



# School social work guidance

for schools employing a social worker

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## Checklist for employers new to employing social workers

- ✓ Read this Guidance and the [Standards of Conduct and Practice for Employers](#) before deciding to employ a social worker.
- ✓ Register with the Social Care Council as an Employer when you are sure you understand your responsibilities.
- ✓ Have clear lines of accountability and adhere to DE policies and procedures in place for reporting of child and adult protection issues and safeguarding concerns. Ensure liaison pathways with HSC Trust social workers and other key professionals.
- ✓ Nominate your organisation Endorser by submitting the relevant proforma.
- ✓ Consider the level of social work experience and skills required for your post **before** advertising.
- ✓ Use rigorous and thorough recruitment and selection policies to ensure that only people with the right skills and values are employed.
- ✓ Employers who recruit newly qualified social workers must be able to provide the required level of developmental social work support and supervision to meet their mandatory AYE and Two PiP Requirements conditions of registration.
- ✓ Identify who will provide social work supervision; if this is not available within the organisation identify how this will be resourced.
- ✓ Identify and secure resources to support the social worker's training and development needs.
- ✓ Check the Social Care Council Public Facing Register to confirm current social work registration on Part 1 and any conditions attached to registration before offering employment.
- ✓ Have systems in place to ensure staff maintain their registration and conditions of registration.

- ✔ Ensure the social worker has access to peer support and a wide range of learning opportunities to grow their role and maximise impact.
- ✔ Report non-compliance with social work registration requirements and/or Standards of Conduct and Practice to the Social Care Council.
- ✔ Encourage the development of the social work role by promoting and targeting the service to families and children who could benefit from the support. Seek feedback and involvement from service users in order to shape and develop service improvements.
- ✔ Maintain contact with the Social Care Council and EA for guidance and support.

## Who is this guidance for?

The *School Social Work Guidance – for schools employing a social worker* (the Guidance) has been developed to be used by schools and/or other educational institutions that have or are considering employing a social worker. Once you employ a social worker you are subject to a number of regulatory responsibilities which you may not be aware of. This Guidance is to help you understand what that means for you.

## Considering employing a social worker?

This Guidance is designed to help you when you are considering whether your pupils, families and teachers can benefit from employing a professional social worker in your school. It does this by briefly outlining the unique skills and attributes social work can contribute, as well as explaining the employer responsibilities you must be able to comply with before you decide to employ a social worker.

As an employer new to employing social workers there are some important regulatory rules to know about. Employers of social workers are bound by the **Standards of Conduct and Practice for Employers** and as such are expected to support and enable social workers in their employment to meet the **Social Work Standards of Conduct and Practice**. This is a practical guide to walk you through these Standards and provide you with useful links to more detailed information on the **Northern Ireland Social Care Council (the Social Care Council) website** and **the Education Authority (EA) website**.

## What do social workers do?

Social work is a relationship-based profession; it is concerned with the 'social' connectedness of people's lives and the issues that lead to disconnection, harm, discrimination and isolation; social workers are trained in interpersonal communication skills, listening, reflecting and advocating in partnership with the people they support to work towards solutions to help improve wellbeing.

Social workers recognise the bigger picture affecting people's lives and work for a more equal and just society where human rights are respected and protected. The problems social workers deal with are often rooted in social or emotional disadvantage, discrimination, poverty or trauma. Using their knowledge of law, social policy and structural systems they apply their values and ethics to help others achieve their full potential. They must be able to demonstrate and develop leadership skills at all stages of their careers (**Social Work Leadership Framework**). Social workers must use their relevant legal powers proportionately to protect people's rights and sometimes balance the rights of everyone involved. This combination of skills is unique to the social work profession.

Social workers seek to improve people's lives by helping with social and interpersonal difficulties, promoting human rights and wellbeing. Social workers must balance risk and protect children and adults with support needs from harm. From helping a family under pressure to supporting someone with mental health problems, social work is a varied, demanding, often emotional but very rewarding career.

Social workers can work with a number of people at any one time. This is often referred to as a caseload. Day-to-day work can involve working in partnership with people to help complete an assessment of needs, focusing on strengths and wishes, working with individuals and families directly to help them make changes and solve problems through organising practical help, linking with communities, supporting carers, making recommendations or referrals to other services and agencies and building supportive networks. Social workers also work in partnership with other professionals to achieve holistic support. Social workers can work preventatively within a community-based environment or be located within statutory organisations where thresholds of engagement may be based on more critical and substantial needs.

## Who employs social workers?

Social workers work with adults, children, families and communities and often specialise in a specific field of work – some examples include working with children and families, refugees and asylum seekers, people in the criminal justice system, people living with HIV or Aids, people who have substance misuse problems or with adults with a disability or mental health related needs.

Social workers may work with children in care (also known as children who are 'looked after'), young people in the criminal justice system, children who have experienced or are at risk of abuse, children with health and mental health needs and with their families. This may include working specifically to assess and intervene where there are child protection concerns within a family or from elsewhere. They may also manage the adoption and fostering processes, and support children with a disability.

Social workers working in adult services may work with older people living with dementia, people with learning or physical disabilities or sensory support needs and people living in residential accommodation and supported housing and in hospital settings. Social workers will intervene across a continuum of activity from preventative support to adult protection and deprivation of liberty assessments. The majority of social workers in Northern Ireland are employed by the five Health and Social Care Trusts whilst others are employed by the Education Authority (EA), Youth Justice, Northern Ireland Probation Board, (PBNI) and by a range of third sector (community and voluntary) organisations and independent providers. There are opportunities for social workers to move into new areas of work, often with employers who have never employed a social worker before.

Social workers may practice within specialist social work teams or as part of a multi-disciplinary team providing professional social work interventions. Social workers often work closely with social care practitioners but will carry responsibilities unique to social work.

## How are social workers regulated in Northern Ireland?

The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (the Social Care Council) is the regulator for social work and for social care in Northern Ireland. The role of the Social Care Council is to protect people who access social work or social care services by ensuring registrants are competent and are adhering to the **Standards of Conduct and Practice** set by the Social Care Council and to the value base of social work.

Social work is a protected title, this means no one may use the term 'social worker' or work as a social worker unless they have undergone accredited social work training and are registered on Part One, (for social work registrants) of the Social Care Council Public Facing Register (the Register). Social workers once registered, have to pay an annual fee and renew their registration every three years which includes evidencing compliance with any conditions of registration and Post Registration Training and Learning Requirements. (See Sections under - **Maintaining Professional Social Work Registration**).

## The Social Work Standards of Conduct and Practice

The Standards of Conduct and Practice for Social Workers describe the values, attitudes and behaviours expected of registered social workers in their day to day work and outline the knowledge and skills required for competent practice. These standards include protecting the rights and promoting the interests and wellbeing of service users and carers, balancing autonomy with safeguarding from risk of harm, upholding public confidence and trust in social work and being accountable for the quality of working and improving professional knowledge and development.

Underpinning the *Standards of Conduct and Practice* are social work values. Social workers must:



-  Respect the rights, dignity and inherent worth of individuals.
-  Work in a person-centered 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 is of a high quality.



Social workers must work in partnership with service users and carers and practise in a multi-disciplinary context.

Social workers must have regular professional social work supervision; this is an important standard of practice for social workers and needs to be built-in to any new social work post. Employers should refer to the **Department of Health Social Work Supervision Policy (2024)**.

The Social Care Council Workforce Development Team can assist with queries about the **Standards of Conduct and Practice for social workers**. The British Association of Social Workers Northern Ireland (BASWNI) can offer advice on accessing social work supervision and professional support services for staff. The standards are binding on all social workers registered with the Social Care Council. A registrant's fitness to practise will be judged against these standards and failure to comply could place a social worker's registration at risk. If someone raises a concern about the conduct or practice of a registrant, it will be considered against the standards when deciding if action needs to be taken. Serious breaches of the standards may result in a social worker's practice being restricted, for example through the imposition of Conditions of Practice or in the most serious cases, their registration being removed.

Employers have a responsibility to proactively check the registration status of potential social work employees on the Register. Employers must apply rigorous and thorough recruitment and selection processes, check criminal records and relevant registers to make sure social workers are safe to practise. (See Section **Checking the Register**).

## Raising a Fitness to Practise Concern

The Social Care Council recognises that, as an employer, you deal with situations regarding the conduct, competence and health of your staff every day and that in most cases, these situations can be resolved quickly and proportionately through local procedures without any need for referral to us. Referral to the regulator should be regarded as a position of last resort where measures put in place by you at individual, team and organisational levels are not deemed to offer sufficient safeguards in relation to ensuring safe and effective practice to service users and carers.

Details of when a fitness to practise referral should be made are included in our **Standard of Acceptance Policy** under Section 8: Employer Referrals. If you are unsure as to whether a matter should be referred, it is better to check with us. Our Fitness to Practise Officers can offer advice on a case by case basis.

Where we do open a fitness to practise case, you must cooperate with our investigation and hearing processes, including providing requested documents or information in a timely manner.

## Maintaining professional social work registration; learning and development

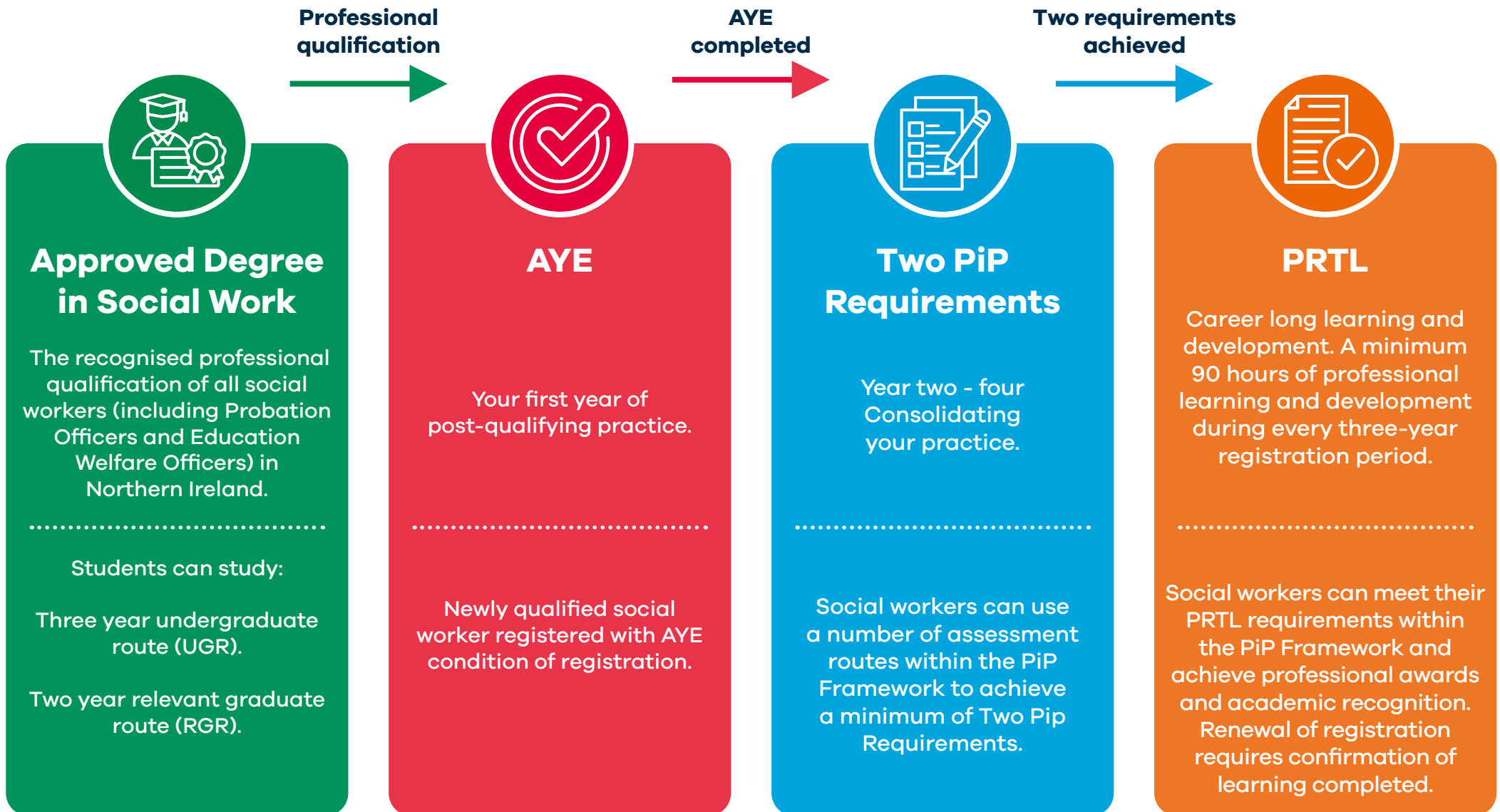
All social workers have learning and development conditions attached to their registration which they must achieve before renewal can proceed. This is to ensure career long engagement with learning, keeping up to date with research, new models of practice and emerging knowledge so that people who access services receive the best support possible.

There are specific learning and development registration conditions for social workers throughout their career. In the first four years of practice after qualification social workers are registered with the Assessed Year in Employment (AYE) during year one, and once they have completed AYE their two Professional in Practice (PiP) requirements during year two to year four. Social workers must then complete at least 90 Hours of Post Registration Training and Learning (PRTL) during every three-year renewal period. Each condition must be met in order to remain on the Register and this is both a registrant and employer responsibility.

As an employer you must promote a culture of learning, ensuring that the necessary resources and supports are in place to enable social workers to meet the standards and that these are built in to any new social work post. As an employer you must use rigorous recruitment and selection processes to make sure that only social workers with the appropriate level of knowledge and skills are recruited to your post.

# Supporting social workers in career long learning

How continuous professional development is supported through regulation.



## What is AYE?

All newly qualified social workers who register with the Social Care Council have an AYE condition attached to their registration and must demonstrate that they are confident and capable practitioners by the end of the assessment period. This is designed to help social workers make the significant transition from being a student to a newly qualified social work practitioner by continuing to build on learning through practice, developing further skills including assessment of risk, support planning and exploration of current models of practice.

Employers must consider the level of experience and social work developmental support required if appointing an AYE into a post where they may be the only social worker.

Employers must provide a specified level of regular supervision from a registered social worker and ensure protected time for training and development days during the assessed year. Research suggests that learning from other social workers within a social work team and from a supportive line manager is an important factor in professional development and wellbeing at work during this early stage of a social work career.

Whilst newly qualified social workers can take up a social work post, once they have been registered with the Social Care Council, they can only start their assessed year when all the employer responsibilities can be met. Completion of AYE is linked in statutory posts to career progression and banding as AYE social workers are employed at Band 5 (Agenda for Change Pay Scale) and move to Band 6 once AYE is completed. This is not the case for other employers and a range of pay scales are in place. For more detailed

information about the AYE and registrant and employer responsibilities visit the AYE Resource link. [\*\*Social Worker - Assessed Year in Employment \(AYE\) - NISCC Learning Zone.\*\*](#)

## What are the two PiP requirements?

After completion of the AYE social workers are registered with a condition and date to achieve a minimum of two requirements in the Professional in Practice Framework (the PiP Framework) within the following three-year renewal period. There are a number of routes to achieve the two requirements and specific points in the year when two requirement submissions can be made and assessed. For more information about the PiP Framework see: [\*\*Professional in Practice \(PiP\) - NISCC Learning Zone.\*\*](#)

Social worker employers need to have learning development systems and supports in place to enable social workers to engage with the PiP Framework and meet this mandatory condition of registration. This may include development of a PiP representative role, (PiP Rep) for someone with expert knowledge in the framework and the standards of work required. Failure to meet the two requirements condition of registration by the date specified, may result in the social worker being removed from the Register (and no longer able to work as a social worker) unless an extension has been agreed with the Social Care Council.

## What is Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for social workers?

Beyond achieving AYE and the two PiP requirements conditions of registration in their early career, social workers must complete at least 90 hours of learning and development in every three-year renewal period afterwards. They must have a Personal Development Plan and record their learning and reflection on learning and be able to produce this if called for Post Registration Training and Learning (PRTL) audit. For more information about PRTL see: [Post Registration Training and Learning \(PRTL\) - NISCC Learning Zone](#).

There are a fantastic range of learning and development opportunities available to social workers within the PiP Framework to develop their professional and specialist knowledge and leadership skills, all of which will enhance the services you provide and the outcomes achieved for children and their families. Use this link to find out more about the [Professional in Practice \(PiP\) Framework](#). As an employer you must support social workers to fulfil their PRTL requirements and have opportunities to develop specialist knowledge and skills. You must also contribute to the education and training of social workers to fulfil their PRTL requirements and have opportunities to develop specialist knowledge and skills. BASW offer a range of learning opportunities to help social workers meet their PRTL requirements and information can be found on their [website](#).

## Social work registration - renewal and fees

Social workers are registered for a three-year period (which means they have to go through a registration application process every three years), and separately pay a fee every year

to maintain their registration. They are required to renew their registration at the end of year three, completing an online form to update personal details and employer information. Social workers will also be asked to confirm that they have completed at least 90 hours of learning and development as part of the renewal application.

Failure to pay or renew fees when due will result in automatic removal from the Register and social workers will not be able to carry out their social work role until a new application has been made and processed by the Social Care Council. As an employer you must ensure that social workers are registered and be clear about the consequences of failing to register or maintain registration.

## Policies and procedures

Schools are important safe spaces for children and the adults there play an important role in children's wider welfare and protection. School staff are often the people children and indeed families seek out for help and are well placed to understand and respond to their needs.

A growing number of social workers are working in education contexts whether that is for education bodies like the Education Authority NI (EANI) or employed directly by schools. Social workers in schools do not have statutory powers of investigation as these are held by social workers employed within Trusts but they will still work under the wider child protection and adult safeguarding policy established for bodies under legislation like *The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995*. School social workers are however bound by the same regulatory standards as set out by the Social Care Council and many of the practices and approaches of school based social work are similar to family support interventions employed by social workers with

statutory responsibilities. Close collaboration and clear referral pathways between social workers employed by schools and their counterparts in both the EA and Trusts are essential.

Social workers working in education will be guided by a number of specific frameworks, policies and procedures in their work.

Specifically:

- **Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland | Department of Health** and
- **Guidance issued by the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland**.

However in an education/school setting staff will also have regard to specific Department of Education (DE) guidance most notably **Safeguarding and Child Protection in Schools - A Guide for Schools**. This document details the roles of the safeguarding team in schools setting.

A framework of DE circulars also provides a practice reference. These include:

- **Circular 2020/07 - Child Protection: Record Keeping in Schools**.
- **Circular 2015/13 - Dealing with allegations of abuse against a member of staff**.
- **Circular 2013/01 - Guidance for schools and employing authorities on pre-employment safer recruitment practices**.

This is not an inclusive list and will be regularly updated by DE. Other DE guidance on a wider range of issues will be relevant to a range of situations e.g.

**Circular 2020/08 - Attendance guidance and absence recording by schools**.

School based social workers will also work with young people aged 18 plus and need to be aware of developing practice and legislation around adult safeguarding and referral pathways. This will also relate to requirements under the Mental Capacity (Northern Ireland Act) 2016.

## EA resources

School based social workers irrespective of setting will be able to access a wide range of EA services and support including:

- The Child Protection Support Service in EA which is available for consultation on any safeguarding matter. **Child Protection Support Service (CPSS)**.
- Education Welfare Service and linked school Education Welfare Office (EWO) staff, see: **Education Welfare Service**, and
- **Primary Children Looked After Advisory Service**.

These three services are social work led in EA. Social work staff are also located in other areas of EA such as in the **Intercultural Education Service (IES)**.

School based social workers will bring practice experience to school-based situations. Their role will be complementary to well-established arrangements and staff should work within the existing structures of the Principal, Designated Teacher and Lead Governor for Safeguarding and school leads for pastoral care and attendance.

## Registering your school as a social work employer

If you are a school that wishes to employ social workers, you must register your school as an organisation with the Social Care Council. You can find out more about your responsibilities and view relevant forms here: [niscc.info/employers-responsibilities](https://www.niscc.info/employers-responsibilities).

Endorsers are nominated representatives of social work employing organisations who will be required to endorse applications to register from relevant social work staff via our [employer portal](#).

Completed organisation and nominate endorser forms should be returned to the Social Care Council Registration Team via email at: [registration@niscc.net](mailto:registration@niscc.net). Alternatively you can contact the Registration Team and ask for the forms to be sent to you.

In accessing the employer [portal account](#), you will have the ability to see all registered social workers employed by your school.

## Checking the register: Social work registration and renewal

To check your social workers are registered visit the [public facing register](#). Nominated endorsers can also use the employer portal to access this information and view other

registration details for example: application status, annual fee and renewal due dates, whether registration has a condition attached and social work staff who have been removed from the register.

The period of registration for social workers is three years. All registered social workers will pay an annual fee via their online [portal account](#). In the third year of registration social workers are required to renew their registration through completion of a short online form and payment of the appropriate fee.

The Social Care Council will issue reminders via email to all registrants in advance of their fee and renewal due date (this is on the anniversary of the registration date each year). The employer will also be able to monitor this via the employer portal. Social workers who do not pay or renew on time will be removed from the register, cannot practise as a social worker, and will need to reapply to return to the register in order to resume practice. Notifications of removal will be sent to staff via their email address provided at registration. The employer will also be able to monitor this via the employer portal. It is important to check with your staff that they know when fees and renewal are due.

[Registration guides](#) can be accessed on our website.

## Glossary - words we use to describe our work

ALB	Arm's length body.
AYE	Assessed Year in Employment – the first year in assessed practice for newly qualified social workers.
BASW NI	The British Association of Social Workers, Northern Ireland. The professional association for social work and social workers in Northern Ireland.
Board	This is the Board of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council who provide strategic oversight and direction.
CEO	Chief Executive Officer.
CORU	The regulator for health and social care professionals in Ireland.
CPD	Continuing Professional Development – ongoing learning and training.
DoH	Department of Health – the government body responsible for health and social care in Northern Ireland.
EA	Education Authority- responsible for delivering education services across Northern Ireland.
FtP	Fitness to Practise – a registrant's suitability to work in social work or social care.
HSC	Health and social care – the people, systems and facilities that provide medical and personal care and support.
IAR	Individual Assessment Route – an option within the Professional in Practice Framework for social workers to have their learning and practice assessed to achieve PiP requirements and awards.
IPD	Initial Professional Development.
IFSW	International Federation of Social Workers – a worldwide body representing social work.
ISO	Interim Suspension Order – temporary action to stop a registrant working while we make enquiries about a very serious complaint.



<b>OU</b>	Open University.
<b>PiP Framework</b>	Professional in Practice – Framework for social workers to have their learning and practice assessed to achieve PiP requirements, awards and qualifications.
<b>PRTL</b>	Post Registration Training and Learning – ongoing learning and development that all social workers must do to keep their registration up to date. A minimum of 90 hrs in every three-year registration period.
<b>QUB</b>	Queens University Belfast.
<b>Register</b>	The Social Care Council’s register is an electronic list of social workers and social care workers working in Northern Ireland (and also students studying for the Degree in Social Work in Northern Ireland).
<b>Registrant</b>	A person approved for registration on the Public Facing Register – social workers, social care workers and social work students.
<b>Registration</b>	Social work is a protected title. All social workers practicing in Northern Ireland must be registered with the Social Care Council and pay a yearly fee.
<b>Renewal</b>	Social workers must apply to renew their registration every three years.
<b>RQIA</b>	Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority – checks health and social care organisations are doing their job to standards set.
<b>Social Care Council</b>	Refers to the Northern Ireland Social Care Council.
<b>Stakeholders</b>	People who are involved with our work or who are affected by what we do.
<b>Two PiP Requirements</b>	Mandatory condition of social work registration applied after AYE: social workers must achieve at least two requirements within three years.
<b>UCAS</b>	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service.
<b>UU</b>	University of Ulster.

## Useful contacts

- ▷ Registration Team  
**registration@niscc.hscni.net.**
- ▷ Fitness to Practise Team  
**ftp@niscc.hscni.net.**
- ▷ Workforce Development Team  
**workforcedevelopment@niscc.hscni.net.**
- ▷ Professional in Practice Team  
**pip@niscc.hscni.net.**
- ▷ Learning Zone  
**learningzone@niscc.hscni.net.**

## Useful resources for social workers and employers

Visit the [Social Care Council](#) and [Learning Zone](#) to find out about current and new resources such as lunchtime seminars, conferences, campaigns and much more.

Update emails are regularly sent to all registrants, so it is important that email addresses and contact details are kept up to date, this can be done using the registrants [portal account](#).

For further information about professional social work support and professional development contact the British Association of Social Workers, BASW (NI) at: [n.ireland@basw.co.uk](mailto:n.ireland@basw.co.uk).

Northern Ireland



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