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**Health, Social Services  
and Public Safety**

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# Northern Ireland Post Qualifying Education and Training Framework in Social Work

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## FOREWORD

As part of the government's programme to improve quality right across the public service, a programme of reform of social work education and training began in 2001. The first part of this programme was completed with the launch of the Honours Degree in Social Work in 2004.

Having reformed qualifying training, it followed that change would be needed to post qualifying education and training. The Department commissioned work to determine what changes might be needed. The resultant proposals recognised the need to support social work practitioners in maintaining and developing their competence linked to their new registration status with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC).

Published in 2004, the report's recommendations were as follows:

A new PQ Framework must:

- be comprehensive;
- offer a continuous range of opportunities for progression, and for developing breadth of competence;
- have more flexible assessment arrangements;
- have streamlined systems for accreditation; and
- align better with career opportunities and the needs of professionals and users.

Since then, the PQ Partnership and NISCC have worked to develop the new NI PQ Framework contained in this document.

Northern Ireland has a good record within the UK of post qualifying achievement over the last fifteen years. All those concerned about quality in social work service recognise the need for a more comprehensive range of post qualifying development opportunities and even better achievement. The NI PQ Framework will support both these aims but not without the commitment of employers, social workers and education and training providers.

So I commend the NI PQ Framework to:

- social workers who want to develop their competence and make their practice as safe and effective as possible;
- employers who want to safeguard the quality of social work services available to all service users and their carers;
- human resources managers and planners who want effective recruitment and workforce development tools; and
- education and training providers as the framework for course design.

PAUL MARTIN  
Chief Social Services Officer



## SECTION ONE

### What is the NI PQ Framework?

1. The Northern Ireland Post Qualifying Education and Training Framework (NI PQ Framework) is an education and training framework for social workers wishing to develop and enhance their skills and qualifications throughout their career in the social work profession.
2. The NI PQ Framework provides a range of professional Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) awards in social work based at post graduate M level and beyond.
3. The NI PQ Framework provides opportunity for achievement of professional recognition within social work. It may also create opportunity for access to academic achievement as determined by an academic Institution.

### Who will use the NI PQ Framework?

4. The NI PQ Framework is for qualified social workers registered with the NISCC on the social work part of the Register and who, if applicable<sup>1</sup>, have successfully completed the Assessed Year in Employment (AYE).
5. The NI PQ Framework is designed to meet the development needs of professional social work staff at all levels within organisations and at all stages of career development.
6. The NI PQ Framework will also be useful to employers who may use it to enhance appropriate recruitment and selection or training for particular posts, by requiring identified modules or Programmes or Awards. The NI PQ Framework should therefore be integrated and used both within Human Resources systems and Line Management systems for supervision, training and development, appraisal and review.

### Aims of the NI PQ Framework

7. The NI PQ Framework aims to be:
  - a) comprehensive;
  - b) relevant to all qualified social work staff at all levels;

<sup>1</sup> The AYE is applicable to new graduates of the Degree in Social Work on entering employment as a social worker.



- c)** accessible, offering a broad range of opportunities for progression and for developing breadth of competence;
- d)** flexible in its arrangements for assessment;
- e)** efficient in its arrangements for accreditation;
- f)** enabling to employing organisations seeking to value and make use of professional qualifications; and
- g)** aligned with career opportunities and the needs of professionals and users.



## SECTION TWO

### Structure of the NI PQ Framework

8. The NI PQ Framework is based at postgraduate M level. It has a range of Professional Requirements that can be achieved through a modular approach to education and training leading to three professional awards.

### NI Specific Award in Social Work

9. This award is intended to enable practitioners with a basic qualification in social work to develop the range of knowledge and skills associated with competence “in depth” in a specific area of work. The aim is to develop and enhance knowledge beyond Bachelor Degree level, to produce well-rounded practitioners, confident and competent in a particular area of work. This will help prepare for movement into more specialist working.
10. To attain a NI Specific Award staff will require learning opportunities and support specific to their particular area of practice. Education, learning and development provision may include a range of small sized inputs that address the immediate issues of doing their current job. Needs will vary depending on previous experience and learning.
11. The NI Specific Award will be appropriate to staff who:
  - are recently qualified and, if appropriate, have successfully completed the AYE; or
  - have moved into a new area of practice and need specific knowledge of their new field; or
  - are re-entering practice after a period of absence and require refresher training.
12. There are 6 PQ Requirements and 3 Core Requirements that describe the range of professional activity within the Specific Award. The 3 Core Requirements must be integrated and met through the general Requirements. When all 6 Requirements and the Core Requirements are met the Specific Award is achieved.
13. Achievement of the NI Specific Award is not a requirement for entry into any other part of the NI PQ Framework.

### NI Specialist Award in Social Work

14. This award is for those involved in complex decision-making requiring high levels of professional responsibility and accountability. Such staff need to develop high levels of specialist knowledge, skills and expertise in their work.



- 15.** The Specialist area of work is wide ranging and may include: therapeutic or specialised interventions; project or team management; education; training and development; research and development.
- 16.** There are 9 PQ Requirements that describe the range of professional activity required within this area of work. When all 9 PQ Requirements are met the NI Specialist Award is achieved.
- 17.** Achievement of PQ Requirements within the Specialist area may be used towards the Strategic and Leadership Award and vice versa. A maximum of 3 PQ Requirements within the Specialist area may be used in this way. See also paragraph 23.

## **NI Leadership and Strategic Award in Social Work**

- 18.** This award is for those who demonstrate high levels of competence within a field that is recognised within and outwith their agency context. These staff are moving beyond the detail of their own practice and need opportunities to explore a wider perspective where they can influence developments and influence others. This will include people who are pushing and testing the boundaries of their field and contributing at a significant level to the development of thinking and provision of service in that field.
- 19.** There are 9 PQ Requirements that describe the range of professional activity required within this area of work. When all 9 PQ Requirements are met the NI Leadership and Strategic Award is achieved.
- 20.** Achievement of PQ Requirements within the Leadership and Strategic area may be used towards the NI Specialist Award and vice versa. A maximum of 3 PQ Requirements within the Leadership and Strategic area may be used in this way. See also paragraph 23.

## **Progression and Recognition**

- 21.** Achievement will be recognised for both modular achievement and full awards.
- 22.** It is possible to move around the Framework, mixing modules or Requirements from the Specialist and the Leadership and Strategic areas to make up an award.
- 23.** A Candidate can achieve all three awards as they are separate entities. The same piece of work can not be used for a second award but it is possible to build on and develop work for the first award to lead to achievement of a second.



## SECTION THREE

### Routes to Achievement

**24.** To achieve awards within the NI PQ Framework candidates have to meet a range of Requirements reflecting professional activity. Accredited Programmes/Modules will be mapped to selected Requirements. This means that recognition of achievement can be based on achievement of Requirement(s), module(s) as well as complete programmes. The modular structure of programmes will support an individually tailored approach being taken.

**25.** Candidates will be able to access post qualifying education and training via a range of accredited provision, including: Programmes, Modules and an Individual Assessment Route.

#### **(i) Accredited Programme/Module Route**

Programmes/Modules will be accredited for specified Requirements from the appropriate award.

The candidate and the employer will be able to decide whether to complete full programmes or select a range of appropriate modules.

#### **(ii) Individual Assessment Route**

Candidates will also have access to an Individual Assessment Route whereby submissions can be made to an Assessment Board for assessment against specified Requirements within any of the awards.

#### **(iii) Combined Route**

Candidates may achieve full awards via a combination of a Programme/Module Route and the Individual Assessment Route.

### Career Pathways and Learning Plans

**26.** The flexible nature of the framework should enable candidates to match their training to their development needs at various stages of their career.

**27.** The flexibility must, however, be within a structure, and candidates will be required to have learning plans that map chosen pathways or routes. The Learning Plan will be a working document and will be used to review progress and record amendments based on needs of the job role. Where possible the Learning Plan will be matched to similar formats being used within the employment context and/or linked to professional development recording tools.



## SECTION FOUR

### NI PQ Framework Requirements

The NI PQ Framework provides opportunity for achievement of professional recognition within social work. It may also create opportunity for access to academic achievement as determined by an academic Institution.

#### **Underpinning Statements to be applied to all Awards**

- 1.** Critical reflection must be integral to all work to be considered in the NI PQ Framework.
- 2.** A social work value base must be evident throughout all work to be considered in the NI PQ Framework.
- 3.** Personal responsibility and initiative for independent learning to enhance continuous professional development must be demonstrated.
- 4.** Successful postgraduate study is characterised by a number of criteria:
  - (i)** It must demonstrate a thorough and systematic grasp of the issues in relation to a particular field of inquiry.
  - (ii)** It must show independence of thought and originality. The candidate must move beyond familiar ideas to develop thinking and application.
  - (iii)** Methodological rigour must also be evident. This is shown in the way that problems are analysed and dealt with in a systematic manner.
  - (iv)** Critical judgement must be applied to complex and demanding scenarios. This necessitates the weighing up of different arguments and courses of action.



## NI SPECIFIC AWARD IN SOCIAL WORK

### Core Requirements

- A.** Demonstrate a systematic understanding of their own practice and a critical awareness of current issues and challenges in the context of the NISCC Codes of Practice, professional ethics, the principles of diversity, equality and social inclusion in a wide range of situations.
- B.** Use evaluation to systematically develop and improve their specific practice, including implementing effective practice in inter-professional and inter-agency contexts.
- C.** Take responsibility for continuing professional development making use of professional and managerial supervision, consultation and other professional support as appropriate to identify and address issues; develop, implement and evaluate plans; and continue to advance knowledge and understanding in order to improve practice.

### PQ Requirements

- 1.** Develop and consistently sustain in-depth competence within their specific area of practice to agreed national, occupational or recognised agency standards, applying knowledge and experience of relevant service provision with confidence.
- 2.** Demonstrate systematic and appropriate application of relevant legislation/policy, theories, research and methods of practice that include a range of skills.
- 3.** Demonstrate consistent and sustained sound judgement and decision making in the context of complexity, risk, uncertainty, conflict and/or contradiction.
- 4.** Systematically apply knowledge and understanding of service user and carers issues to actively contribute to social support strategies that promote choice, independence and empowerment and which involve service users and carers (where appropriate).
- 5.** Effectively and efficiently manage and be accountable for own work and demonstrate a capacity to plan for and respond to change.
- 6.** Demonstrate confidence in, and promote understanding of, own professional role within networks across organisational and professional boundaries and support others as appropriate to the candidate's level of learning.



## NI SPECIALIST AWARD IN SOCIAL WORK

### PQ Requirements

- 1.** Apply independent critical judgement to systematically develop their own practice and that of others in the context of the NISCC Codes of Practice, professional ethics, the principles of diversity, equality and social inclusion in a wide range of situations.
- 2.** Demonstrate a substantially enhanced level of competence in a defined area of professional practice, professional management, professional education or applied professional research to agreed national, occupational or recognised agency standards.
- 3.** Demonstrate a well-developed capacity of using analysis and evaluation to continuously develop and enhance own performance and contribute to the performance of professional and inter-professional groups, teams and networks.
- 4.** Demonstrate a well developed capacity to analyse, evaluate and apply relevant and current research evidence including service user research.
- 5.** Using a range of skills and methods of intervention, work effectively and creatively and with initiative in a context of risk, uncertainty, conflict and contradiction where there are complex challenges. Make informed and balanced judgements in the context of relevant policy and legislation.
- 6.** Use a critical knowledge and understanding of service user and carers' issues to develop and implement service user and where appropriate carer rights and participation in line with the goals of choice, independence and empowerment.
- 7.** Take responsibility for influencing key aspects of complex change processes, including those involving other professions or other agencies.
- 8.** Support, mentor, supervise or manage others including contributing to practice learning opportunities, enabling self and others to identify and explore issues, improve and develop and share best practice.
- 9.** Develop and implement effective ways of working in networks across organisational and professional boundaries, having confidence in own professional role and taking responsibility for identifying , analysing and resolving complex issues, promoting partnership and collaboration, thus ensuring the delivery of integrated and person-centred services.



## NI LEADERSHIP AND STRATEGIC AWARD IN SOCIAL WORK

### PQ Requirements

1. Use independent critical judgement to take a leading role in systematically developing their own practice and that of others in the context of the NISCC Codes of Practice, codes of professional ethics, the principles of diversity, equality and social inclusion in a wide range of situations.
2. Demonstrate a substantially enhanced and sustained level of competence in a defined area of work, taking a leading role in developing and promoting good practice drawing on international perspectives to inform this.
3. Demonstrate conceptual understanding and a well developed capacity to take responsibility for the use of critical analysis and evaluation to continuously develop and enhance own performance and that of others.
4. Demonstrate a significant contribution to the development, delivery and evaluation of the service provided in a chosen area by demonstrating the ability to research, plan, implement, monitor and evaluate strategies for improvement or change;
5. Work creatively, innovatively and effectively, taking a leading role in the context of risk, uncertainty, conflict and contradiction or where there are complex challenges and a need to make informed, independent and balanced judgements.
6. Take a lead responsibility, using initiative and self direction, for managing key aspects of complex change processes, including those involving other professions or other agencies.
7. Support, mentor, supervise or manage others exercising leadership to enable them to identify and explore complex issues and improve practice and service delivery.
8. Take a leading role in developing and implementing effective ways of working in networks across organisational and professional boundaries, taking responsibility for identifying, analysing and resolving highly complex issues, promoting partnership and collaboration, thus ensuring the delivery of integrated and person-centred services.
9. Use critical knowledge and comprehensive understanding of service user and carers' issues to actively promote, develop and implement service user and, where appropriate, carer rights and participation in line with the goals of choice, independence and empowerment.



## Reference Documents

J M Consulting Ltd (2004) A Strategy for Professional Development, Belfast: DHSSPS.

NISCC (2006) Rules for the Approval of Post Qualifying Education and Training in Social Work in Northern Ireland, Belfast: NISCC.

NISCC Codes of Practice for social care workers and their employers, Belfast: NISCC.





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