



Standards of Conduct and Practice for  
**Social Workers**

**Working together.  
Making a difference.**

Northern Ireland

**Social**

**Care**

**Council**

# Introductory Notes

## About Us

The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (the Social Care Council) was established in 2001 as the regulatory body for the social care workforce in Northern Ireland.

We regulate the workforce by maintaining a register and setting standards for the conduct, practice and training of social care workers to ensure that the quality of care provided to service users and carers is of a high standard.

'Social work' has been a protected title since 1st June 2005, with social workers required by law to register with the Social Care Council in order to be able to practise.

Our register is a public record that those registered have met the requirements for entry onto the register and have agreed to adhere to the standards of conduct and practice set by the Social Care Council.

**'Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.'**

**Global Definition of Social Work (International Federation of Social Workers and International Association of Schools of Social Work, 2014)**

# About the Standards

As part of its roles and responsibilities, the Social Care Council is required to produce and publish standards of conduct and practice expected of social workers and social care workers. This booklet contains the standards of conduct and practice for **social workers**.

The **standards of conduct** describe the values, attitudes and behaviours expected of social care workers in their day to day work.

The **standards of practice** outline the knowledge and skills required for competent practice.

Together, both sets of standards combine to provide a baseline against which a social care worker's conduct and practice will be judged.



The standards are binding on all social workers registered with the Social Care Council, irrespective of employment status or work setting. Your fitness to practise will be judged against these standards and failure to comply could put your registration at risk. If someone raises a concern about your conduct or practice, it will be considered against these standards when deciding if we need to take any action.

The standards are intended to reflect existing good practice and public expectations of the behaviour and practice of social workers. They form part of the wider package of legislation, regulatory requirements, practice standards and employers' policies and procedures that social workers must meet.

Social workers are professionally accountable for their practice which means that they are responsible for ensuring their conduct and practice does not fall below the standards set out in this document and that no action or omission on their part harms the wellbeing of service users or carers.

The standards provide social workers with clear criteria to guide their practice and to check that they are working to standard. They are intended to be a support to registrants in their day to day practice.

The standards provide service users and carers with a clear understanding of how a social worker should behave towards them and the standards of practice they can expect to receive.

Consistent application of these standards by social workers will benefit service users and carers.

Employers of social workers are expected to take account of the standards in making decisions about the conduct and competence of their staff.

To help you understand these standards, we have published a glossary of terms. We will also publish guidance from time to time to support and underpin the standards. Guidance will be available on our website: [www.niscc.info](http://www.niscc.info).

## **Underpinning Values**

The following values inform and underpin the standards of conduct and practice:

### **Social care workers must:**

- Respect the rights, dignity and inherent worth of individuals
- Work in a person-centred way
- Treat people respectfully and with compassion
- Support and promote the independence and autonomy of service users
- Act in the best interests of service users and carers
- Uphold and promote equality, diversity and inclusion
- Ensure the care they provide is safe and effective and of a high quality

# Standards of Conduct

- 1** *As a social worker, you must protect the rights and promote the interests and wellbeing of service users and carers.*
- 2** *As a social worker, you must strive to establish and maintain the trust and confidence of service users and carers.*
- 3** *As a social worker, you must promote the autonomy of service users while safeguarding them as far as possible from danger or harm.*
- 4** *As a social worker, you must respect the rights of service users while seeking to ensure that their behaviour does not harm themselves or other people.*
- 5** *As a social worker, you must uphold public trust and confidence in social care services.*
- 6** *As a social worker, you must be accountable for the quality of your work and take responsibility for maintaining and improving your knowledge and skills.*

**As a social worker, you must protect the rights and promote the interests and wellbeing of service users and carers.**

# Protecting the rights and promote the interests and wellbeing of service users and carers

## This includes:

- 1.1 Treating each person as an individual;
- 1.2 Treating people with consideration, respect and compassion;
- 1.3 Empowering service users and carers to communicate their views, needs and preferences, taking account of their preferred language and form of communication;
- 1.4 Respecting and, where appropriate, representing the individual views and wishes of both service users and carers;
- 1.5 Supporting service users' right to control their lives and make informed choices about the services they receive;
- 1.6 Gaining consent as appropriate from service users before you provide care or services, in line with your employer's procedures and any statutory requirements;
- 1.7 Explaining your role, the purpose of your involvement and the reasons for any decision you make;
- 1.8 Respecting and maintaining the dignity and privacy of service users;
- 1.9 Treating service users and carers fairly and promoting equal opportunities;
- 1.10 Respecting diversity, beliefs, preferences, cultural differences and challenging discriminatory attitudes or behaviour.

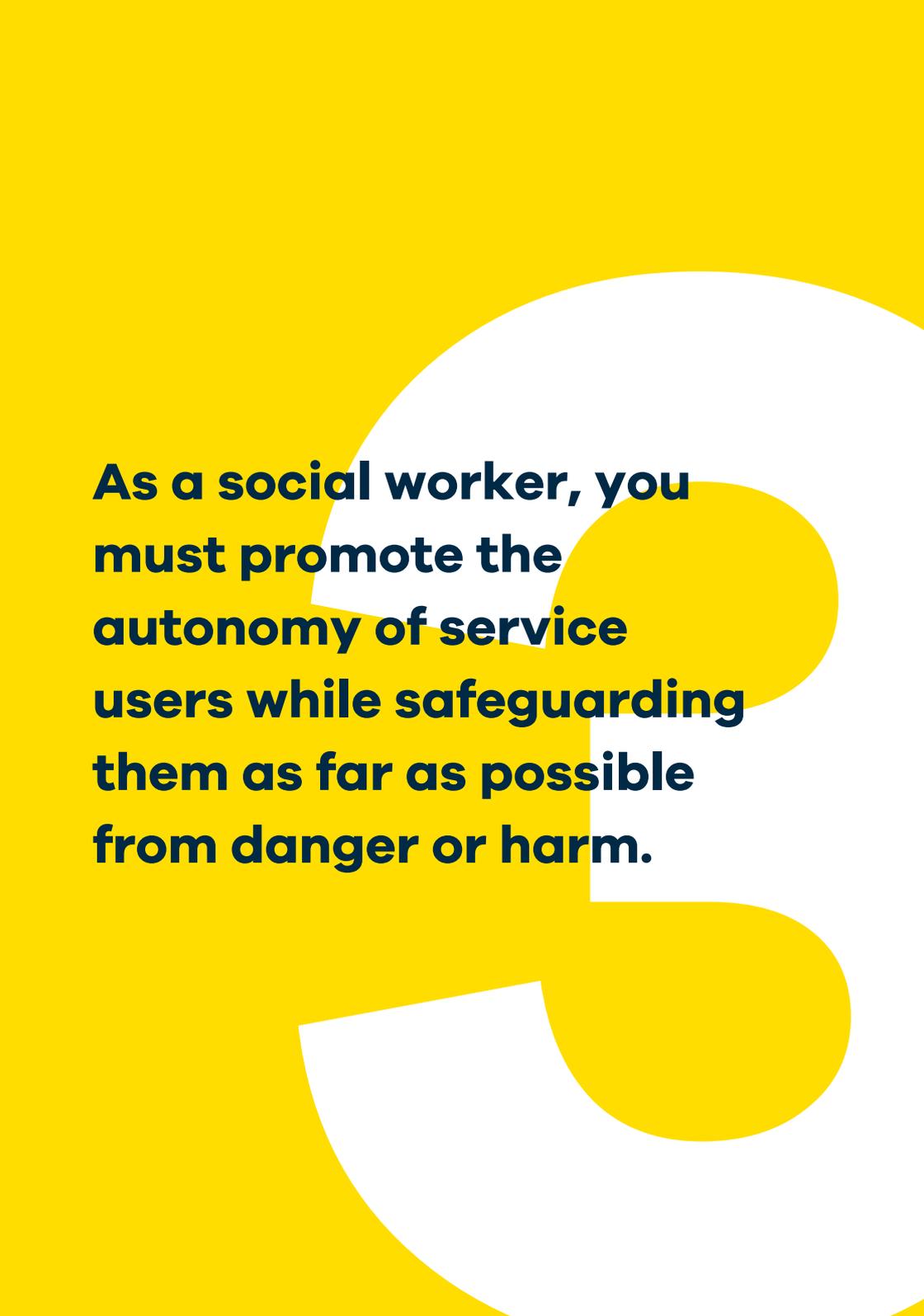
The background is a solid bright yellow color. It features several large, white, abstract shapes that resemble stylized letters or organic forms. One prominent shape is a large white 'S' or 'C' shape that curves around the text. Another shape is a white triangle pointing upwards from the bottom right. The text is centered in the upper half of the page.

**As a social worker, you must strive to establish and maintain the trust and confidence of service users and carers.**

# **Strive to establish and maintain the trust and confidence of service users and carers**

## **This includes:**

- 2.1 Being honest and trustworthy;
- 2.2 Communicating in an appropriate, open, accurate and straightforward way;
- 2.3 Being able to communicate clearly in the English language both verbally and in writing;
- 2.4 Respecting confidential information and clearly explaining agency policies about confidentiality to service users and carers;
- 2.5 Holding, using and storing records in line with organisational procedures and data protection requirements;
- 2.6 Being reliable and dependable;
- 2.7 Honouring work commitments, agreements and arrangements and, when it is not possible to do so, explaining why to service users and carers;
- 2.8 Declaring issues that might create conflicts of interest and making sure that they do not influence your judgement or practice;
- 2.9 Adhering to policies and procedures about accepting gifts and money, hospitality or services from service users and carers;
- 2.10 Refusing any loans of money or property from anyone in your care or anyone close to them;
- 2.11 Not engaging in practices which are fraudulent in respect of use of public or private monies.

The background is a solid bright yellow color. Overlaid on this are several large, white, abstract shapes that resemble stylized letters or organic forms. One large white shape is on the right side, partially overlapping the text. Another white shape is at the bottom, also overlapping the text. The text is in a bold, black, sans-serif font and is positioned on the left side of the page, within the white space.

**As a social worker, you must promote the autonomy of service users while safeguarding them as far as possible from danger or harm.**

# **Promote the autonomy of service users while safeguarding them as far as possible from danger or harm**

## **This includes:**

- 3.1 Promoting service users' independence and empowering them to understand and exercise their rights;
- 3.2 Using established processes and procedures to assess, respond to and manage dangerous, abusive, discriminatory or exploitative behaviour and practice;
- 3.3 Following practice and procedures designed to keep you and other people safe from violent and abusive behaviour at work;
- 3.4 Bringing to the attention of your employer or the appropriate authority, without delay, resource or operational difficulties that might get in the way of the delivery of safe care;
- 3.5 Informing your employer or an appropriate authority, without delay, where the practice of colleagues or others may be unsafe or adversely affecting standards of care;
- 3.6 Complying with employers' health and safety policies, including those relating to substance misuse;
- 3.7 Recognising and using responsibly with service users and carers, the power that comes from your work role.

**As a social worker, you must respect the rights of service users while seeking to ensure that their behaviour does not harm themselves or other people.**

# **Respect the rights of service users while seeking to ensure that their behaviour does not harm themselves or other people**

## **This includes:**

- 4.1 Recognising that service users have the right to take positive risks and helping them to identify and manage potential and actual risks to themselves and others;
- 4.2 Following risk assessment policies and procedures to assess whether the behaviour of service users or others presents a risk of harm to themselves or other people;
- 4.3 Taking necessary steps to minimise the risks of service users' behaviour causing actual or potential harm to themselves or other people;
- 4.4 Ensuring that relevant colleagues and agencies are informed about the outcomes and implications of risk assessments in a timely and effective manner.

**As a social worker, you  
must uphold public trust  
and confidence in social  
care services.**

# **Uphold public trust and confidence in social care services**

## **In particular you must not:**

- 5.1 Abuse, neglect or harm service users, carers or colleagues;
- 5.2 Exploit service users, carers or colleagues in any way;
- 5.3 Abuse the trust of service users and carers or the access you have to personal information about them or to their property, home or workplace;
- 5.4 Form inappropriate personal relationships with service users;
- 5.5 Discriminate unlawfully or unjustifiably against service users, carers or colleagues;
- 5.6 Condone any unlawful or unjustifiable discrimination by service users, carers or colleagues;
- 5.7 Put yourself or other people at unnecessary risk;
- 5.8 Behave in a way, in work or outside work, which would call into question your suitability to work in social care services;
- 5.9 Use social media or social networking sites or other forms of electronic communication in a way that contravenes professional boundaries, organisational guidelines or the Social Care Council standards.

The background is a solid bright yellow color. Overlaid on this are several large, white, abstract shapes that resemble stylized speech bubbles or overlapping circles. One large white shape is on the left, another is on the right, and a smaller one is at the bottom right. The text is positioned within the white space on the left side of the page.

**As a social worker, you must be accountable for the quality of your work and take responsibility for maintaining and improving your knowledge and skills.**

# **Be accountable for the quality of your work and take responsibility for maintaining and improving your knowledge and skills**

## **This includes:**

- 6.1 Meeting relevant standards of practice and working in a lawful, safe and effective way;
- 6.2 Taking personal and, where appropriate, collective responsibility for quality improvement and safety in line with your job role;
- 6.3 Being personally accountable for your actions and able to explain and account for your actions and decisions;
- 6.4 Maintaining clear and accurate records as required by procedures established for your work;
- 6.5 Informing your employer or the appropriate authority in a timely manner about any personal difficulties that might affect your ability to do your job competently and safely;
- 6.6 Informing the Social Care Council and any employers you work for at the first reasonable opportunity if your fitness to practise has been called into question. This includes ill-health that affects your ability to practise, criminal convictions, disciplinary proceedings and findings of other regulatory bodies or organisations;
- 6.7 Seeking assistance from your employer or the appropriate authority if you do not feel able or adequately prepared to carry out any aspect of your work, or you are not sure about how to proceed in a work matter;
- 6.8 Ensuring that if there is a conflict between the Social Care Council standards of conduct and your work environment, your first obligation is to the standards;

- 6.9 Helping service users and carers to make complaints where required, taking complaints seriously and responding to them or passing them to the appropriate person including your employer or the Social Care Council;
- 6.10 Making service users and carers aware of your responsibilities within the Social Care Council standards of conduct;
- 6.11 Being open and honest with people if things go wrong, including providing a full and prompt explanation to your employer of what has happened;
- 6.12 Co-operating with any investigation or formal inquiry into your conduct, the conduct of others, or the care or services provided to a service user where appropriate;
- 6.13 Working openly and co-operatively with colleagues and treating them with respect;
- 6.14 Taking responsibility for work delegated to you, recognising and working within the limits of your knowledge, skills and experience;
- 6.15 Recognising that you remain responsible for the work that you have delegated to other workers;
- 6.16 Recognising and respecting the roles and expertise of workers from other disciplines and agencies and working in partnership with them;
- 6.17 Undertaking relevant training and learning to maintain and improve your knowledge and skills and meeting the Social Care Council Post Registration Training and Learning Requirements in line with your job role;
- 6.18 Contributing to the learning and development of others.

# Standards of Practice

- 1 Manage your role as a professional social worker.**
- 2 Maintain an up-to date knowledge and evidence base for social work.**
- 3 Develop social work practice through supervision, consultation, reflection and analysis.**
- 4 Practise competently within your area of practice.**
- 5 Engage and participate with service users and carers.**
- 6 Assess needs, circumstances, rights, strengths and risks in partnership with those involved and respond appropriately.**
- 7 Use social work interventions to manage risk and improve outcomes for service users.**
- 8 Develop yourself and others.**
- 9 Practise in multidisciplinary and inter-agency contexts.**



**As a social worker, you must manage your role as a professional social worker.**

# Manage your role as a professional social worker

## This includes:

- 1.1 Practising safely and effectively within the context of your organisation, requirements of legislation and scope of practice, being able to balance accountability and autonomy;
- 1.2 Exercising authority and professional judgement as a social worker within the appropriate legal and ethical frameworks;
- 1.3 Managing competing or conflicting interests;
- 1.4 Recognising ethical issues, dilemmas and conflicts that arise in the context of social work practice and drawing on an appropriate knowledge base to inform professional judgements;
- 1.5 Reflecting on the impact of your own values and experiences on practice with different groups of service users and carers;
- 1.6 Demonstrating social work values and principles, including the promotion of rights, social justice, equality and inclusion;
- 1.7 Prioritising and managing your work effectively;
- 1.8 Constructing professional reports that are analytical, coherent and appropriate to the intended audience;
- 1.9 Maintaining accurate, complete, retrievable and up to date records that comply with applicable legal and organisational requirements;
- 1.10 Maintaining personal and professional boundaries;
- 1.11 Taking steps to ensure your own safety where there is a risk of harm;
- 1.12 Reporting any adverse events, incidents, errors and near misses that are likely to affect the wellbeing of service users or carers;



**As a social worker, you must maintain an up-to date knowledge and evidence base for social work.**

# Maintain an up-to-date knowledge and evidence base for social work

## This includes:

- 2.1 Taking responsibility for maintaining an up-to-date knowledge and evidence base for social work practice;
- 2.2 Working within the legislative and policy context for social work, including professional codes, standards, frameworks and guidance;
- 2.3 Updating your knowledge through research and evidence based practice, to inform your interventions;
- 2.4 Applying evidence-based knowledge and skills to practice.



**As a social worker, you must develop social work practice through supervision, consultation, reflection and analysis.**

# **Develop social work practice through supervision, consultation, reflection and analysis**

## **This includes:**

- 3.1 Applying critical thinking to reflect on practice;
- 3.2 Integrating learning into practice;
- 3.3 Accessing and using professional supervision appropriately in accordance with organisational and professional requirements;
- 3.4 Using supervision proactively by bringing your own ideas, suggestions and decisions for discussion;
- 3.5 Using feedback from supervision and other sources, including service users and carers, to inform reflection on and evaluation of social work practice.



**As a social worker, you  
must practise competently  
within your area of practice.**

# Practise competently within your area of practice

## This includes:

- 4.1 Clarifying and complying with legal and organisational requirements for your particular area of practice;
- 4.2 Fulfilling statutory responsibilities;
- 4.3 Demonstrating appropriate knowledge and skills for your particular area of practice;
- 4.4 Adapting your practice to meet specific needs of service users, carers, families, groups, and communities;
- 4.5 Developing your practice as needed to take account of new developments, research evidence or changing contexts;
- 4.6 Contributing to the continued improvement of social work practice, services, policies and procedures within your area of practice.



**As a social worker, you must engage and participate with service users and carers.**

# Engage and participate with service users and carers

## This includes:

- 5.1 Building and sustaining purposeful and situation appropriate professional relationships with service users and carers which are person-centred and inclusive;
- 5.2 Working in partnership to promote the active participation of service users and carers in all aspects of decisions and actions affecting their lives;
- 5.3 Supporting service users and carers to communicate their views, needs and preferences, advocating on their behalf where appropriate;
- 5.4 Where appropriate, challenging service users to achieve their goals;
- 5.5 Clearly communicating your own and your organisation's roles and responsibilities;



**As a social worker, you must be able to assess needs, circumstances, rights, strengths and risks in partnership with those involved and respond appropriately.**

# **Assess needs, circumstances, rights, strengths and risks in partnership with those involved and respond appropriately**

## **This includes:**

- 6.1 Undertaking accurate, comprehensive and person centred assessments in line with agreed standards and procedures;
- 6.2 Assessing the nature, level, urgency and implications of any risks identified in compliance with legal and other requirements;
- 6.3 Making professional judgements about needs, risks and protective factors to inform planning, while balancing service users' rights and responsibilities;
- 6.4 Challenging resistance in the interests of achieving full information on which to assess risk;
- 6.5 Working in partnership with service users and carers to prepare, implement, monitor, review and revise plans to meet needs and circumstances, securing resources where required;
- 6.6 Supporting service users and carers to connect with appropriate resources and support to meet identified outcomes.

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**As a social worker, you must be able to use social work interventions to manage risk and improve outcomes for service users.**

# Use social work interventions to manage risk and improve outcomes for service users

## This includes:

- 7.1 Having a sound knowledge of a range of evidence-based interventions and the ability to appropriately select and apply these to meet identified needs and circumstances of service users, families, carers, groups and communities;
- 7.2 Coordinating and facilitating a range of practical and emotional support, based on assessed need, to complement the service user's own resources and networks;
- 7.3 Developing and implementing risk management plans which promote independence and positive risk taking while taking account of legal and organisational requirements and service user capacity to make decisions regarding risks;
- 7.4 Identifying behaviours and environments that present potential risk of harm or abuse;
- 7.5 Reporting and investigating harm or abuse in line with regional safeguarding procedures, using persistence and assertiveness where required;
- 7.6 Promoting and supporting the safeguarding of service users in collaboration with multidisciplinary colleagues, adopting the most restrictive and least damaging plan of action to guarantee their safety and protection;
- 7.7 Being able to make a professional case for your assessment and recommendations where agreement is not reached and there is the potential for challenge from multidisciplinary colleagues and others;
- 7.8 Providing therapeutic support to service users who have experienced harm and/ or abuse;

- 7.9 Disengaging in a planned manner, providing service users and other agencies with information on the closure or continuity of support;
- 7.10 Arranging for the transfer or closure of information relating to social work involvement in line with agreed standards and procedures.



**As a social worker, you  
must develop yourself and  
others.**

# Develop yourself and others

## This includes:

- 8.1 Managing the physical and emotional impact of your practice and developing personal and professional resilience;
- 8.2 Keeping your knowledge, skills and competence up to date throughout your career, proactively seeking out learning and development opportunities that will meet your learning needs and priorities;
- 8.3 Taking responsibility for your continued professional registration and understanding what is required of you by your regulatory body;
- 8.4 Contributing to the learning, development and practice of others.



**As a social worker, you  
must be able to practise in  
multidisciplinary and  
inter-agency contexts.**

# Practise in multidisciplinary and inter-agency contexts

## This includes:

- 9.1 Developing and maintaining effective collaborative relationships with professionals from other disciplines and agencies;
- 9.2 Upholding and promoting the role and function of social work when working in a multidisciplinary context;
- 9.3 Understanding the roles and responsibilities of others and being able to negotiate respective responsibilities and deal constructively with disagreements and conflict;
- 9.4 Making and receiving referrals appropriately;
- 9.5 Ensuring the timely and effective exchange of information between professionals and agencies to inform assessments and promote the safeguarding and wellbeing of service users and carers.

# Glossary

## **ACCOUNTABLE**

Being responsible for the decisions you make and being able to justify them.

## **ADVERSE EVENT**

Any event or circumstance that could have or did lead to harm, loss or damage to people, property, environment or reputation.

## **COMPETENCE**

The overarching set of knowledge, skills and attitudes required to practise safely and effectively without supervision.

## **DIVERSITY**

Accepting that everyone is different and respecting and valuing those differences.

## **EFFECTIVE**

To be successful in producing a desired or intended result.

## **EMPOWER**

To give someone the strength and confidence to act on their own initiative.

## **EQUALITY**

Treating everyone fairly and ensuring they have access to the same opportunities irrespective of their race, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief.

## **FITNESS TO PRACTISE**

When someone has the competence, character and health to do their job safely and effectively.

## **POST REGISTRATION TRAINING AND LEARNING REQUIREMENTS**

These are the learning and development activities you must undertake to maintain your registration.

## **PREFERENCES**

A person's preferred option or choice.

# Glossary

## **PROMOTE**

To support or actively encourage.

## **RESPECT**

To have due regard for someone's feelings, wishes or rights.

## **RIGHTS**

The entitlements that individuals have legally, socially and ethically, including human rights.

## **SERVICE USER**

Any individual who receives social care services.

## **WELLBEING**

Enjoying a good quality of life characterised by keeping well and healthy, feeling safe and secure, being able to participate in purposeful activities and social networks and realise one's full potential.







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Northern Ireland Social Care Council  
7th Floor, Millennium House  
25 Great Victoria Street  
Belfast BT2 7AQ  
Tel : 02895 362 600  
Web: [nisccl.info](http://nisccl.info)

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