

Northern Ireland

Social

Care

Council

**PROFESSIONAL IN PRACTICE
INDIVIDUAL ASSESSMENT ROUTE
ASSESSOR HANDBOOK**

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Introduction

The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (Social Care Council) has responsibility for determining and managing the provision of post qualifying education and training for social work in Northern Ireland. This responsibility is carried out within the Social Care Council by the Professional in Practice Partnership which reports to the Board.

The Professional in Practice Partnership, chaired by a member of the Board, comprises the main social work employers and higher education institutions engaged in the provision of post qualifying education and training for social work in Northern Ireland.

The Social Care Council is required, as part of its key roles and functions, to have arrangements and structures in place to facilitate individual submissions through the Individual Assessment Route (IAR). This function is delivered by the Professional in Practice Assessment Panel.

This guidance has been developed to provide assessors with the information they require to complete assessment of IAR submissions across the range of assessment methods.

SECTION ONE

Overview of the Professional in Practice Framework

The Professional in Practice Framework has four Professional Awards:

- 1. Consolidation Award in Social Work:-**For those staff consolidating and extending the knowledge and skills developed at basic qualifying level and preparing to move into more specialist work.
- 2. Specialist Award in Social Work:-** For those involved in complex work requiring high levels of responsibility and accountability.
- 3. Leadership and Strategic Award in Social Work:-** For those influencing developments and influencing others.
- 4. Advanced Scholarship Award in Social Work:-**For those who are involved in the acquisition and dissemination of new knowledge, demonstrating a sustained commitment to innovation policy and practice development.

Each of the four awards is a separate entity and therefore a candidate can achieve each award or indeed can achieve an award more than once across a range of routes. Candidates can work towards achievement by using any of the following routes;

- **Individual Assessment Route (IAR)** for candidates who work independently and submit for assessment by the Assessment Panel. Candidates can achieve both professional Requirements and academic credits via this route.
- **Approved Programme Route** for candidates who prefer formal taught programmes of study, the majority of which have academic credits at Post Graduate level.
- **Credit Accumulation Route** where candidates can log training leading to PiP accreditation.
- **Work-Based Learning Route** where in-house training courses are approved for PiP Requirements.
- **Combined Route:** a combination of different routes.

Enrolment

All social workers seeking to access the Individual Assessment Route to gain Professional in Practice Requirements and Awards must be registered on the social work part of the NISCC register. Once registered, social workers are automatically **enrolled with the Professional in Practice Framework**. Social workers intending to submit to the Individual Assessment Route must log onto their account on the NISCC portal and select the relevant award. This is referred to as “Enrolling on an award”.

Where the candidate wishes to achieve academic credits, they are required additionally to enrol with the relevant academic institution.

NB: Enrolment with academic institutions is an arrangement between the candidate, their employer and the academic institution and is not a Social Care Council responsibility.

SECTION TWO

Appointment as an Assessor

Assessment within the Individual Assessment Route (IAR) is undertaken by suitably qualified assessors nominated by the employer/organisation/institution. New Assessor training is delivered by the Professional in Practice Advisor twice per year - on a given date in February and September. Criteria for eligibility are outlined in Appendix One "Criteria for Appointment as a Professional in Practice Assessor." Once trained and confirmed as IAR assessors, the role is maintained by a minimum of once yearly attendance at Standardisation training which is delivered at two points in the year – also in February and September.

Assessment Process

Assessment Panel

Assessment and achievement via the Individual Assessment Route is managed by the Assessment Panel, which is representative of the members of the Professional in Practice Partnership. Each member body of the Partnership provides a member and a deputy for the Assessment Panel.

The Assessment Panel has responsibility for assessors undertaking assessment on its behalf.

The Professional in Practice Assessment Framework provides two submission points per year within the Individual Assessment Route:

- Submission Point One – the first Monday in March
- Submission Point Two – the first Monday in October

Candidates submit their work electronically via the NISCC portal on the first Monday in March or October in any given year. Once they submit, their agency PiP Rep receives an automatically generated email to inform them that they have submissions to approve.

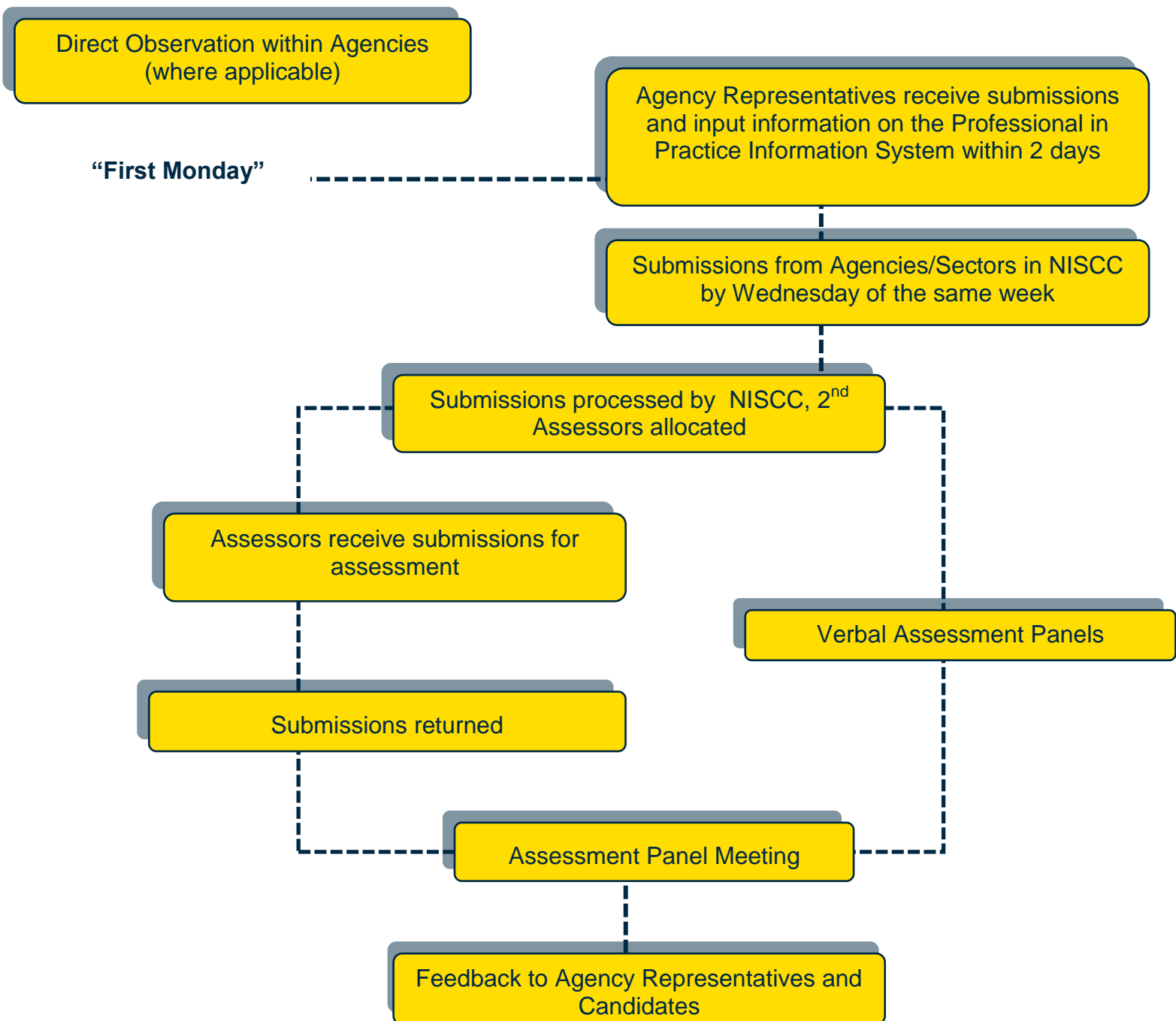
It is the Agency PiP Reps' responsibility to view the submissions from their agency and confirm the following:

- All necessary documentation has been included.
- Word Count is indicated, is accurate and within the permitted range.
- All details on the Front Sheet are accurate and complete.

- The correct Requirements and Award are indicated.

Agency Reps should proceed to approve submissions if they are in order. If not approved, they are returned to the candidate for amendment. The assessment process is outlined in the following diagram:

Allocation and Assessment



Allocation Process

1. Agencies are normally responsible for “first marking” and direct observation of submissions in relation to their own employees. They then cross mark ie are “second markers” for other agencies.
2. The agency Professional in Practice Representative identifies the first assessor from a list presented on the assessor portal.
3. Agencies normally receive an assessment allocation which is proportionate to the number of submissions they have made.
4. The NISCC Professional Advisor for PiP manages the allocation of an approved assessor from an agency/sector unconnected to the candidate, to cross-mark. In the event of particularly specialised submissions, assessors with relevant expertise may be used.
5. A rota of assessors for verbal panels is maintained by NISCC. Two assessors form the panel for verbal submissions and assessors rotate on an agency basis. If the candidate is claiming academic credits, one of the assessors will be an academic staff member.
6. Agencies will receive their cross-marking allocation in the week following submission.

Assessment Process

1. The process takes approximately 10 weeks from the point of submission through to receipt of results.
2. Assessors are notified by automatic email that they have submissions available to be marked.
3. There is a time allocation of 3-4 weeks for assessment of submissions. Assessors should log their comments and assessment outcome on the assessor portal.
4. Verbal assessment panels convene to assess verbal submissions on dates set by the NISCC. Assessors and candidates are informed of dates and times in advance. The comments and outcomes are entered onto the assessor portal on the day of assessment.
5. Submissions are returned to the NISCC on a predetermined date published in advance of the assessment point. If required, moderation is undertaken in the week following the return of all the submissions to the NISCC. * **See additional guidelines below***
6. The External Examiner receives a sample of submissions to include all those referred, all those partially competent, all those moderated and some which are competent.
7. The Assessment Panel meets to discuss and ratify results on a specified date. The panel is chaired by a member of the PiP Partnership and is attended by the External Examiner, panel members, NISCC staff and assessors. Those assessors who have

referred work or who have disagreed with their co-marker are strongly encouraged to attend.

8. Exemplary submissions which may be used for future training are identified at the panel.
9. Candidates are informed of their results in the 2 weeks following the panel during which time results are entered onto the online assessment system.
10. Candidates are encouraged to seek feedback on their submissions which will have been made available to their agency PiP Representative.

Moderation – Additional Guidelines

- An IAR submission should be moderated when there is a clear difference of opinion between markers about the outcome.
- Both assessors must clarify the reasons why they are seeking moderation and record their comments on the online system.
- When a submission has been moderated, at least one (preferably both) assessor(s) must attend the Assessment Panel.
- The moderator will be an experienced assessor selected by rotation from a previously compiled list. The moderator should not come from the same agency as the candidate.
- The moderator will have access to the comments of the original assessors and may also contact them for discussion if necessary.
- The moderator will read the whole submission but will comment only on the contentious areas.
- The moderator will enter comments on the system and their decision is final.

Assessment Principles

The Professional in Practice Framework provides an opportunity for achievement of professional recognition within social work.

Fundamentally, competence is about demonstrating knowledge and skills appropriate to a context. Professional competence is about having knowledge and skills underpinned by professional ethics and values. Assessment within the Professional in Practice Framework is a measurement of professional competence.

Submissions for assessment for Professional in Practice Requirements or full awards will be considered in respect of the following underpinning statements.

1. Critical reflection must be integral to all work to be considered in the Professional in Practice Framework.

2. A social work value base must be evident throughout all work to be considered in the Professional in Practice Framework.
3. Personal responsibility and initiative for independent learning to enhance continuous professional development must be demonstrated.
4. Successful postgraduate study is characterised by a number of criteria;
 - (i) Demonstrating a thorough and systematic grasp of the issues in relation to a particular field of inquiry.
 - (ii) Showing independence of thought and originality. The Candidate must move beyond familiar ideas to develop thinking and application.
 - (iii) Methodological rigour must also be evident. This is shown in the way that problems are analysed and dealt with in a systematic manner.
 - (iv) Critical judgement must be applied to complex and demanding scenarios. This necessitates the weighing up of different arguments and courses of action.

Academic Recognition

The Professional in Practice Framework aims to be comprehensive, relevant and accessible. The Professional in Practice Partnership Committee in its endeavour to ensure that the Professional in Practice Framework achieves these aims, seeks to provide access for candidates to academic recognition of their achievements within the Individual Assessment Route.

All academic institutions have in place arrangements for Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) and academic recognition can be achieved using this route. Candidates in this instance are advised to discuss options with the academic institution of their choice.

Ulster University has also academically approved all of the professional Requirements within the Consolidation, Specialist and Leadership & Strategic Award levels which candidates can access through the IAR.¹

Candidates are advised to discuss options with the Programme Director at UU and are further advised that up to two thirds of a Master's degree can be achieved in this way. The final third must be achieved via a dissertation or research within the setting of the University Programme.

Candidates are advised that the Professional in Practice Framework is assessed at postgraduate Master's level, irrespective of whether or not academic credits are being sought.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education sets out a range of descriptors for postgraduate study. A Master's degree is awarded to students who have demonstrated:

¹ Please note the In-Service assessment method does not offer academic credits as part of the MSc Professional Development Programme

- (i) A systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study, or area of professional practice.
- (ii) A comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship.
- (iii) Originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline.
- (iv) Conceptual understanding that enables the student;
 - to critically evaluate current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline; and
 - to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of same and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.

Typically, holders of Master's level qualifications will be able to:

- (i) Deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences.
- (ii) Demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level.
- (iii) Continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level.

And will have:

- (v) The qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:
 - the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility
 - decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations and
 - the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development

Assessment Decisions

Assessors within the Individual Assessment Route for the Professional in Practice Framework have the task of assessing a candidate's submission against the identified professional requirements of the particular Professional in Practice Award. Given that the Professional in Practice Framework is based at postgraduate Master's level, the standards for assessment must meet postgraduate level requirements. When arriving at a judgement, assessors will be guided by the assessment criteria specified in Table One (see below).

TABLE ONE:

Assessment Criteria - Postgraduate Level

% Range	Content* <i>(must include professional ethics)</i> 30	Application of Theory and Research 20	Knowledge and Understanding 20	Evidence of Reading 15	Referencing (Harvard) 5	Presentation, Grammar and Spelling 10
70 – 100	Critical insightful evaluation and synthesis of complex issues and materials. A high level of originality and reflection. Demonstrates the ability to pursue research at Doctoral level. Originality (21 – 30)	Extensive evidence of advanced applications and/or empirical data, where applicable, informed extensively by current research and practice in the area. Innovative and original use of knowledge. (14 – 20)	Exceptional knowledge and conceptual understanding of complex and/or specialised principles and concepts and the development and advancement of ideas and practice. High level critical judgement and confident grasp of complex issues. (14 – 20)	Extensive evidence of integrating current supplementary sources (12 – 15)	Outstanding referencing with current sources (5)	Outstanding, well-directed presentation, logically and coherently structured, using correct grammar, spelling and referencing. (8 – 10)
60 – 69	Critical evaluation and synthesis of complex issues and materials which includes some originality and a reflective approach. Well argued. (18 –20)	Clear evidence of relevant applications and/or empirical data, where applicable, informed by current research and practice in the area. Critical judgement and a grasp of complex issues. (12 –13)	Wide knowledge and depth of understanding of complex and/or specialised principles and concepts and the development of ideas and practice. (12 –13)	Evidence of extensive reading of current supplementary sources (9 –10)	Comprehensive referencing with current sources (4)	Very good presentation, logically structured, using correct grammar, spelling and referencing. (7)
50 – 59	Some critical evaluation and synthesis of key issues and material. Reasonably well argued. Largely descriptive. (15 –17)	Evidence of relevant applications and/or empirical data, where applicable, with some links to current research in the area. (10 – 11)	Good and appropriate knowledge and depth of understanding of key principles and concepts with some understanding of the development of ideas and practice. (10 – 11)	Evidence of reading supplementary sources (7 – 8)	Adequate referencing. Some current sources. (3)	Orderly presentation, clear structure and acceptable grammar, spelling and referencing. (6)
COMPETENT						
REQUIRING FURTHER WORK						
45 – 49	Some evaluation and synthesis of issues and material (12 – 14)	Occasional relevant applications and/or empirical data, where applicable. (8 – 9)	Basic knowledge and depth of understanding of key principles and concepts only (8 – 9)	Limited evidence of current reading (6)	Limited referencing. Sources not up to date. (2)	Weak presentation and structure, grammar, spelling and referencing. (5)
31 – 44	Limited evaluation and synthesis of issues and material (11)	Limited applications and/or empirical data, where applicable (7)	Limited and/or superficial knowledge of key principles and concepts (7)	Minimal evidence of current reading (5)	Inadequate referencing. (1)	Poor presentation and structure, grammar, spelling and referencing. (4)
0 – 30	Little or no evaluation and synthesis of issues and material (0 – 10)	Little or no evidence of relevant application and/or empirical data. (0 – 6)	Virtually devoid of any evidence of knowledge and understanding (0 – 6)	Little or no evidence of reading (0 – 4)	Inadequate referencing. (0 – 1)	Inadequate presentation, structure, grammar, spelling and referencing. (0 – 3)
Total						

* Content refers to what extent the submission meets PiP Professional Requirement

Assessment Outcome

The Individual Assessment Route has 4 possible outcomes:

1. **Competent** Candidates will be awarded the PiP Requirements they have claimed.
2. **Partially Competent** Candidates will be awarded some of the Requirements they have claimed.
3. **Referred** Candidates will not be awarded the Requirements they have claimed.
4. **Not Assessed** submission has not been assessed as it is incomplete, in breach of the word count or is not in a suitable form for assessment.

Re-submission Process

If a candidate's Professional in Practice submission is referred for further work, the candidate will normally be given the option **either**

- To re-submit the same material with revisions for re-marking; **or**
- To make a new submission.

A **resubmission** is work which:

- Is submitted within a three year period from the date of the first submission; **and**
- Uses the same method and case material and covers the same Professional in Practice requirement(s) as the original submission.

A candidate may present **one** resubmission of a 'referred' piece in the same format (e.g., Direct Observation, verbal submission or assignment) as the original work.

After three years, the case material loses currency and a new submission must be made.

All resubmissions must include:

- The letter of referral from the Professional in Practice Assessment Panel.
- Copy of the Agreed Summary.
- Updated information on the candidate.
- An up- to -date line manager's report addressing the reasons for the 'referral'.
- The date of the last submission(s) entered on the submission front sheet.

A resubmitted piece of work will normally be assessed by one of the original assessors and one different assessor.

New Submission

A **new** submission must differ from the original in **at least one** of the following ways

- Different case material.
- A different submission method (e.g. assignment, verbal presentation etc.).
- Different Requirements or Award.

Candidates Registered For Academic Credits

Please note that if a candidate is registered for academic credits with Ulster University, the University's resubmission policy differs from the Professional in Practice resubmission policy. For further information refer to the University's IAR programme handbook, or contact pgsocialwork@ulster.ac.uk.

Examples of work

Candidates are informed on the front sheet of their submission that their work may be used as an example for training purposes. Submissions will be selected, anonymised and copied by the Professional in Practice office. These can then be used by Agency Representatives in work with prospective candidates and/or for standardisation or training events. Candidates can indicate on the front sheet if they do not wish their work to be used for these purposes.

Breaches of Confidentiality

Breaches of confidentiality, as defined in the Policy on Confidentiality can be minor, moderate or serious. See the policy for more detail. [Link to Policy](#)

SECTION THREE

Submission Methods

Candidates should seek guidance from their agency Professional in Practice representative as to which method best suits the piece of work being considered for submission.

To obtain a full award, candidates must choose two methods of submission from the following options, one of which must be an assignment. Each submission should cover a maximum of 3 Requirements unless it is an APL submission which has no limit on the number of Requirements being claimed.

- **Assignment**
- **Verbal Presentation**
- **Direct Observation**
- **Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)**
- **In-Service Training Submission Schedule**

A **Combination** of these methods may be submitted at the one Assessment Point

With every submission type, the candidate must make clear which Professional in Practice requirements are being addressed and how they have been met.

SECTION FOUR

Supporting Policies and Procedures

Consent

Service user or carer permission must be sought before any material is submitted for assessment. A statement must be included in the submission indicating that permission was sought and confidentiality was explained to the service user. If consent was not sought or not granted, candidates must complete a thematic assignment which **does not directly identify casework**.

Confidentiality

Social workers have a professional responsibility to ensure that confidentiality in work submitted for assessment is maintained at all times. Failure to ensure that the identity of service users and others is protected demonstrates a breach of trust, a failure to meet the NISCC Standards of Conduct and Practice, Professional in Practice standards on submissions and Professional in Practice Requirements.

- 1.8 *Respecting and maintaining the dignity and privacy of service users;*
- 2.4 *Respecting confidential information and clearly explaining agency policies about confidentiality to service users and carers;*

*(NISCC Standards of **Conduct** and Practice 2019).*

When submitting work for assessment to the Assessment Panel via the Individual Assessment Route, care must be taken to ensure that the information presented does not lead to the identification of a service user. The Confidentiality Policy is strictly applied to all methods of assessment.

Plagiarism

The Professional in Practice Committee defines plagiarism as, where any candidate includes, in a mode of assessment, unacknowledged and verbatim, substantial material which has been authored by another.

This definition includes unpublished work, for example, web sources, other people's portfolios and dissertations. Plagiarism is dishonest, involves the appropriation or purchase of the ideas and work of others. Within the context of a Professional in Practice submission plagiarism involves the misrepresentation of the candidate's level of competence. In this context, plagiarism is a breach of professional ethics and the NISCC Standards of Conduct.

- 2.1 *Being honest and trustworthy;*
(NISCC Standards of Conduct and Practice 2019).

Further information on Plagiarism is available in the policy.

Review of Decision

The Professional in Practice Committee has developed standards and systems to ensure consistency, impartiality and accountability in the assessment of submissions to the Individual Assessment Route. There may be circumstances when candidates consider the assessment processes to be flawed. In such situations the candidate can request a review of the decision making process.

A candidate may request a 'Review' only on the grounds that there may have been procedural irregularities or administrative error of such a nature as to cause reasonable doubt as to whether the assessors would have reached the same conclusion had they not occurred.

The professional decision of the Assessment Panel and its External Examiner is **not** open to appeal. Further information is available in the policy.

Where a matter is not satisfactorily resolved through this route, a candidate may make a formal complaint to the NISCC using the procedures outlined in the Social Care Council Policy on Complaints.

Equal Opportunities

The Social Care Council is committed to the provision of equality of opportunity and access to assessment in the Professional in Practice Framework regardless of any real or perceived differences.

The Professional in Practice Partnership is committed to fair and objective assessment.

Where a candidate feels he/she is being unfairly treated in respect of access to assessment or within the assessment process, an appeal may be made using the Policy on Reviewing an Assessment Decision. Should further action be required the candidate should refer to the Social Care Council complaints policy.

All documents, forms and policies referenced in this handbook can be accessed from or within the PiP Framework digital guide/s at [Social Care Council Learning Zone](#).

APPENDIX ONE

Criteria for Appointment as a PiP Assessor

Assessment within the Individual Assessment Route is undertaken by suitably qualified assessors nominated by the employer/organisation/institution. In order to assess submissions within the Individual Assessment Route the following criteria must be met.

- Must be a qualified social worker and registered with NISCC.
- Must have a minimum of 4 years post qualifying social work experience.
- Must have achievement within the PQ or PiP Framework and/or equivalent post-qualifying academic achievement.
- Must have experience of PQ/PiP assessment or other relevant assessment.
- Must attend a minimum of one standardisation event per year.
- Must have undertaken training for assessors provided by the PiP Partnership.

A register of suitably qualified Assessors will be retained by the PiP Partnership.

APPENDIX TWO

Monitoring and Standardisation

External Examiners

The PiP IAR Assessment Panel normally appoints an independent External Examiner from outside Northern Ireland to:

1. Monitor the efficacy of the assessment processes.
2. Monitor the standards and consistency of assessment.
3. Contribute to assessment decisions where appropriate.

The following criteria for appointment apply:

- Social work qualified and registered with their appropriate Social Work Regulatory Body
- Experience of social work post qualifying education and training in the UK
- Experience of postgraduate level assessment
- Commitment to attending Assessment Panel meetings
- Commitment to undertaking sample reviews of submissions
- Commitment to providing a written report
- Commitment to attending appropriate standardisation events if required

The Assessment Panel recommends the appointment of the External Examiner to the PiP Partnership Committee for approval.

The appointment is for an initial period of 3 years and may be reappointed on an annual basis for a further 3 year period.

Monitoring

Assessors receive feedback from the Assessment Panel on issues identified by the assessment process through their agency PiP Representatives on the Assessment Panel, via Assessment Panel reports and by attending standardisation events.

The areas monitored include:

- Assessors' understanding of the Requirements, standards and processes
- The quality of assessor reports and feedback to candidates
- Attendance at standardisation, training and assessors' meetings
- The quality, fairness and consistency of assessment

The performance of assessors can be monitored via the production of reports and analysis from the on-line assessment process. The agency PiP Representative can access their own assessment reports after each assessment point.

Standardisation

The purpose of standardisation is to develop and sustain assessment systems and practices and ensure consistency and fairness. It is an assessor's responsibility to ensure they attend a minimum of one standardisation event a year to maintain their efficacy as an assessor and to enable consistent assessment. NISCC will offer a minimum of two standardisation events a year and all assessors are expected to attend at least one.

The External Examiner also plays a role in standardising assessment by bringing knowledge of practices in other post qualifying assessment systems, sampling submissions, contributing to discussions at the Assessment Panel, formally reporting on the quality of assessment and advising on improvements.