

Northern Ireland

Social

Care

Council

Quality Assurance Framework for Education and Training Regulated by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council

**Approval, Monitoring, Review and
Inspection Arrangements for Degree
in Social Work Courses**

Revised January 2012

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Introduction

This paper sets out the arrangements for the approval, monitoring, review and inspection of the Degree in Social Work and is part of a series of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council quality assurance documents. This paper should be read in conjunction with the Quality Assurance Framework for Education and Training Regulated by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council Revised January 2012.

Other papers in the series are:

- 'Approval, Review and Inspection of Designated Practice Learning Providers' (Northern Ireland Social Care Council Revised January 2012); and
- 'Approval, Monitoring, R-approval and Inspection Arrangements for Post Qualifying Education and Training Programmes (January 2012)'

In accordance with the Rules for the Approval of the Degree in Social Work (Northern Ireland Social Care Council January 2012), Course Providers must be approved by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council and must meet the Northern Ireland Social Care Council Standards for Approval contained in the Rules. This can be downloaded from the Northern Ireland Social Care Council website: **www.niscc.info**

Interpretation

‘Council’ means the corporate body responsible for the functions as specified in the Health and Personal Social Services Act (Northern Ireland) 2001.

‘Course Provider’ means a partnership of one or more education institutions together with social work employers, which has been approved by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council to jointly design, plan, deliver, and evaluate a course leading to the award of the Degree.

‘Degree in Social Work’ means a course of education and training in social work at honours degree level, which is approved by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council under these Rules for persons who wish to become social workers.

‘Designated Practice Learning Provider’ means an organisation which individually or together with other associate organizations is approved to provide practice learning opportunities for Degree in Social Work students.

‘External Examiner’ means a person who is independent and impartial, engaged to provide informed comment on the standards set for approved degree courses and student achievement in relation to those standards.

‘Joint Validation’ means a process whereby a course is jointly evaluated and approved by a Higher Education Institution and the Northern Ireland Social Care Council.

‘Major modification’ means a substantive change to the approved provision.

‘Northern Ireland Social Care Council’ means the executive function of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council.

‘Northern Ireland Social Care Council Officer’ means an employee of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council or any person authorised to act on behalf of the Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council.

‘Northern Ireland Framework Specification’ means the document setting out what a student social worker should know, understand and be able to do to be awarded the Degree.

‘Practice learning’ means the wide range of learning experiences, including direct supervised practice in a workplace, which can contribute to the professional development of knowledge, skills, values and competence of a practising social worker in keeping with the requirements.

‘Registration’ means Registration on the Northern Ireland Social Care Council Register.

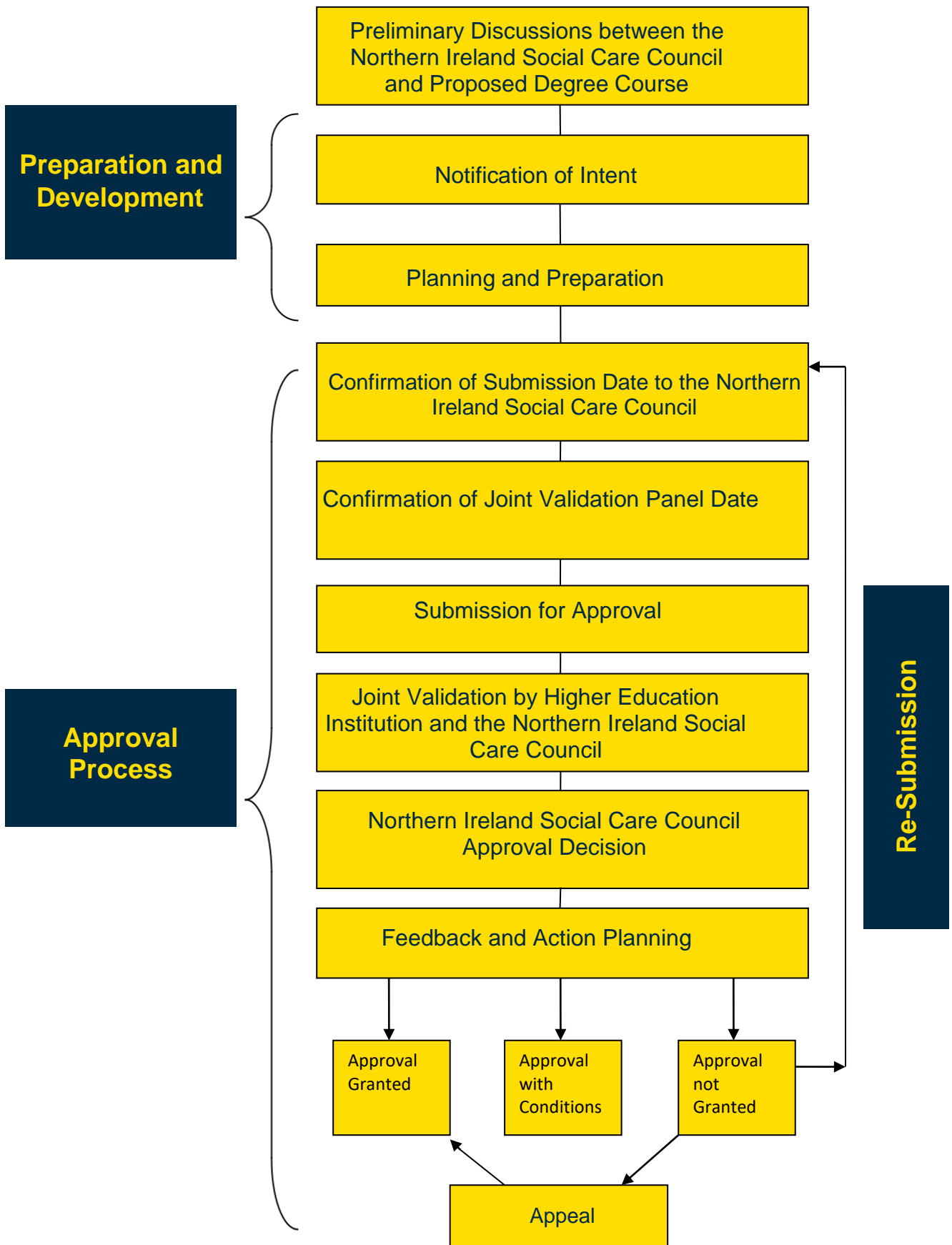
Part 1

Approval

1. Overview of the approval process

- 1.1 All courses leading to the Degree in Social Work must be approved by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council. The Northern Ireland Social Care Council has published Rules for the Approval of the Degree in Social Work (the Rules). This approval process is based on those Rules and gives a fuller guide for Course Providers intending to submit a course for approval. It is aimed, therefore, mainly at those in educational institutions and agencies who will be responsible for ensuring that the Degree meets the Northern Ireland Social Care Council's requirements.
- 1.2 To gain approval Course Providers must demonstrate how they meet the Standards for Approval (the Standards) as laid out in Section 6 in the Rules. Course Providers will be expected to submit evidence and/or information against each of the standards in their submission.
- 1.3 The ethos of the approval process is to encourage a developmental approach, enabling Course Providers to prepare submissions for approval with guidance and feedback at key points.
- 1.4 The Northern Ireland Social Care Council recognises that Higher Education Institutions have validation processes for degree courses. The Rules require validation of the Degree in Social Work from a Higher Education Institution and/or confirmation of franchise agreements between education institutions to deliver the Degree where appropriate.
- 1.5 The Northern Ireland Social Care Council has two processes:
 - (i) Full approval for new provision;
 - (ii) Re-approval for provision that has been previously approved but there have been major modifications and/or the Northern Ireland Social Care Council has issued new Standards.
- 1.6 A Northern Ireland Social Care Council Officer will be appointed to advise Providers on the approval process. The decision making process will be separate from the advisory process and will be carried out by a different Northern Ireland Social Care Council Officer.
- 1.7 The final decision regarding approval of a course following a joint validation event will be made by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council.
- 1.8 For an overview of the approval process see Figure 1

Figure 1 – Overview of the approval process



Key participants in the approval process

Course Provider	A partnership of one or more education institutions together with social work employers.
Course Provider's Official Correspondent	The Course Provider's official correspondent is the person through whom negotiations about approval are carried out. The official correspondent will speak with authority about the resources and design of the course. If the official correspondent is not directly responsible for these aspects of the course (s)he will be in direct contact with those who are responsible so that discussions progress smoothly.
Northern Ireland Social Care Council Officer	A Northern Ireland Social Care Council Officer can provide advice and guidance to the Course Provider throughout the approval process, including guidance about the process, the Standards for Approval and documentation required.
Joint Validation	Process whereby a course leading to the Degree in Social Work is jointly evaluated and approved by a Higher Education Institution and the Northern Ireland Social Care Council.
Higher Education Institution	A university with degree awarding powers.
Education Institution	Any university or Further Education College intending to, or providing, the Degree course in partnership with social work employers.
NI Degree in Social Work Partnership	A body set up by, and accountable to the Northern Ireland Social Care Council with representatives from education institutions and social work employers engaged in the provision of social work education and training. The body is responsible for ensuring regional approaches to social work training arrangements across Northern Ireland.
Appeals Panel	The Appeals Panel will hear appeals from Course Providers concerning the validity of the process and/or the decision. The panel will consist of 3 members of the Council not connected with the Course Provider.

2. Standards for approval

- 2.1 The Standards for Approval are laid out in Section 6 of the Rules for the Approval of the Degree in Social Work. The Standards cover the following key areas:
- Regional consistency;
 - Collaborative arrangements;
 - Management and organisation;
 - Policy and planning;
 - Resources and staffing;
 - Student participation;
 - Public participation;
 - Selection and registration;
 - Teaching, practice learning and assessment;
 - Governance and continuous improvement.
- 2.2 These Standards provide the framework for the planning, delivery and evaluation of course provision. Guidance on the Standards for Approval is available on the Northern Ireland Social Care Council website www.niscc.info. The Northern Ireland Social Care Council has also issued the Standards for Practice Learning. These complement the above standards and ensure that Course Providers, including agency partners, meet the necessary requirements.
- 2.3 It is recognised that at the point of approval the course will not be operational and therefore the submission will largely be based on planned inputs and processes. The emphasis at the point of approval will be on:
- the commitment of the Course Provider to meet the standards;
 - agreements of key parties to work together to meet the standards;
 - policies, systems, procedures and protocols in place that reflect the standards; and
 - action plans to ensure standards that cannot be demonstrated until the course is underway, will be met.
- 2.4 There will be an expectation that all Standards for Approval are fully met by the first annual monitoring visit by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council, or earlier if specific timescales have been set as a condition of approval. The emphasis in monitoring will be on how effective planned inputs and processes are in achieving the desired quality and results. Feedback from staff, students, external examiners and other key players will therefore be crucial in monitoring the quality and effectiveness of course provision.

3. Approval process

Notification of intent & planning and preparation

- 3.1 Course Providers wishing to be approved to offer the Degree in Social Work should, following initial discussions with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council and the NI Degree in Social Work Partnership, submit a Notification of Intent to the Director of Education and Training in writing, indicating the official correspondent for the Course Provider.
- 3.2 A Northern Ireland Social Care Council Officer will be available to provide advice and consultation to support preparation and development work leading to submission.
- 3.3 Course Providers will be expected to have preliminary discussions with the NI Degree in Social Work Partnership to ensure their planned submissions are consistent with regional agreements.
- 3.4 The Northern Ireland Social Care Council Officer will discuss and clarify the Standards for Approval contained in the Rules, the process for approval and documentary evidence required with the Course Provider.

Submission for approval

- 3.5 The submission document must show evidence of how the Standards for Approval are met or will be met and that the Course Provider has adequate resources to deliver the course.
- 3.6 A date for submission by the Course Provider to the Northern Ireland Social Care Council will be negotiated and agreed with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council Officer at the planning stage. The submission date must be at least 4 weeks before the agreed date for the Joint Validation and/or Approval Panel meeting. The date for the Joint Validation and/or Approval Panel meeting will be agreed at the same time as the submission date. All submissions must be made in the format required by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council.
- 3.7 At the point of submission, Course Providers must include written agreements detailing the rights and obligations of the relevant parties and signed by the accountable officer of each organisation. (Rules for the Approval of the Degree in Social Work 6.10.2)

Approval panel/Joint validation panel

- 3.8 The Northern Ireland Social Care Council will, as far as possible, work to streamline the Northern Ireland Social Care Council approval of the course with the Higher Education Institution's validation process. Joint Validation Panels will be arranged, wherever possible, to evaluate courses. The Higher Education Institution will negotiate with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council the date, venue and arrangements for a meeting of the Joint Validation Panel and any requirements/action needed in advance for example, the detail of panel membership. The Northern Ireland Social Care Council Approval Panel will comprise two Council members and two Northern Ireland Social Care Council staff.

- 3.9 The Joint Validation Panel will consider the submission and any reports that have been submitted by Panel members. The details of the submission will be discussed with the Course Planning Team. The Joint Validation Panel must ensure that the Northern Ireland Social Care Council's Standards for Approval and any academic requirements are met.
- 3.10 If considered necessary, selective visits to institutional facilities and/or practice learning sites may be undertaken as part of the joint validation process.
- 3.11 Where joint validation mechanisms and procedures are not in place, the submission document, together with the report/recommendations from the Northern Ireland Social Care Council Officer will be considered by an Approval Panel established by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council. The outcome will be communicated to the Course Provider's official correspondent by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council.

Outcomes of the approval process

- 3.12 There are three possible outcomes to the approval process:
- The submission is acceptable and can be approved;
 - The submission can be approved with conditions;
 - There is not sufficient evidence for approval or the submission does not meet the Northern Ireland Social Care Council standards. The Provider will be informed what further work is required and arrangements will be made for a resubmission.

Approval decision

- 3.13 The Northern Ireland Social Care Council must satisfy itself that its Standards for Approval have been fully met. The Northern Ireland Social Care Council's decision will be provided in writing to the chair of the joint validation panel. The report will include confirmation (or otherwise) of course approval, any conditions which apply, and an action plan for the first year of approval.

Resubmissions

- 3.14 In the event that approval is not granted, the Northern Ireland Social Care Council or where appropriate, the Joint Validation Panel will seek in the first instance to work with the Course Provider to develop and improve the initial submission. However, should the amount of development work needed effectively involve a new submission, the Course Provider will be informed by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council.

Approval with conditions

- 3.15 Where the Northern Ireland Social Care Council approval is conditional upon certain conditions being met, the Course Provider will submit revised documentation within the specified timescale.

Appeals

- 3.16 A Course Provider may appeal against an approval decision by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council. Details of the appeals procedure for the degree can be found in Appendix 1.

Post approval

- 3.17 Once the Northern Ireland Social Care Council is satisfied that the submission for approval meets all the Northern Ireland Social Care Council's Standards for Approval and requirements, a Certificate of Approval will be issued.

Public record

- 3.18 Once approval has been granted, the approval submission will be accessible as a public record. The Northern Ireland Social Care Council will produce an annual report on the outcome of its approval activities and will publish information about the type and location of approved courses.

Modifications

- 3.19 The Course Provider must notify the Northern Ireland Social Care Council of any major modification to the course provision and must not make any such change without the Northern Ireland Social Care Council's approval. A major modification is one that involves change and/or restructuring of a course, which has a substantive impact in terms of course delivery.

Approval should be sought before introducing any of the following modifications:

- The introduction of a new route
- The introduction of new APEL arrangements
- Changes in the partnership arrangements

Re-approval

- 3.20 Re-approval will be required for provision that has been previously approved but there have been major modifications and/or the Northern Ireland Social Care Council has issued new Standards.

Part 2

Regulation through annual monitoring and review

4. Annual monitoring and review

- 4.1 The educational quality of the Degree in Social Work (the Degree) must be established upon robust academic and professional quality assurance processes that address both the academic and professional components of the course. It is essential that Degree courses are delivered to the required standards for the protection of the public and that they achieve the ultimate goal of preparing safe and competent practitioners.
- 4.2 The Northern Ireland Social Care Council's process of reviewing Degree in Social Work Courses will comprise the following elements:
- Annual Monitoring;
 - Thematic Reviews; and
 - Periodic Reviews.

Annual monitoring

- 4.3 The Northern Ireland Social Care Council annual report

The Northern Ireland Social Care Council annual quality assurance report is the mechanism for the Course Provider to make use of information already collected by their own quality assurance system, including the annual subject review report. The content of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council report is set out in section 4.5. This information will complement the Course Provider's internal quality assurance systems and enable duplication to be kept to a minimum. The Northern Ireland Social Care Council annual quality assurance report process is shown below.

- 4.4 Annual report process:

- Confirmation by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council of date for receipt for the Northern Ireland Social Care Council annual report.
- Reminder from the Northern Ireland Social Care Council when report is due.
- The Northern Ireland Social Care Council responds to the report and may, if there are concerns, decide to undertake further investigation.
- Provider circulates copy of annual report and the Northern Ireland Social Care Council response to relevant participants.
- Annual report and the Northern Ireland Social Care Council response will become accessible as a public record.
- The Northern Ireland Social Care Council may meet with the Course Provider to agree the resolution of any outstanding issues **after** the submission of the annual report.

4.5 Annual report content

The Northern Ireland Social Care Council requires Course Providers to report on the following information annually. The report should include a brief analysis and cross referencing of the information provided. Providers may include course documentation in the provision of data, however, this must be clearly cross referenced in the report to the relevant sections/pages.

- i. Statistics on applications/enrolments/student progression, including equal opportunities monitoring information as outlined in Appendix 2.
- ii. Progress on action plans/targets, to include feedback from internal quality assurance mechanisms
- iii. Areas for development for the following year
- iv. Any new course documentation. This should be agreed with the professional adviser.
- v. Information on terminations, complaints and appeals;
- vi. Information on any major modifications to the provision;
- vii. Information on the staffing and learning resources provided.
- viii. Summary of service user and carer involvement;
- ix. Summary and analysis of feedback from employers and actions taken;
- x. Summary of feedback from students.
- xi. Summary of findings about the adequacy of the provision of practice learning opportunities for level 2 and level 3 and issues raised.
- xii. Information about how students are prepared to undertake practice learning opportunities.
- xiii. Information about the management of Practice Development Days.
- xiv. Summary of feedback about regionally agreed approaches to course provision.

4.6 In addition the Northern Ireland Social Care Council must be informed throughout the year of any significant issues relating to compliance with the Rules for Approval of the Degree in Social Work.

4.7 The Northern Ireland Social Care Council may receive written or oral reports from other key stakeholders which may be taken into account in monitoring course provision. This may include the following:

- NI Degree in Social Work Partnership members,
- Social work lecturers/tutors,
- Other contributing lecturers/tutors;
- Practice Teachers;
- RQIA inspection reports
- Employers
- Service Users

4.8 For courses operating on an academic year the following dates apply:

The Annual report should be submitted to the Northern Ireland Social Care Council by 31 October each year. External Examiner reports should be submitted to the Northern Ireland Social Care Council by mid - September for courses with an academic year format. This means the External Examiner report

is received six weeks before the Course Provider reports to the Northern Ireland Social Care Council. It is expected that Course Providers will have responded to any recommendations from external examiners in the Annual Subject Review Report.

- 4.9 The Northern Ireland Social Care Council will respond to Course Providers by 31 December each year. This means the Northern Ireland Social Care Council's feedback can be included in the submission of the Annual Subject Review Report by the Course Provider to Faculty and University Heads. The final report submitted to the education institution should be copied to the Northern Ireland Social Care Council for information.
- 4.10 For courses operating on a calendar year, reporting dates will be agreed with the Course Provider.

External Examination

- 4.11 External Examiners play a key role in the Northern Ireland Social Care Council's quality assurance of the Degree by providing independent information and verification that students have achieved agreed academic and professional standards. The External Examiner's report confirms to students, Course Providers, employers, the public and the Northern Ireland Social Care Council that the standards are at the appropriate level for the Degree and that assessment processes, examination and determination of the award of the degree are sound and have been fairly conducted. (See Appendix 3)
- 4.12 The QAA Code of Practice in External Examining provides guidance to Course Providers on appointments and practice in relation to External Examiners. The Northern Ireland Social Care Council Rules for the Degree in Social Work, (Section 7) specify criteria for the appointment of External Examiners for the Degree.
- 4.13 The Northern Ireland Social Care Council expects that Course Providers will work to these standards and appoint External Examiners directly. Course Providers must inform the Northern Ireland Social Care Council of External Examiner appointments, their specific responsibilities, and advise the Northern Ireland Social Care Council of any subsequent changes.
- 4.14 The Course Provider must forward a copy of the External Examiner's report to the Northern Ireland Social Care Council by mid-September each year. The Northern Ireland Social Care Council will consider the External Examiner's report and the Course Provider's response in its annual monitoring.
- 4.15 The External Examiners also have a duty to alert the Course Provider if they have evidence that standards are not being met for any reason. The Course Provider must inform the Northern Ireland Social Care Council immediately of any such report.

Criteria on which course provision will be assessed:

4.16 In its annual monitoring the Northern Ireland Social Care Council will measure the performance of Providers against a set of indicators in order to assess levels of risk, their impact on the provision and the need for the Northern Ireland Social Care Council to intervene e.g. conduct a review visit or initiate a preliminary investigation. These indicators are specified below:

- Delivery against the Northern Ireland Social Care Council Rules, Requirements and Standards.
- Continuous improvement.
- External scrutiny.
- Internal scrutiny.
- Student/candidate/employer/public confidence.

4.17 More specifically this means:

- Submission of annual report by agreed date.
- Statistical data has been provided, including information on applications, enrolments and progression which identify equal opportunities statistics, e.g. students with disabilities. (See Appendix 2.)
- No major modifications introduced without agreement.
- The Provider has met requirements as stipulated by NISCC.
- Action plans are implemented in agreed timescales
- Targets have been met.
- Future targets agreed.
- Confirmation of External Examiners.
- No major concerns raised by external scrutiny.
- No issues about student progression
- Targets for practice learning opportunities have been met or reasons for not doing so are acceptable.
- No issues raised by relevant inspection bodies
- Internal quality assurance systems are in place and operating satisfactorily.
- Any governance issues which have been identified have been addressed.
- Stakeholders have been consulted about the ongoing effectiveness of course provision, including service users and carers.
- Complaints and Fitness to Practise matters are received and dealt with appropriately.

Outcomes of annual monitoring

4.18 Following the annual quality assurance process the Provider will be informed that:

- The provision meets the Northern Ireland Social Care Council standards; or
- Further information/clarification is required; or/and
- A review meeting is required or
- An inspection is required.

- 4.19 The outcome of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council annual monitoring process, including the report to the Northern Ireland Social Care Council and the Northern Ireland Social Care Council response will be accessible as a public record. The access to the public record does not automatically apply to the internal quality assurance reports of the Course Providers.

Appeals

- 4.20 A Course Provider may appeal against an annual monitoring decision by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council. Details of the appeals procedure for the Degree can be found in Appendix 1.

Thematic and Periodic Review Process

- 4.21 Following approval, the Northern Ireland Social Care Council will undertake regular reviews of provision. The frequency of reviews will depend on the risk assessment of provision. Where annual monitoring continues to be satisfactory, the review period will normally be five years. Normally all reviews of the Degree in Social Work in Northern Ireland will incorporate the review of provision by all course providers offering the Degree. The review will include the review of all provision delivered regionally, including Practice Learning. Separate sections of the report may be devoted to the specific provision by each course provider
- 4.22 The Northern Ireland Social Care Council will have a programme of Thematic Reviews for all provision. The Thematic Reviews may be dictated by, for example, issues raised by annual monitoring, the Northern Ireland Social Care Council reviews or RQIA inspections or other key stakeholders. These will focus on a specific theme agreed with the Director of Registration. The Northern Ireland Social Care Council may also undertake spot reviews if there are concerns about any area of provision.
- 4.23 When the Course Provider is subject to a Periodic Review, the Thematic Review will be incorporated within this process.

Pre-review

- 4.24 At least 6 months before the proposed date of the review, the Director of Registration will establish a review team, comprising the Director of Registration, a lead adviser who has not worked with the provision to be reviewed and the professional adviser to the provider.
- 4.25 The Director of Registration will establish a project group to steer and oversee the work of the review team. The project group should be chaired by a Council member and include a service user/carer representative and at least one other Council member, the Director of Registration and the review team.
- 4.26 At least 4 months before the proposed date of the review, the project group will agree the terms of reference and the action plan for the review in consultation with the DHSSPS.

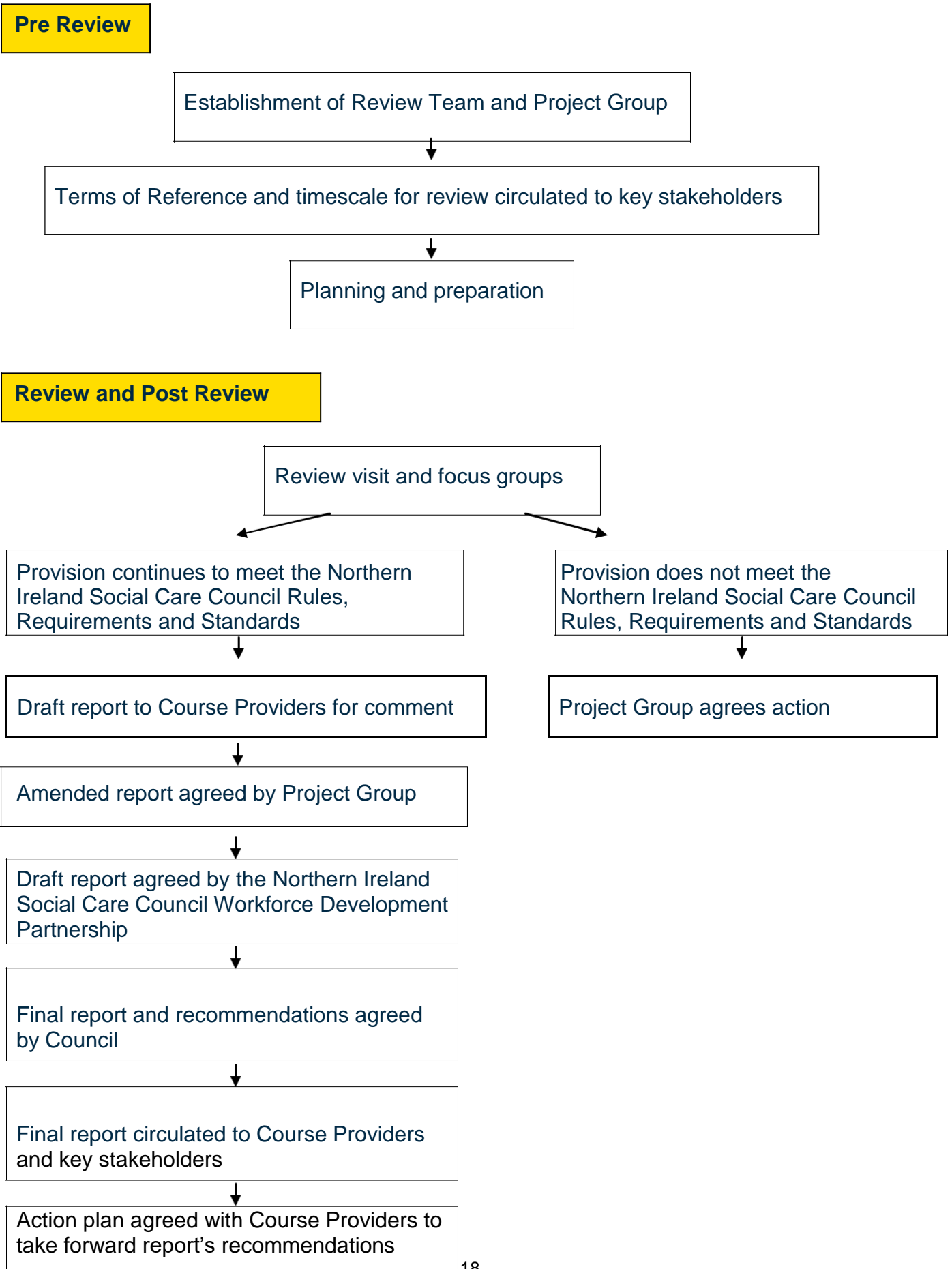
- 4.27 The review team will agree:
- The detail of any further information or reports required from the provider before the review and the timescale for receiving them.
 - Plans for the visit/s including dates
 - Areas for discussion during visit/s
 - The people to be interviewed
 - Any focus groups required
- 4.28 Prior to each review, the Northern Ireland Social Care Council will require a concise report from Course Providers. The content of the report will be agreed by the professional adviser and may include any or all of the following:
- The main outcomes from the Course Provider's own quality assurance system over a mutually agreed period including monitoring of equal opportunities.
 - Any areas for improvement highlighted in the previous year's report and how these have been addressed
 - Any changes or targets in practice learning arrangements
 - A summary of the Course Provider's attainments or challenges in meeting action plans agreed with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council including Practice Learning Standards.
 - A concluding summary of the main strengths and weaknesses of the provision and priorities for action.
- 4.29 At least 4 months before the review, the lead adviser will inform the provider and other key stakeholders about the review, the terms of reference and the proposed timescale for the review.
- 4.30 At least 3 months before the review the lead adviser will agree with the provider
- the date of the review visit/s
 - the key areas for review
 - the information required before the review and the date by which it should be received by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council
 - the people/groups to be interviewed
- 4.31 At least 2 months before the review the lead adviser will write to stakeholders inviting nominations to focus groups, indicating venue and dates.
- 4.32 The lead adviser will write to nominees indicating areas of discussion proposed during the visit and focus groups.

Review and post review

- 4.33 The review visit will normally focus on the Northern Ireland Social Care Council Rules, Requirements and Standards and the action plan agreed for the review. The agenda for the visit will have been discussed with the provider at least 3 months before the visit takes place. The key people interviewed will normally be:
- Relevant teaching staff and agency partners
 - Representatives of any regional provision
 - Service users/carers
 - Students
 - Practice teachers & on site supervisors
 - Employers.
 - Newly qualified social workers
- 4.34 At the end of the visit the Northern Ireland Social Care Council lead adviser will share the key points from the review visit with the provider.
- 4.35 A draft report of the review will be sent to the course provider for comments on the content and accuracy of the report.
- 4.36 Where the provision is considered not to meet the Northern Ireland Social Care Council Rules and Requirements, the adviser will inform the Director of Registration and the project group which will agree the action to be taken.
- 4.37 The Report will inform the Provider about:
- Whether provision continues to be based on the Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work and the Rules for the Approval of the Degree in Social Work.
 - Which Rules or Requirements have not been met.
 - What further action the Northern Ireland Social Care Council proposes to take, including whether an inspection is being recommended.
 - The recommendations for improvement, the actions required and the timescale.
- 4.38 The project group will agree the amended report before its submission to the Workforce Development Partnership.
- 4.39 The report will be tabled for discussion at the Workforce Development Partnership meeting. Any further amendments will be made before its submission to Council.

- 4.40 Following agreement by Council to the recommendations in the report, it will be circulated to Course Providers and key stakeholders.
- 4.41 Following Council agreement on the report's recommendations, the report will become accessible as a public document.
- 4.42 The Northern Ireland Social Care Council will draw up an action plan with Course Providers to take forward any recommendations made in the report.
- 4.43 Any appeal against the process and/or decision will follow the Northern Ireland Social Care Council appeal procedure which is outlined in Appendix 1.

Figure 2 - Overview of the Review Process



Part 3

Inspection

5. Definition of inspection

- 5.1 An inspection is a visit by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council to a Course Provider outside the normal review procedures where there is evidence of an unacceptable level of risk through:
- Failing to comply with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council's Standards and/or requirements; and/or
 - Being unable to complete remedial action within the timescale specified by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council; and/or
 - Being the subject of a serious complaint or allegation of failure to comply with the standards and/or requirements. This is so serious as to throw into immediate doubt the continued suitability of the provision.
- 5.2 The Northern Ireland Social Care Council approval can only be withdrawn from a Course Provider after an inspection visit has taken place.
- 5.3 Once the need for an inspection visit has been identified, a clear timescale for the full process will be agreed between the Northern Ireland Social Care Council and the Course Provider.

Inspection process

- 5.4 There are seven stages in the inspection process comprising two elements:
- Preliminary Investigation - Stages 1-3
 - Inspection - Stages 4-7
- 5.5 Preliminary Investigation stages:
- Stage 1- There is evidence that the Course Provider is not complying with the requirements.
- Stage 2 - A Preliminary investigation takes place.
- Stage 3 - A remedial action plan with timescales is agreed between the Northern Ireland Social Care Council and the Course Provider. If the Course Provider successfully implements remedial action, the investigation process will cease.
- 5.6 The Northern Ireland Social Care Council reserves the right to instigate an immediate inspection without this preliminary stage.

5.7 Inspection stages

Stage 4 - Where a preliminary investigation identifies the need for an inspection, the Course Provider will receive written notification outlining:

- The reason and evidence for the decision.
- Information about the process.
- The date for commencement of the inspection.

Stage 5 - The Northern Ireland Social Care Council will establish an inspection team to carry out a formal investigation. It will have a minimum of two people, one of whom will be a Northern Ireland Social Care Council Officer and who will chair the team. The other will be a member of the Council. The Northern Ireland Social Care Council may also include in the inspection team a person deemed to have specialist knowledge of the issues involved, but no person will be involved who is directly connected with the Course Provider.

A time-table and process will be established by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council, which will take into account any reasonable requests by the Course Provider. The Northern Ireland Social Care Council will reserve the right to extend the process if it becomes clear in the course of the formal inspection that further information is required.

Stage 6 - Inspection visit takes place. This may include meeting with relevant personnel and observation of related activities.

The visit will conclude with a meeting between the Northern Ireland Social Care Council and the Course Provider led by the Chair of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council inspection team. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss issues emerging from the inspection.

Stage 7- Outcomes of Inspection

- A report will be issued confirming the Northern Ireland Social Care Council's decision following the inspection.
- The Course Provider will be given the opportunity to comment on accuracy.
- The report will be returned to the Northern Ireland Social Care Council with comments and/or additional information.
- Final report is sent to the Course Provider.
- Course Provider circulates report to relevant personnel.

Appeals

5.8 A Course Provider may appeal against an inspection decision by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council. Details of the appeal procedure for the Degree can be found in Appendix 1.

Part 4

Appendices

Appendix 1

Northern Ireland Social Care Council Appeal procedure for the Degree in Social Work

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (the Council) is a statutory body established under the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Act 2001. The Act requires the Northern Ireland Social Care Council to approve courses in social work and any requirements set by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council.
- 1.2 Social work courses are required to comply with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council's Rules for the Approval of the Degree in Social Work.
- 1.3 This appeal procedure has been drawn up in accordance with these Rules, Section 11.
- 1.4 The Rules state that a Course Provider¹ may appeal to the Northern Ireland Social Care Council against a decision made in respect of: approval, monitoring, review or formal investigation, withdrawal of approval.

2. Grounds for appeal

- 2.1 A Course Provider may appeal against a decision of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council on the following grounds:
 - 2.1.1 The Northern Ireland Social Care Council did not take into account material information which was made known to it at the time of the decision;
 - 2.1.2 New information which could not have been made available at the time of the decision and which materially affects the outcome has since become available; or
 - 2.1.3 The Northern Ireland Social Care Council did not observe its own procedures and this failure materially affected the decision.

¹ The term Course Provider is defined in the Rules for the Approval of the Degree in Social Work as "a partnership of one or more education institutions together with social work employers, which has been approved by the Council to jointly design, plan, deliver and evaluate a course leading to the award of the Degree".

3. Principles

3.1 The key principles which underpin the Northern Ireland Social Care Council's appeal procedure are that it should be:

3.1.1 **Open and transparent** – All appeals decisions will be based on open and relevant evidence.

3.1.2 **Speedy** - Appeals will be resolved as quickly as is reasonably possible, and unless there are exceptional circumstances, within the timescales specified in the appeals procedure.

3.1.3 **Facilitative** - The Northern Ireland Social Care Council will seek to be responsive to and work with the Course Provider to resolve an appeal at the earliest stage possible.

3.1.4 **Consistent** - The Northern Ireland Social Care Council will be consistent in their approach to all Course Providers.

4. Procedure for appeal

Stage 1- Request for reconsideration

4.1 An application for reconsideration of a Northern Ireland Social Care Council decision and/ or procedure, in respect of approval, monitoring, review or formal investigation, or withdrawal of approval, should be made by the Course Provider's Official Correspondent in writing, with supporting evidence, to the Northern Ireland Social Care Council Director of Registration within four weeks of the Course Provider's receipt of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council's decision.

4.2 The relevant Professional Adviser will meet with the Course Provider within ten working days of receipt of the application for reconsideration. This meeting will explore the issues leading to dissatisfaction and attempt to achieve resolution. The outcome will be communicated, by the Director of Registration, to all involved within five working days of the meeting.

4.3 If the Course Provider is not satisfied with the outcome of Stage 1 they can proceed to Stage 2.

Stage 2 – Appeal panel

4.4 Where reconsideration fails to resolve the causes of dissatisfaction the Course Provider's Official Correspondent should write to the Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council within ten working days of receiving the Northern Ireland Social Care Council's Stage 1 decision. The letter should set out grounds for appeal (see paragraph 2 above, Grounds for Appeal) and request formal consideration by the Council. The letter will be accepted as a Notice of Appeal.

4.5 On receipt of the letter the Chief Executive will consult with the Chair of the Council who will appoint an appeal panel.

- 4.6 The panel will comprise three members: a Chair who will normally be the Council Chair, and two other members, one of whom will be a Council member. The third panel member will be either a Council member or an independent person with relevant experience. No panel members will be connected with the Course Provider. The Director of Registration will act as Secretary to the panel.
- 4.7 Within ten working days of receipt of the notice of appeal the panel will consider the relevant paperwork and decide whether there is a prima facie case for further consideration. The panel will inform the Course Provider of its decision, in writing.

Stage 3 – Appeal process

- 4.8 Where a review of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council's decision is to take place the Course Provider will be informed of the date of the appeal panel meeting and will be invited to make oral submissions to the panel and/or send further written statements. No legal representatives will be permitted to appear on behalf of any party.
- 4.9 The panel will consider all relevant evidence, and may, on behalf of the Council, take either of the following decisions:
- Uphold the appeal; or
 - Confirm the original decision
- 4.10 The decision of the appeal panel will be final. The Course Provider will be notified in writing. Stage 3 of the process should be completed within four weeks.

Appendix 2

Statistical data

Statistical information required annually from HEIs will include the following:

1. Student population

- 1.1 Numbers of applications;
- 1.2 Numbers short-listed for interview;
- 1.3 Numbers of offers made to each route;
- 1.4 Numbers enrolled for intake by route;
- 1.5 Profile of cohort including age at entry, gender, nationality, religion, domicile, highest qualification on entry; disability
- 1.6 Numbers of students offered entrance with credit;
- 1.7 Numbers turned down for Registration with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council.

2. Achievement and progression

- 2.1 End of year statistics including numbers of withdrawals (permanent or temporary) and numbers of transfers to other courses – summary of reasons;
- 2.2 Numbers of complaints &/or appeals – summary of issues, action and outcomes;
- 2.3 Number of referrals to Fitness to Practise procedures – summary of issues and outcomes;
- 2.4 Assessment outcomes – numbers completing each level and progressing to next level.

Appendix 3

The Northern Ireland Social Care Council guidance for completion of External Examiner reports

Queen's University Belfast and the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (the Northern Ireland Social Care Council) guidance on completion of External Examiner's report for the Degree in Social Work

The Bachelor in Social Work Honours Degree (BSW) has been jointly validated by Queen's University Belfast and the Northern Ireland Social Care Council. The BSW is a recognised professional social work qualification and confers eligibility on graduates to register as qualified social workers with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council.

This guidance on the completion of the External Examiner Report has been agreed by Queen's University and the Northern Ireland Social Care Council to ensure key professional elements of the Degree are reported on by External Examiners. The areas identified below reflect course requirements set by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council which are contained in a range of documents, including the Rules for Approval, the Framework Specification for the Degree, Practice Learning Requirements and Learning, Teaching and Assessment Requirements¹. External Examiners are asked to comment on these key areas in their reports.

- (a) Practice Learning
 - Quality, standards and assessment of practice learning at Levels 1, 2 and 3.
 - Range of practice learning opportunities.
 - Quality, standards and assessment of integration of theory into practice and evidence base for practice.
 - Appropriateness of assessment schemes and methods to ensure students are fit to practise as qualified social workers.
- (b) User and Carer Involvement in Course Provision
 - Evidence of user and carer contribution in course provision (academic and practice learning), including their contribution to student assessment.
- (c) Professional Ethics and Value Base
 - Quality, standards and assessment of professional ethics and social work value base in students assessed work, including assessment of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council's Code of Practice for Social Care Employees.
- (d) Comparability of Standards
 - Quality and standards of assessment between two-year Relevant Graduate Route and three-year fulltime route.
- (e) Any other matters
 - Please include any specific comments in respect of the professional practice component of course provision, including partnership arrangements.

External Examiners' reports will be shared with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council by Queen's University as part of the annual monitoring arrangements of the Degree in Social Work in Northern Ireland.

¹ Copies of these documents are available to download from www.niscc.info

Ulster University and the Northern Ireland Social Care Council Guidance on Completion of External Examiner's Report for the Degree in Social Work

The Bachelor of Science Honours Degree in Social Work ((BSc (Hons) Social Work) has been jointly validated by the University of Ulster and the Northern Ireland Social Care Council. The BSc (Hons) Social Work is a recognised professional social work qualification and confers eligibility on graduates to register as qualified social workers with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council.

This guidance on the completion of the External Examiner Report has been agreed by the University of Ulster and the Northern Ireland Social Care Council to ensure key professional elements of the Degree are reported on by External Examiners. The areas identified below reflect course requirements set by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council which are contained in a range of documents, including the Rules for Approval, the Framework Specification for the Degree, Practice Learning Requirements and Learning, Teaching and Assessment Requirements². External Examiners are asked to comment on these key areas in their reports.

- (a) Practice Learning
 - Quality, standards and assessment of practice learning at Levels 1, 2 and 3.
 - Range of practice learning opportunities.
 - Quality, standards and assessment of integration of theory into practice and evidence base for practice.
 - Appropriateness of assessment schemes and methods to ensure students are fit to practise as qualified social workers.
- (b) User and Carer Involvement in Course Provision
 - Evidence of user and carer contribution in course provision (academic and practice learning), including their contribution to student assessment.
- (c) Professional Ethics and Value Base
 - Quality, standards and assessment of professional ethics and social work value base in students' assessed work, including assessment of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council Code of Practice for Social Care Employees.
- (d) Comparability of Standards
 - Quality and standards of assessment between University and college learning sites.
 - Quality and standards of assessment between two-year Relevant Graduate Route and three-year fulltime route.
- (e) Any other matters
 - Please include any specific comments in respect of the professional practice component of course provision, including partnership arrangements.

External Examiners' reports will be shared with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council by the University of Ulster as part of the annual monitoring arrangements of the Degree in Social Work in Northern Ireland.

²Copies of these documents are available to download from www.niscc.info

**For further information about the Quality Assurance Framework
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