

**Standards of Conduct for**

# **Social Work Students**

**Working together.  
Making a difference.**

Northern Ireland

**Social**

**Care**

**Council**

# Welcome

**You are enrolled on an education and training programme that is preparing you to enter a profession that carries with it great privilege and responsibility. As a social work student, you should be proud of the profession you have joined and look forward to upholding its values and standards.**

The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (Social Care Council) is here to protect the public from poor standards of social care. We do this by helping our registrants be the best they can be by providing standards, guidance and advice. You can learn more about our role in the following pages.

It is important that, as a social work student, you conduct yourself professionally at all times to justify the trust the public places in the profession.

Throughout your course you will learn about the behaviour and conduct that the public expects from social workers. You will develop and be assessed on the knowledge, skills and attitudes you need to become a professionally qualified social worker.

## About us

We are the NI regulator for the social work and social care workforce. Our job as a regulator is to protect the public and we do this by maintaining a register of all social workers and social care workers and ensuring that they are properly qualified and competent to practise.

We also set standards for their conduct, practice and training to ensure that the quality of care provided to service users and carers is of a high standard. We provide guidance and advice to help our registrants keep their knowledge and skills up to date. We also use firm but fair processes to investigate any allegations made against social workers or social care workers who may not have followed our standards.

We set standards for the social work degree courses in NI and carry out quality reviews on both the taught elements and practice learning opportunities provided for students.

## **Your Registration**

'Social work' has been a protected title since 1st June 2005, with social workers required by law to register with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council in order to be able to practise. As a social work student you are also required within the legislation to register with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council. You must apply to register when you start your course.

You will be registered on the student part of the Register until you complete your programme of study.

It is important that you notify us of any changes in your personal details or any matters which may call your fitness to practise into question, e.g. criminal convictions.

## **The Standards of Conduct**

We are required as part of our roles and responsibilities to produce and publish standards of conduct for our registrants. These describe the behaviours, attitudes and values expected of registrants and are the benchmark of good practice. You will be required as part of the registration process to sign a declaration that you agree to comply with these standards. The standards of conduct for social work students are the same as for professionally qualified social workers.

This is because we think it is important that you are clear from the outset of your training course what is expected of you as a registered professional.

We have also developed standards of practice for social workers which describe what they need to know, understand and be able to do. These standards will apply to you from the point of qualification. The relevant practice standards for you as a social work student are found in the Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work.

On your social work course, you have the opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge you need to become a professionally qualified social worker. You also have the opportunity to learn about what it means to be part of a registered and regulated workforce.

Many of the standards within this booklet relate to the direct work you will undertake with service users and carers during your practice learning periods. The term 'employer' therefore will mean the organisation within which you are placed.

However it is important that you are aware that your behaviour and conduct both in relation to your course and your personal life, may have an impact on your fitness to practise. This may include for example, concerns about cheating or plagiarism, unprofessional behaviour or criminal offences.

The standards will be of particular relevance to you if you are:

- A social work **student**
- A member of **academic staff** who is teaching students on the social work degree programme or
- Involved in practice education as a **practice teacher** or **supervisor**

## **Fitness to Practise**

When we say that someone is 'fit to practise', we mean that they have the skills, knowledge, character and health to practise safely and effectively. As a student studying to become a professional in a regulated profession, you have certain responsibilities. On your course you will be expected to meet high standards of conduct. You should be aware that in very serious circumstances, your conduct may affect your ability to:

- Complete your programme
- Gain the final qualification or
- Register with us

Course providers are required to notify us where they initiate fitness to practise procedures in relation to any student. Academic institutions expect all students registered on programmes which lead directly in to professions, to conform to the code of conduct of the relevant professional body. You should familiarise yourself with the student regulations and fitness to practise procedures within your academic institution.

Where the concerns may call into question your suitability to remain on the Social Care Council Register, we will consider the standards of conduct when deciding if we need to take any action within our fitness to practise process.

## **Fitness to Practise**

The following values inform and underpin the standards of conduct.

### **Social work students 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.

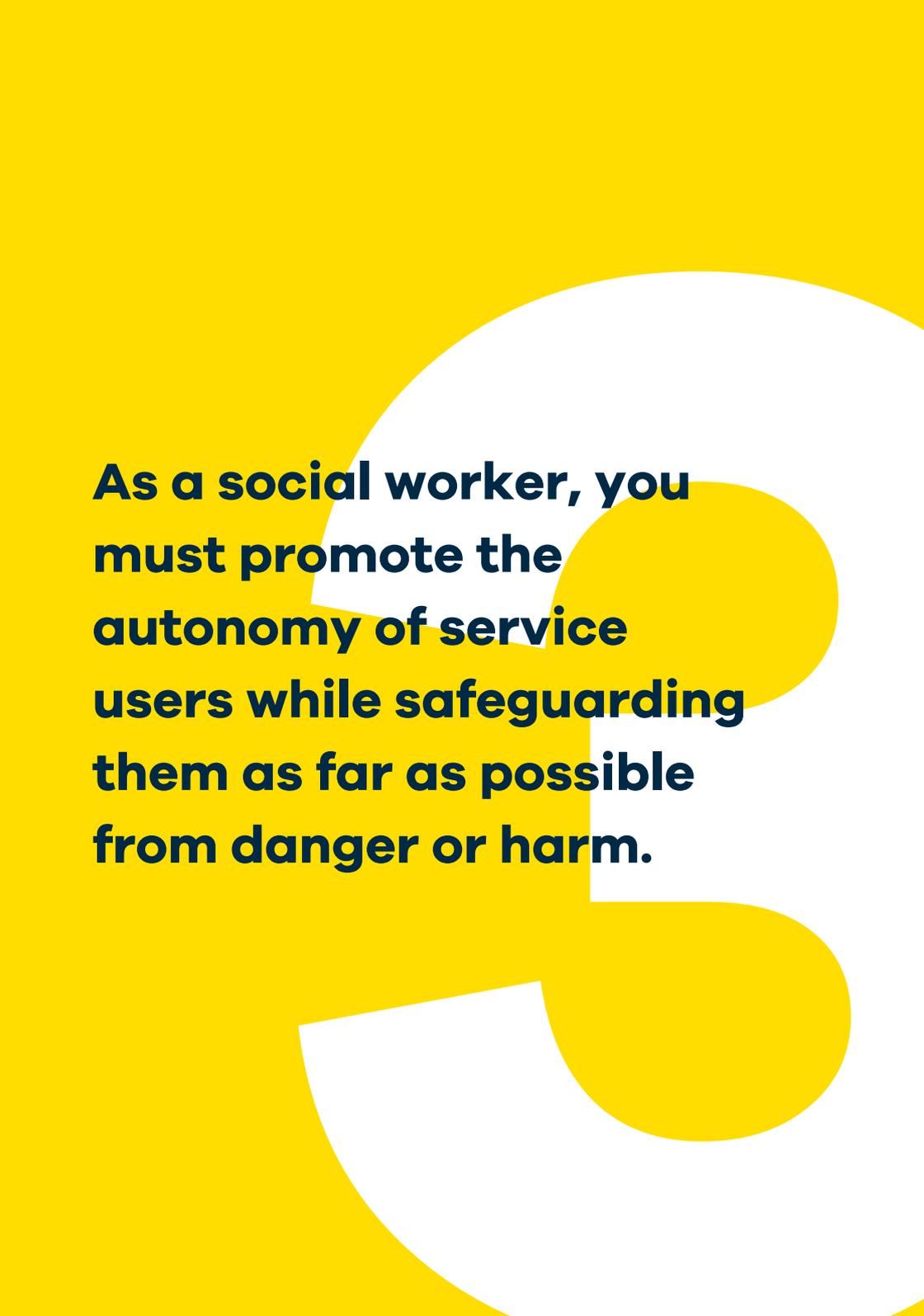
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**As a social worker, you must strive to establish and maintain the trust and confidence of service users and carers.**

# **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.

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**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.

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**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.

# 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  
4th Floor, James House  
2 Cromac Avenue  
Belfast, BT7 2JA  
Tel : 02895 362 600  
Web: [nisc.info](http://nisc.info)

