

Northern Ireland

Social

Care

Council

PROFESSIONAL IN PRACTICE

**HANDBOOK FOR APPROVED
PROGRAMME PROVIDERS**

The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) is the awarding body for Professional in Practice, the continuous Professional Development Framework for Social Work in Northern Ireland.

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Introduction

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 which reports to Council.

All social workers on the NISCC Register are required to maintain their ongoing learning and development. The PiP Framework is the continuing professional development framework for social work and all achievement within the framework is recognised as meeting the registration requirements of social workers.

Programme providers, as part of their approved status, must provide NISCC with relevant, accurate and timely information on social workers' participation and achievement on their programmes. This information is the social workers' record of continuing professional development.

As the Awarding Body for the professional awards, NISCC is required, as part of its key roles and functions, to have arrangements and structures in place to:

- Approve and re-approve programmes of post qualifying education and training in accordance with PiP Standards for Approval
- Monitor the standard and validity of approved programmes at regular intervals
- Ensure action is taken where standards of programme provision fall below a satisfactory level

The approval and re-approval of programmes within the PiP Framework is undertaken by the PiP Approval Panel.

Programmes approved within the PiP Framework help to support the professional development of social workers and their fitness to practise. PiP achievement may also support career progression.

This handbook has been developed to support approved programme providers to effectively discharge the roles and responsibilities which come with approved status.

Roles and Responsibilities of Approved Programme Providers

As the awarding body for the professional Awards within the PiP Framework, NISCC will issue certificates to those candidates who achieve a full Award and Transcripts of Achievement to candidates who have achieved part of an Award each year.

In order to support awarding body functions, NISCC maintains a database of all PiP candidate achievement from the Individual Assessment Route, the Credit Accumulation Route and the Approved Programme Route.

To ensure accuracy of information and the integrity of professional awards, it is imperative that accurate and up-to-date data is both recorded and maintained. The contribution of programme providers to this process is therefore vital.

All social work candidates on approved programmes must be registered with NISCC. This is a mandatory requirement. Before undertaking study on a PiP Approved Programme, candidates must access the NISCC online portal and enrol on the relevant award (Consolidation, Specialist or Leadership and Strategic). While enrolment on the relevant professional award is primarily the responsibility of the individual candidate and their employer, it is important that Programme Coordinators quality assure that candidates are enrolled on the appropriate PiP Award prior to the commencement of a programme.

Programme Intakes

NISCC will send Programme/Pathway Coordinators an Intake List detailing the candidates who are enrolled on the NISCC Portal by the closing date of application to the Programme. Coordinators should verify that the list is accurate and return to NISCC no later than 4 weeks after the closing date for application to the programme.

Due to the modular nature of much of approved provision, coordinators must detail all of the modules each candidate will be undertaking in that academic/calendar year. It is also important that coordinators identify any modules from which the candidate has received exemption as a result of accreditation of prior learning (APL). These details will be recorded on the NISCC database.

Some programmes are approved for a range of PiP Requirements and candidates at module level can make a professional requirement selection from a specified range. In these instances, the programme provider must detail the requirements that the candidate has selected to undertake.

Programme Providers will inform NISCC at this stage of the date/provisional date of the Programme Assessment Board/Exam Board.

Programme Results/Outcomes

After the Exam Board, coordinators will be sent Programme Assessment Point Reports for update of outcomes to be returned to NISCC within 6 weeks of the Exam Board. An outcome is required for each module undertaken, with a result of 'competent', 'referred', 'deferred' or "withdrawn". The schedule is returned by e-mail and is uploaded directly to the candidate's record. The Programme Coordinator's countersignature is required for governance purposes before results can be formally recorded on the NISCC Information System.

It is essential that this information is full and accurate. **Programme Coordinators/Chairs will be responsible for ensuring the integrity of the information provided.**

Changes to Programme Provision

Any changes to programme structure, content etc. should be notified to NISCC as part of the annual monitoring process. Where changes are substantive in nature, the programme may be required to seek re-approval.

Approval of Additional Modules

Where programmes are planning to include additional modules in an existing programme/pathway, the programme provider must seek the approval of the PiP Approval Panel. The provider should forward a copy of the relevant module specification/s along with any accompanying paper work to NISCC for consideration by the Approval Panel. Additional modules may have been academically validated but this does not necessarily guarantee professional approval.

Programme Withdrawal

A decision to withdraw or stand down a programme may be taken by the provider but this should always be with the agreement of its stakeholders. If there are difficulties, these should be shared with NISCC and negotiations initiated at an early stage. The PiP Partnership has an identified process which must be observed in the event of withdrawal of a programme. Please refer to Appendix Four for the full process.

Annual Monitoring

NISCC will undertake monitoring of all approved provision on an annual basis. This process will help ensure that:

- Approved provision continues to meet NISCC's Rules, Standards and Requirements **(see Appendix One)**
- Approved provision is fit for purpose
- Action is taken where problems are identified with the provision
- An ethos of continuous improvement is promoted

The annual monitoring process will normally be undertaken in September/October each year and will relate to the previous academic year. An annual monitoring proforma is available for each provider and is designed to dovetail with the quality assurance processes of that provider. **(See Appendix Two)**

The annual monitoring proforma should provide information on:

- Candidate assessment outcomes, including referrals, deferrals and withdrawals along with any associated actions taken by the programme provider to address issues
- Any minor modifications to the course structure, content or arrangements for delivery
- Risks, developments, enhancements and proposed actions in relation to the provision
- Any issues raised by the External Assessor/Examiner and the programme provider's response to this
- Currency of the curriculum in terms of reflecting current policy and legislative developments and findings/recommendations from inspections and inquiries
- Mechanisms for stakeholder involvement, including with employers and service users and carers
- Promoting opportunities for shared learning between disciplines and agencies
- Complaints and appeals with outcomes
- Direct feedback from candidates and other stakeholders

NISCC may also request additional specific or thematic information as part of the annual monitoring process.

NISCC will assess the performance of programmes against the following criteria:

- Delivery against NISCC Standards
- Continuous improvement
- Student progression
- Appropriate internal and external quality assurance systems
- Satisfactory reports from External Examiners
- Currency and fitness for purpose of curriculum content
- Active engagement with candidates, employers and other stakeholders
- Candidate/employer/stakeholder confidence in the provision

Following the annual monitoring process, the programme provider will be informed that:

- The provision continues to meet PiP Standards for Approval
- Further information/clarification is required
- An Interim Monitoring Report is required to address specific identified issues

NISCC will notify Programme providers of the outcome of the annual monitoring process in writing.

Where a programme provider is required to submit an interim monitoring report, the NISCC Advisor will inform the Provider of the issues to be addressed and the timescale for submission. The NISCC Advisor may also undertake a monitoring visit as part of this process.

A programme provider may appeal against an annual monitoring decision by NISCC. Details of the appeals procedure can be found in the Quality Assurance Framework for Education and Training Regulated by NISCC, September 2017.

Provision of Related Information

NISCC may, from time to time, be required to report on a particular issue by the DOH, e.g. as part of an inspection process or thematic review. Where this information relates to an aspect of approved provision, programme providers will be required to respond to requests for information within specified timescales.

Standardisation Events

As part of the support offered to programme providers, NISCC will facilitate an annual workshop and other standardisation events to disseminate information on relevant developments, share best practice and discuss common issues. Attendance at these events is a requirement.

Programme Reapproval

All programmes will undergo a re-approval process normally every five years. This process can be a joint re-approval/revalidation process with an academic institution or a NISCC independent re-approval where joint arrangements do not apply.

Joint Reapproval/Revalidation

Where a programme is jointly approved/validated by an academic institution, the Approval Panel will seek to align its re-approval process with the academic revalidation process.

It is the responsibility of the academic institution to notify the NISCC Advisor of the date of the intended revalidation event. This should be no later than six months before the event is scheduled to take place.

The NISCC Advisor and at least two members of the PiP Approval Panel will participate in the joint revalidation event. The External Assessor to the Approval Panel may also be invited to attend.

While NISCC will accept the same revalidation documentation required by the academic institution, programme providers must ensure that there is explicit reference to the NISCC Standards of Approval within the documentation along with supporting evidence to demonstrate ongoing adherence to relevant Rules, Standards and Requirements.

NISCC Independent Reapproval

Where a Joint Revalidation event is not applicable (i.e. in the case of professionally approved programmes without academic validation) the NISCC Advisor will notify the programme provider of the timescale and terms of reference for the re-approval at least six months in advance of it taking place.

The programme provider will be required to submit a Re-approval Report (see **Appendix Three**). This will include information on:

- how the programme continues to meet the development needs of the social work workforce
- any changes in programme structure, content or arrangements for delivery
- curriculum developments to reflect current policy and legislative requirements and findings from relevant inspections and inquiries
- analysis of candidate intakes and assessment outcomes, including identification of any issues and any actions taken
- outcomes from the programme provider's own quality assurance systems and processes over the reporting period, including key recommendations from the External Examiner and how the course has sought to address these
- engagement with/involvement of key stakeholders, including candidates, employers, users and carers and feedback obtained
- any complaints, appeals or terminations along with outcomes
- any issues in relation to resources

As part of the re-approval process, NISCC may wish to engage with:

- relevant teaching staff and agency partners
- candidates
- employers
- users and carers

Reapproval Outcomes

There are the following possible outcomes to the re-approval process:

- The provision is re-approved by NISCC and revalidated by the academic institution
- The provision is re-approved/revalidated by one joint partner only
- The provision is re-approved/revalidated with conditions which may be identified by the academic institution, NISCC or both
- The provision is not re-approved/revalidated by NISCC and/or the academic institution

Where joint revalidation has taken place, the provider will be informed of the outcome of their submission at the event. The academic office will also notify the programme provider in writing of the outcome of the re-approval/revalidation, any actions required and timescales for addressing these. The NISCC Advisor will report the outcome to the Approval Panel and the PiP Partnership.

Where the re-approval has not been undertaken on a joint basis with an academic provider, the NISCC Advisor will send a report to the programme provider outlining the outcome of the re-approval, any actions required and timescales for addressing these.

Programme Providers may appeal against the process and/ or decision in relation to the re-approval process. Details of the Appeals Procedure can be found in the Quality Assurance Framework for Education and Training Regulated by NISCC (January 2017).

Appendix One: PiP Standards for Programme Approval

1. Collaborative arrangements are in place between employers and providers that include arrangements for both a professional practice and academic perspective.
2. There is a rationale for the provision that demonstrates identified need and there has been consideration of realistic resources for delivery of the programme.
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 and Standards.
5. The provision must meet a minimum of one professional Requirement and reflect a minimum of 100 notional effort hours¹.
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 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 which includes detail of time commitments.

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

Appendix Two: Annual Monitoring Proforma PiP Approved Programmes

Ulster University		PiP Quality Assurance Processes							
		Candidate intakes/ assessment outcomes/ referrals/ deferrals/ withdrawals	Programme risks, developments enhancements	Major modification to programme structure/ content/ delivery arrangements	Analysis of Stakeholder involvement, feedback with employers, service users and carers	Analysis - student feedback	Update of curriculum on policy, legislation, inspections and inquiries	Risk-Termination/ complaints/ appeals/ areas of concern - analysis	Analysis of issues from external assessor/ examiner
UU Quality Assurance Process	Course Committee: Student Progression: Retention and Awards.								
	Course Committee: Risks to ongoing delivery								
	Staff/student Feedback								
	External Examiner Reports								
	Course Committee: Course/ subject developments								
	Course Committee: Employability engagement.								
	Programme Handbooks								

Queen's University Belfast		PiP Quality Assurance Processes							
		Candidate intakes/ assessment outcomes/ referrals/ deferrals/ withdrawals	Programme risks, developments enhancements	Major modification to programme structure/ content/ delivery arrangements	Analysis of Stakeholder involvement, feedback with employers, service users and carers	Analysis - student feedback	Update of curriculum on policy, legislation, inspections and inquiries	Risk-Termination/ complaints/ appeals/ areas of concern - analysis	Analysis of issues from external assessor/ examiner
QUB Quality Assurance Process	Entry Profile								
	Progression Report: retention transfer and withdrawals.								
	Outcomes/ Pass Analysis								
	External Examiner Reports								
	Risks and Actions Report.								
	Module Survey Results								
	Course Handbooks								

HSC Leadership Centre		PiP Quality Assurance Processes							
		Candidate intakes/ assessment outcomes/ referrals/ deferrals/ withdrawals	Programme risks, developments enhancements	Major modification to programme structure/ content/ delivery arrangements	Analysis of Stakeholder involvement, feedback with employers, service users and carers	Analysis - student feedback	Update of curriculum on policy, legislation, inspections and inquiries	Risk-Termination/ complaints/ appeals/ areas of concern - analysis	Analysis of issues from external assessor/ examiner
HSCLC Quality Assurance Process	Summative evaluation by exam board.								
	Programme assignments assessed by HSCLC								
	Candidate feedback gathered and Reviewed								
	External Examiner Reports								
	Programme Handbook and Module content								

Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust		PiP Quality Assurance Processes								
		Candidate intakes/ assessment outcomes/ referrals/ deferrals/ withdrawals	Programme risks, developments enhancements	Major modification to programme structure/ content/ delivery arrangements	Analysis of Stakeholder involvement, feedback with employers, service users and carers	Analysis - student feedback	Update of curriculum on policy, legislation, inspections and inquiries	Risk-Termination/ complaints/ appeals/ areas of concern - analysis	Analysis of issues from external assessor/ examiner	Action plans for the next year/including responses to internal/external QA
Quality Assurance Process	Course Committee Minutes									
	Feedback from Student Survey									
	Progression and Retention Data									
	External Examiner Reports									
	Action Plan from previous cycle									

Appendix Three: Five Year Reapproval Proforma for Programmes Approved within the PiP Framework

(Please note: this Proforma applies to programmes which are professionally approved only or where Joint Validation with an academic institution cannot be accommodated)

Programme Details

Programme Name:

Programme Coordinator:

Programme Chair:

Programme Location:

External Examiner:

Approval Details

Date of Initial Approval:

Award/Requirements for which approved:

Review Period:

Delivery of Programme:

Outline Programme rationale and how it continues to meet the development needs of the social work profession:

Detail developments in structure and content of Programme:

Detail developments in teaching and learning strategies:

How has the Programme sought to promote opportunities for shared learning and teaching with other disciplines and agencies?

Detail developments in assessment methods:

Candidate Information

Comment on patterns/trends in relation to intake numbers over the review period, any related issues and the ways in which the Programme has sought to address these:

Comment on withdrawal/ deferral/referral rates and detail how the Programme has sought to address these:

Involvement of Key Stakeholders

Identify the key collaborative partners and how the Programme has sought to involve them in its delivery and ongoing development, with particular reference to service users:

Feedback

Detail nature and summary of feedback obtained from:

1. Candidates

2. Employers

3. Service users

How has this feedback informed the development of the Programme?

Quality Assurance

Detail the Programme's internal quality assurance arrangements and any planned enhancements:

Detail key recommendations made by External Examiner/Assessor during the period under review and how the Programme has sought to address these:

Outline the ways in which the Programme seeks to ensure that curriculum content remains current and reflects policy developments and findings from relevant inspections and inquiries:

Complaints, Appeals, Terminations

Detail all complaints, appeals or terminations made in the review period along with Programme response and outcomes:

Resource Issues

Detail any issues in relation to availability or utilisation of resources and how these have been addressed:

Future Plans for Development

Detail any other relevant information about your Programme's future plans for development:

Any other information relevant to reapproval of the programme:

Signed: _____ (Programme Coordinator)

_____ (Programme Chair)

_____ Date

Appendix Four: NISCC Procedures for Standing Down or Withdrawal of an Approved Programme

Introduction

The NI PIP Framework for social work education and training is managed and delivered in a partnership model that requires collaboration between NISCC as the awarding body, programme providers, commissioners and employers.

Programmes approved within the NI PIP Framework meet the NISCC standards for approval that include demonstrating collaborative arrangements and stakeholder engagement in the design, delivery and evaluation.

Decision making to alter the nature or status of the programme must therefore involve engagement with key stakeholders at the earliest opportunity.

A decision to stand down or withdraw a programme may be taken by the provider, normally with the agreement of its stakeholders.

A decision to suspend or withdraw approval of a programme may be taken by the awarding body, normally with the agreement of its stakeholders.

Underpinning Principles

Where consideration is being given to either standing down/withdrawing a programme or withdrawing approval it is important that the process reflects the following principles:

- Mutual recognition of and respect for the processes that apply to each of the member bodies. The decision and the impact to stand down or withdraw a programme may impact differently for each grouping or organisation.
- Transparency of decision making. It is important to articulate a rationale for the decision to pursue a withdrawal of a programme
- Inclusive communication. It is important to seek timely and effective communication with key stakeholders in the consultation and decision making.
- Effective planning. It is important to agree a collaborative action plan that addresses the needs and processes for each member organisation and grouping.

Steps To Be Taken

1. The provider will identify concerns and considerations to stakeholders including NISCC at the earliest point. Where the concerns lie with NISCC, these will be notified to the provider at the earliest point.
2. The Programme Management Board will meet with NISCC to discuss rationale for withdrawal. An action plan will be agreed.

3. The provider may give notice to stakeholders of the intention to withdraw a programme or pathway. Normally a programme is closed by mutual consent, although a partner body may terminate approval by giving due notice, or if the partner is in breach of the terms of the agreement with immediate effect.
4. Prospective and current candidates and their employers should be informed as soon as possible.
5. Applicants already in process should be advised of suitable alternatives elsewhere if known.
6. The programme should continue to be delivered to current cohort of students in accordance with the approved curriculum and regulations. Where this is not possible an action plan must be agreed with NISCC.
7. An action plan to process outstanding referred and deferred students must be agreed with NISCC.
8. Publicity and marketing material should be updated.