



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

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Preface

The “Quality Assurance Framework for Education and Training Regulated by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council” (Social Care Council) sets out the key principles, key aspects and outcomes for the quality assurance of Degree in Social Work courses, Designated Practice Learning Providers and the Northern Ireland Post Qualifying Education and Training Framework. There are three associated documents which contain detailed information on the approval, monitoring & review and inspection for each type of provision:

- ‘Approval, Monitoring Review and Inspection Arrangements for Degree in Social Work Courses (Revised January 2017)’
- ‘Approval, Monitoring, Review and Inspection Arrangements for Designated Practice Learning Providers (Revised March 2018)’
- ‘Approval, Monitoring, Review and Inspection Arrangements for Post Qualifying Education and Training Programmes (December 2018)’

These four documents provide comprehensive information on the Social Care Council’s approach to quality assurance for providers of social work education and training.

The Quality Assurance Framework aims to ensure:

- That social workers are trained to the highest standards to provide safe and effective practice linked to the Social Care Council registration requirements;
- That teaching, learning and practice is fit for purpose;
- Effective service user and carer participation in education and training provision;
- A coordinated approach with regulators of social work service provision for example, the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA);
- Continuous improvement in education and training provision through monitoring and review including thematic reviews.

The Social Care Council is committed to ensuring the highest quality education and training provision and will keep its quality assurance arrangements under review. The Social Care Council looks forward to working with education and training providers to promote the government’s modernisation agenda of quality, safety and effectiveness in social work practice.

Introduction

- 1. Introduction**
- 1.1 The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (Social Care Council) is a non-departmental public body established on 1 October 2001 by the Health and Personal Social Services Act (Northern Ireland) 2001. The Act requires the Social Care Council to promote high standards of conduct and practice among social care workers and high standards in their training.
- 1.2 As the regulator of social work education and training, the Social Care Council is responsible for setting the standards for social work education, ensuring these standards are being met, and that social workers are equipped with the knowledge and skills to deliver quality services that meet the needs of users of services and their carers.
- 1.3 Social Care Council needs to be assured that the Degree and post qualifying training programmes are meeting the sector's needs in terms of readiness to practise (the Degree and practice learning provision), and ongoing fitness to practise, linked to registration (Professional in Practice).
- 1.4 Social Care Council also needs to ensure there is sufficient training available and that qualifying and post qualifying education is of a sufficiently high quality and is meeting the needs of a diverse workforce. The Social Care Council therefore will need information on the quantity of provision, the quality of provision and the impact of social work training on the quality of services provided.
- 1.5 Social Care Council works closely with other standards setting and regulatory bodies such as the Department of Health (DoH) and the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA).
- 1.6 This publication outlines the principles for the regulation of social work qualifying and post qualifying education and training by the Social Care Council, and is supplemented by specific quality assurance arrangements for:
 - Degree in Social Work courses;
 - Designated Practice Learning Providers;
 - The Northern Ireland Professional in Practice Framework (the PiP Framework).

These arrangements are contained in separate publications which can be accessed from the Social Care Council website **www.niscc.info**

Social Care Council Equal Opportunities Statement

2. Social Care Council Equal Opportunities Statement

2.1 Social Care Council promotes education and training that produces competent social care and social work staff who can provide high quality services in our diverse society. Social Care Council recognises that each individual should be treated equally and fairly and respects the individual's legal right to equality of opportunity.

2.2 Students and candidates will therefore:

- Accept and respect individual rights and circumstances and understand how these affect the delivery of services for children and adults, families and communities;
- Learn how to counter discrimination, racism, poverty, disadvantage and injustice in ways appropriate to the situation and their role.

2.3 Providers of social work education and training and the PiP Partnership will seek to:

- Eliminate unfair discrimination and disadvantage in all aspects of their work regulated by the Social Care Council;
- Demonstrate this consistently through the quality assurance process.

2.4 The Social Care Council will:

- Take action to ensure the implementation of equal opportunities through the quality assurance process.

Principles underpinning the quality assurance system

3. Principles underpinning the quality assurance system

In undertaking its function of regulating social work education and training, the Social Care Council will work to the following four principles:

3.1 Continuous improvement

The Social Care Council seeks to ensure that continuous improvement underpins both its regulation of provision and the processes by which regulation is undertaken. The Social Care Council will focus on the continuous improvement of social work education and training and the consequent outcomes for services. The Social Care Council will ensure that the delivery of education and training meets its standards.

3.2 Efficiency and effectiveness

The Social Care Council will work in partnership with providers and other key stakeholders as appropriate, to implement these arrangements and to avoid duplication of effort where possible. Constructive dialogue between the Social Care Council staff and providers is encouraged so that any ongoing or developmental issues can be dealt with as they arise. The Social Care Council will ensure that its standards for education and training are appropriate, comprehensive and reflect up to date professional practice and that its regulatory activity and requirements are proportionate, reasonable and fit for purpose.

3.3 Consistency

The Social Care Council will be consistent in its approach to all providers and in the interpretation of the Rules, Standards and Requirements.

3.4 Transparency

The Social Care Council will have in place a transparent and proportionate system of quality assurance for education and training providers and processes that are responsive to both internal and external scrutiny. A summary of quality assurance reports will be made available to key stakeholders and the public.

Key aspects of quality assurance

4. Key aspects of quality assurance

4.1 Providers are required to deliver against standards as set out in the following documents.

For the Degree and Practice Learning Providers:

- The Northern Ireland Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work, September 2014 (Revised) (Amended October 2015);
- Northern Ireland Social Care Council Rules for the Approval of the Degree in Social Work, including the Standards of Approval, January 2012 (Revised);
- Northern Ireland Practice Learning Requirements, February 2020 (Revised);
- Northern Ireland Social Care Council, Learning, Teaching and Assessment Requirements, March 2018;
- The Standards for Practice Learning for the Degree in Social Work, March 2018 (Revised).

For Professional in Practice:

- The Rules for the Approval of Post Qualifying Education and Training in Social Work in Northern Ireland, (May 2020);
- PiP Framework Specification, (January 2018)
- Arrangements for Quality Assurance of PiP Framework, (March 2022);
- Requirements and Guidance for Programme Approval and Reapproval within PiP Framework, (March 2022)
- PiP Handbook for Approved Programme Providers, (March 2022)
- PiP Standards for Programme Approval (Nov 2019)
- PiP Handbook for the Individual Assessment Route (July 2021)
- PIP Requirements and Guidance for the Work-Based Learning Route (April 2022)

4.2 In addition, provision will be monitored against agreed targets, action plans from submission documents or previous reports. The Social Care Council will also take account of the outcomes of inspections of services carried out by the RQIA and other relevant inspection bodies.

4.3 In its annual monitoring, the 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 Social Care Council to intervene, e.g. conduct a review visit or initiate a preliminary investigation. These indicators are specified in the Approval, Monitoring, Review and Inspection documents for each type of provision.

4.4 The Social Care Council will also require statistical information which gives an overview and understanding of developments and trends in social work education. The Approval, Monitoring, Review and Inspection documents for each type of provision will detail the statistics required.

Thematic Reviews

5. Thematic Reviews

5.1 The Social Care Council will undertake thematic reviews that will apply across all provision. These thematic reviews may be dictated by, for example, issues raised by employers or issues that have been identified through RQIA inspections and by other relevant inspection bodies. The Social Care Council may also undertake ad hoc reviews if there are concerns about any area of provision. An independent visitor and a representative of service user or carer interests will be appointed to contribute to thematic reviews. For post qualifying training provision this may include visits to training providers.

Periodic Review

6. Periodic Review

6.1 Following approval, the Social Care Council will undertake regular reviews of provision. The frequency of reviews will depend on the risk assessment of the quality of the provision.

Re-approval

7. Re-approval

7.1 Where annual monitoring continues to be satisfactory, the periodic review period for the Degree in Social Work will be five years. All provision within the PiP Framework will normally be re-approved on a five-year basis, subject to satisfactory ongoing annual monitoring in the interim period. Where the academic revalidation cycle is on a six-year basis, the Social Care Council will seek to accommodate this timescale

Outcomes of the quality assurance system

8. Outcomes of the quality assurance system

8.1 The system will ensure that:

- Regulated provision meets the Social Care Council's Rules, Standards and Requirements;
- Social work training at qualifying and post qualifying levels is fit for purpose;
- Action is taken where problems are identified with the process and/or outcomes of provision;
- An ethos of continuous improvement is promoted.

8.2 An annual report will be produced for the Social Care Council Board on the outcomes of Social Care Councils quality assurance system.

Complaints Procedure

9. Complaints Procedure

9.1 The Social Care Council has a Complaints Procedure, which may be used by any user of the Social Care Council's services at any time. Copies of the Complaints Procedure are available from the Social Care Council's Director of Registration and Corporate Services to whom complaints should be addressed in the first instance.

For further information about the Quality Assurance Framework for Education and Training

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