PROFESSIONAL IN PRACTICE

REQUIREMENTS AND GUIDANCE FOR PROGRAMME APPROVAL WITHIN PROFESSIONAL IN PRACTICE FRAMEWORK

Contents

Introduction

1. The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) 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 NISCC by the Professional in Practice (PiP) Partnership.

   The PiP Partnership comprises representatives from 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.

   NISCC is required, as part of its key roles and functions, to have arrangements and structures in place for the approval of post qualifying programmes within the PiP Framework.

2. This document provides information to programme providers seeking approval within the PiP Framework. It should be read in conjunction with The Quality Assurance Framework for Education and Training Regulated by NISCC (January 2017).

3. NISCC is the Awarding Body for the PiP Framework. There are 3 Professional Awards:

   Consolidation Award in Social Work
   Specialist Award in Social Work
   Leadership and Strategic Award in Social Work

4. The PiP Framework and its 3 Professional Awards are set at Postgraduate Level. Each of the Awards is based on a range of Professional Requirements that reflect professional activity or practice from different perspectives. The postgraduate level status of the 3 Awards provides the opportunity to accommodate, demonstrate and recognise both vertical and horizontal progression. It also ensures flexibility by supporting professional achievement alongside the parallel opportunity for academic progression and achievement.

5. The PiP Approval Panel receives and makes decisions on all programme submissions for approval. The PiP Approval Panel is a sub-committee of the PiP Partnership Committee.

6. Where course providers are seeking validation or approval with an academic institution or a separate professional body, joint approval/validation arrangements apply.

7. The following will be used to recognise progression and achievement:

   Transcript – The PiP Partnership will provide a verified transcript of achievement of any Professional Requirement and Programme/Module that has been accredited within the PiP Framework. The Transcript will provide details of the route and pathway undertaken by the candidate.

   Certificate – NISCC will issue certificates to those who achieve any of the three Professional Awards within the PiP Framework.

   Programme Certificate – Specific Programmes may issue their own certificates.

Submission for Approval within the PiP Framework

Statement of Intent

1. NISCC requires all course providers intending to apply for the initial approval of a programme, to submit a Statement of Intent, with an Outline Business Plan, to the PiP Partnership Committee (see Appendices One and Two). The purpose of this is to ensure that scarce resources allocated to training are used to best effect, and approved programmes are developed as part of a strategic plan for postqualifying social work education and training within Northern Ireland.

   Information and guidance on the preparation of a Statement of Intent is provided by a NISCC Advisor as required.

   The PiP Partnership Committee requires the following information as part of the Statement of Intent:

   - the identification of the market for the programme
   - how the programme aligns with the needs of both employing organisations and the profession
   - a brief outline Business Plan for the programme, and
   - any other relevant information

   Templates for the Statement of Intent and Business Plan can be found in Appendices One and Two.

2. The PiP Partnership Committee will consider this information, and make a decision based on the viability of the proposed programme including whether it is likely to be supported by partner agencies. The NISCC Advisor will notify the proposed programme of the decision outcome as well as provide detail on any further action the programme should pursue prior to proceeding with a submission for approval.

Submission to the Approval Panel

1. The Professional Advisor will provide advice and guidance on preparing a submission as required.

2. Submissions for approval are accepted at two points in the year and programme providers will be notified of agreed dates in advance.

3. In order to gain approval within the PiP Framework, programmes must meet the PiP Standards for Approval (see Appendix Six).

4. Programmes are required to submit all documentation to the NISCC office within agreed timescales. This will normally be 6 weeks before the Approval Panel is scheduled to meet.

5. The submission should provide details of a named correspondent, title, address and contact numbers and should provide sufficient information to demonstrate the PiP Standards for Approval. A proforma is provided in Appendix Four. **Ten copies of both the submission** and **any additional supporting materials are required.**

6. NISCC may appoint an Expert Reader for new submissions as required. The purpose of appointing an Expert Reader is to obtain an opinion from a subject 'expert' on the appropriateness of the level and content of the submission. A template for the Expert Reader's Report can be found in Appendix Five.

7. At the point of submission, programme providers will be required to pay an administration fee. Details of fees are available from the PiP office.

8. The members of the Approval Panel will be required to declare any interest in or association with the programme seeking accreditation. Where a conflict of interest arises, the member will be required to withdraw from involvement in the particular submission.

9. The Approval Panel may appoint additional associate members in the consideration of particular submissions.

10. The Approval Panel will normally invite representatives from the proposed programme to attend part of the panel meeting. This will provide an opportunity for panel members to seek clarification on any outstanding issues and for representatives to provide any additional information that they consider to be relevant to the decision-making process.

11. There are three possible outcomes to the approval process:

    - The submission meets the Standards for Approval.
    - The submission is approved with conditions
    - The submission does not meet the Standards for Approval

12. The decisions of the Approval Panel will be conveyed by letter to programme providers, normally within 5 working days of the Panel having met.

13. All Approval Panel outcomes are reported to the PiP Partnership Committee. A flowchart outlining the approval process can be found in Appendix Three.

14. NISCC has a Complaints Procedure, which may be used by any user of the NISCC's services at any time. Copies of the Complaints Procedure are available from the NISCC's Head of Corporate Services to whom complaints should be addressed in the first instance.

Submission for Joint Approval/Validation

Please note: This guidance should be read in conjunction with the programme approval/validation documents of the relevant academic institution or professional body from which joint approval/validation is being sought.

Where Programmes are seeking validation or approval with an academic institution and a professional body respectively, joint approval/validation arrangements will apply.

1. Programmes will be required to submit a Statement of Intent and Outline Business Plan in the usual way to the PiP Partnership Committee. The programme providers should indicate at this stage that they are seeking joint validation with an academic institution and approval with a professional body.

2. The NISCC Advisor, based on the decision from the PiP Partnership Committee, will inform the programme provider and the Chair of the Approval Panel if approval has been given to proceed to the next stage of the process. The NISCC Advisor will then liaise with the programme representative/s to discuss arrangements for joint approval/validation.

3. The submission documentation should be forwarded to the NISCC office no later than 6 weeks before the joint approval/validation event is scheduled to take place.

4. While the Approval Panel will accept the submission document in the format required by the academic institution, programme providers must ensure that they have explicitly demonstrated, within the document, how the PiP Standards for Approval are met.

5. The outcomes of the joint approval/validation process are as follows:

   - The submission meets the PiP Standards for Approval and those set by the academic institution for validation.

   - The submission is approved with conditions set by NISCC and/or the academic institution.

   - The submission does not meet the Standards set by NISCC and/or the academic institution.

6. Where approval/validation is conditional, the programme provider will be advised of the actions required and the specified timescale for resubmission.

7. When all required conditions are met the programme provider will be issued with a Certificate of Approval within the Professional in Practice Framework.

   NB: See Appendix Seven for PiP Framework links to Academic Credits/Awards.

Arrangements for Professional Awards

The following arrangements are in place for each of the 3 awards:

- ➢ The Approval Panel will consider submissions for approval of programmes conferring one or more PiP Requirement.

- ➢ Each Requirement within the Consolidation Award or Specialist Award should equate to **a minimum of 100** notional effort hours[1], therefore the full NI Consolidation Award should equate to no less than 600 notional effort hours. Each requirement within the Leadership and Strategic Award should equate to a **minimum of 200** notional effort hours, therefore, the NI Leadership and Strategic Award should equate to no less than 1800 notional effort hours.

- ➢ Flexibility may be achieved by providing the option of taking stand alone module/s that allow for the achievement of Professional Requirement/s.

- ➢ Accumulation of Professional Requirements across a range of programmes or modules may build towards a full Award.

- ➢ Where applicable, flexibility may also be achieved by accumulation of academic credits across a range of programmes or modules to build towards an academic award.

- ➢ Application may be made for up to three Professional Requirements of the Specialist Award to be transferred and counted towards achievement of the Leadership and Strategic Award. Conversely the same arrangement applies for transfer from the Leadership and Strategic Award to the Specialist Award. This transfer is normally only for the purposes of finishing an award.

---

[1] Effort hours include teaching input, tutorials, study time, practice and assessment.

Appendix One: Statement of Intent for Approval in PiP Framework

Statement of Intent for Approval in PiP Framework
(to be submitted to the PiP Partnership Committee)

Programme Title:	

Name & Contact Details of Programme Correspondent:	

Chair of Programme:	

Coordinator:	

Date:	

For which Professional Award/s do you intend to seek approval?

For which Professional Requirements?

Are the course providers intending to seek Academic validation?	Yes/No
If Yes – Which Academic Institution?	

Will the timescales allow for Joint Approval/Validation?	Yes/No
If Yes – Please provide contact details at Academic Institution	

Academic Award:	

Academic Credits:	

Date when submission will be prepared:	

Intended Programme Start Date:	

Appendix Two: Template for Business Plan (to accompany Statement of Intent)

<div style="background-color:#1a2b47; color:white; text-align:center;">

Template for Business Plan
(to accompany Statement of Intent)

</div>

1. Rationale for Programme Proposal

2. Evidence of demand for the planned provision, including sustainability

3. Proposed intake numbers over next 5 year period

4. Outline how the proposed provision aims to meet the development needs of the social work profession

5. Intended outcomes for candidates undertaking the programme *(e.g. in relation to academic/professional recognition, further study and training opportunities, career progression, evidence of continuous professional development)*

6. Relationship with other courses/programmes in subject-related areas

7. Relationship with external agencies, professional bodies

8. Resource implications and how these will be met. *(Identify whether a funding commitment to support candidates to undertake the programme has been obtained.*

Appendix Three: Flowchart of Approval Process

Flowchart of Approval Process

Preliminary Discussion between NISCC and Proposed Provider → Exit to consider alternative approach

↓

Statement of Intent developed and submitted to PiP Partnership Committee

↓

Statement of Intent accepted and agreement to progress to approval stage

↓

Submission prepared and submitted to NISCC

↓

Consideration of Submission by PiP Approval Panel or Joint Validation Panel

↓

Decision endorsed by PiP Partnership Committee and reported to Council and Chief Executive for final sign off

↓

Provider notified of outcome of approval process along with any required actions to be taken

↓ ↓ ↓

Approved | Approved with Conditions | Not Approved → Re-submission

↓

Appeal

Appendix Four: Submission for Approval in PiP Framework

Submission for Approval in PiP Framework

Programme Information:

Programme Title:

Professional Requirements:

Professional Award:

Academic Award:

Academic Credits:

Any Other Professional Body Accreditation:

**Name & Contact Details
of Correspondent:**

Chair of Programme:

Coordinator:

Programme Site:

Please provide the following information. The letters in brackets refer to the PiP Standards for Approval.

1. **Programme Overview:**

    1.1 **Rationale: (2)**
    Outline the rationale for the provision that demonstrates identified need:

    1.2 **Relevant policy requirements, rules and standards (4)**
    Specify the relevant policy requirements, rules and standards as applicable to the programme context and setting:

    1.3 **Collaborative Partners: (1)**
    Specify the collaborative partners:

2. **Programme Provision**

    2.1 **Programme Specification: (4)**
    Summarise the programme's main features and learning outcomes:

    2.2 **Programme Commentary**
    Comment on:

    ➢ Where the Programme fits with professional progression (2)

    ➢ Its relationship with professional/statutory/regulatory bodies and relevant professional standards; (1) (4)

    ➢ Its relationship with other programmes or provision including opportunities for shared learning with other disciplines (1)

    ➢ The involvement of key stakeholders in the planning, delivery, assessment or evaluation of the programme, including users of the service (3)

    ➢ How and where the programme fits with professional progression, i.e. which PiP Award/s and which professional Requirements (5)

    ➢ Teaching, learning and assessment strategies (4) (9) including details of work based elements

    ➢ How the programme fits with career opportunities, development and progression (2)

**2.3	Programme Structure Diagram:**
In table format detail the modular structure of the programme. (5) (7)

**2.4	Module Description:** (5) (12)
Repeat for each module:

- Professional Requirements of which professional Award

- Academic credits/award (if applicable)

- Hours – include total notional effort hours and division

- Rationale

- Aims

- Learning Outcomes

- Content

- Teaching and Learning Methods

- Assessment

- Reading List

- Summary Description – up to 480 characters (for use in NISCC database and related publications)

**3.	Programme Management**

**3.1	Equal opportunities, complaints, appeals and termination policies and procedures:** (11)
Append these to the submission:

**3.2	Entry Requirements:** (6)
Specify entry requirements, including the requirement that candidates are able to undertake work and study at M level

3.3   Programme Administration: (1) (3)
Brief comment or table format on programme committees/personnel role and responsibilities including the involvement/participation of key stakeholders including users of service.

3.4   Candidate support and guidance: (13)
An outline of the range of provision for Candidate support and guidance

3.5   Arrangements for Quality Assurance and Monitoring: (8) (10)
Specify the internal quality assurance system and monitoring arrangement; also stating commitment to complying with NISCC monitoring arrangements

3.6   Arrangements for External Assessor: (8)
Specify the arrangements for an external contribution to the assessment process, including C.V.

3.7   Arrangements for APL (7)
Specify the APL arrangements that are in place:

3.8   Information to candidates and employers: (13)
Specify how information will be presented and accessed:

4. **<u>Resources</u>** (2)
Demonstrate that sufficient physical and appropriate staff resources are available; CVs to be included:

Signed: _____

Designation: _____

Date: _____

Appendix Five: Expert Reader Report

<table>
<tr><td align="center">**Expert Reader Report**</td></tr>
</table>

Please comment on the following areas as identified in the Programme Submission.

1. **Rationale for proposed provision**

2. **Level and range of stakeholder involvement in Programme design and delivery**

3. **Content and structure of the Programme**

4. **Relevance, currency and validity of the Programme**

5. **Fitness for purpose of intended learning outcomes in terms of subject area and qualification descriptors (i.e. postgraduate level)**

6. Appropriateness of range and composition of teaching and learning methodologies in relation to identified learning outcomes

7. Appropriateness of assessment methodologies to meet identified learning outcomes

8. Any other comments

Signed: _____

Designation: _____

Date: _____

Appendix Six: PIP Standards for Programme Approval

PIP Standards for Programme Approval

1. Collaborative arrangements are in place between employers and providers that include arrangements for an academic and practice perspective.

2. There is a rationale for the provision that demonstrates identified need and demonstrates that realistic resources have been identified.

3. A range of stakeholders (may include people who use services, carers, candidates, employers, academic institutions) are/will be actively involved at the appropriate stage in the design, delivery and evaluation of the programme.

4. The provision meets any relevant policy requirements, Rules and Standards.

5. The provision must reflect a minimum of 100 notional effort hours and must meet a minimum of one Professional Requirement.

6. There is an entry requirement that applicants are able to undertake work and study at postgraduate level.

7. There are arrangements in place for accreditation of prior learning (APL).

8. There must be an external contribution to the assessment process.

9. The assessment process must include assessment by a registered social worker and include an academic perspective.

10. There is an internal quality assurance system that will ensure the maintenance of standards and adherence to requirements.

11. There are complaints, appeals and termination procedures in place. These should fit with parallel employer arrangements and, where applicable, higher education arrangements.

12. Account is taken of the NISCC Standards of Conduct and Practice for Social Workers.

13. There is accessible information to candidates and employers that includes detail of time commitments.

Appendix Seven: PiP Framework Links to Academic Credits/Awards

PiP Framework Links to Academic Credits/Awards

1. The PiP Framework is a professional development framework providing 3 professional awards, all of which are at postgraduate level. This provides the opportunity for flexibility in academic arrangements.

2. The PiP Framework seeks to make provision for progression throughout the course of a professional social work career.

3. Programme providers may wish to consider providing access to academic credits and academic awards. Programme providers and academic institutions therefore need to work together to align academic credits with modules , awards and professional requirements.

4. Flexibility within the PiP Framework may be achieved by accumulation of academic credits across a range of modules or programmes under any of the 3 professional awards to build towards an academic award.

5. Academic awards may be achieved in conjunction with, or independently of, the professional awards.

Notional Effort Hours and Academic Credits/Awards		
10 Academic Credits = 100 Notional Effort Hours		
Academic Award	**Academic Credits**	**Notional Effort Hours**
PG Certificate	60	600
PG Diploma	120	1,200
Masters Degree	180	1,800

Appendix Eight: Approval Panel Review of Decision Policy and Procedures

Approval Panel Review of Decision Policy and Procedures

Introduction
The Approval Panel has robust policies and procedures and quality assurance arrangements in place to ensure that its decision- making processes are fair, consistent and transparent. The Approval Panel is committed to ensuring that the experience of submitting for approval is a positive and constructive one for Programme Providers. There may be circumstances however where a Programme Provider considers the approval process to be flawed. In such situations, the Programme Provider may request a review of the approval decision.

Scope of Policy
A Programme Provider may request a Review of Decision only on the grounds that there are procedural irregularities or administrative error of such nature as to cause reasonable doubt as to whether the Approval Panel would have reached the same conclusion had they not occurred.

A procedural irregularity is normally regarded as a deviation from agreed approval arrangements.

It should be noted that the professional decision of the Approval Panel and its External Assessor is not open to appeal.

The Process for a Review of Decision
A request for a Review of Decision must be submitted in writing to the Chair of the Approval Panel not later than 28 days from the date of the letter informing the Programme of the Panel's decision.

The Programme Provider should identify specifically the alleged procedural irregularity or administrative error.

The Professional Advisor will be informed that a request for a Review of Decision has been received.

Within 14 days of receipt, the Chair of the Approval Panel, in consultation with the Professional Advisor, will decide whether there are sufficient grounds to proceed with the Review of Decision process.

Whatever decision is taken at this stage, the Programme Provider will be informed in writing.

Procedures

Where a Review of Decision is to take place, the following procedures will apply:

i. A sub-group of the Approval Panel will be asked to review the decision in light of the new information received. The sub-group may include any associate members involved in considering the initial submission.

ii. The External Assessor to the Approval Panel will also be asked to review the decision and provide a report to the Chair of the Approval Panel.

iii. A meeting of the sub-group will be convened, no later than one month after the decision to proceed with a Review of Decision is taken. This will be chaired by the Chair of the Approval Panel, with the Professional Advisor in attendance.

iv. The sub-group may decide either that:

- a new outcome has been reached as a result of the information received
- the original decision stands

v. The Chair of the Approval Panel will inform the Professional Advisor of the decision reached.

vi. The Chair of the Approval Panel will inform the Programme Provider in writing of the decision reached. This decision is final.

vii. The Approval Panel will inform the PiP Partnership Committee by annual report, of all Reviews of Decision received and the outcomes.