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**Northern Ireland Social Care Council
Registrants' Committee
Confirmed Minutes**

**19 February 2009 at 10.30am
In Millennium House, Belfast**

Present

Brian Smyth (Chair) (NIPSA)
Damien Campbell (UNISON)
Eithne Darragh (BASW)
Damien Maguire (NIPSA)
Paul O'Donnell (UNISON)

Sharon Woods (Deputy Chair) (UNISON)
Frank Carter (Student Representative)
Janette Ferguson (UNISON)
Geraldine Mullan (NIPSA)

Apologies

Sam Murphy (NIPSA)

In Attendance

Patricia Higgins (Director of Registration)
Peggy Carlile (Secretary/Administrator)
(Note Taker)

David McCracken (Registration Manager)
Denise Rooney (Conduct Officer)

Action

(1) Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the Committee. The Director of Registration introduced David McCracken, Registration Manager, and Denise Rooney, Conduct Officer, whom she invited to attend the meeting.

(2) Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 20 January 2009 (Closed Session)

2.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed as an accurate record.

(3) Matters Arising

- 3.1 Item 3.4 – The Director of Registration will discuss the timing of the two joint Council/Registrants' Committee meetings with the Council Chair. **Director of Registration**
- 3.2 Item 4 – Newsletter – The Chair wrote an article for the NISCC Newsletter. It is hoped that an email address and a webpage can be created to assist registrants with communicating with the Committee.

(4) Presentation – Business of the NISCC

- 4.1 The Director of Registration gave a presentation on the business of the NISCC, including:-

- Background;
- Legislative basis;
- Role of the NISCC;
- Committee Structure;
- Personnel Structure;
- Business Areas
 - Registration
 - Conduct
 - Promotion and Development of Standards of Education and Training
 - Regulation of Social Work Education and Training
 - Raise the Profile of Social Work and Social Care
 - Corporate Services
- Business and Corporate Planning.

- 4.2 Copies of the Business Plan 2007/2008 were handed out. The Director of Registration noted that the Business Plan for 2008/2009 would be a more strategic document with a new layout.

- 4.3 The Committee discussed a number of issues and queries raised by the presentation, including the following.

- 4.3.1 Fees – The issue of fee costs was raised. The Director of Registration reported that the Council is carrying out a review of fee levels. She confirmed that any proposals for change would be subject to consultation.

- 4.3.2 Conduct – The reason for closed hearings was queried. The Conduct Officer clarified that closed sessions were held in relation to cases based on health issues only, for the registrant's protection. It was noted that open hearings were generally in the public interest and in the interest of the human rights of the registrant. All registrants are notified of complaints regarding themselves within a reasonable time period. It was noted that the first appeal to the Social Care Tribunal in relation to a decision by the NISCC Registration Committee will be heard on 23-24 February.

4.3.3 Role of the NISCC – The Committee asked if all of the Social Care Councils are registering the same people. The Director of Registration stated that the NISCC, the SSSC and the CCW are registering similar groups of social care workers, however only the NISCC has registered social care workers from the start. The GSCC is currently only registering social workers and social work students, and are in discussions with the Department of Health regarding the rollout of registration to the domiciliary care workforce. The Committee discussed the size of the domiciliary care workforce in Northern Ireland.

4.3.4 Qualifications Framework – The Committee queried the NISCC's role in relation to Standards. The Director of Registration noted the work of the NISCC in developing Codes of Practice, Occupational Standards and requirements for social work education and training. The NISCC is currently taking forward development work linked to the PSS Training Strategy. This includes developing a Fitness to Practise Framework for social workers and social care workers with a view to specifying specific post registration training and learning requirements in the future.

The Director of Registration stated that the PSS Training Strategy requires the NISCC to have in place revised PRTL standards for social workers during 2009. The NISCC is currently looking at proposals which include linking accredited training and PRTL to significant points in people's careers, e.g. the first three year registration period, working in specialist or management positions. Proposals to revise social worker PRTL requirements will be consulted upon. A Member asked about a reduction in PRTL requirements for part-time workers. The Director of Registration stated that the NISCC was not making any proposals in this regard. A Member also asked about the requirements for PRTL for those on maternity leave and long term sick leave. The Director of Registration stated that the Registration Rules did not accommodate such exceptional circumstances and she would be proposing to Council that the Rules are amended to facilitate such matters.

4.3.5 AYE and Codes of Practice - The Committee raised concerns in relation to AYE and the workloads expected of first year social workers. It was felt that there was a conflict between the standards required by the Council for the individual and the employer. The Director of Registration stated she was aware of issues around AYE. A Member stated that whilst policies may be in place for AYE in the Trusts and in organisations, they may not be in use. The Director of Registration noted that further work needed to be done to help registrants understand the Codes of Practice. The Committee noted that in some instances, direct line managers were not social workers. Members also raised concerns about the expansion of the senior social worker role. The Director of Registration stated that she will be meeting with RQIA regarding the AYE.

4.3.7 Telephone System – A Member noted that the message for the telephone system was very long. The Registration Manager reported that the telephone system was new and some trial and errors were being worked out. He welcomed any suggestions to improve the system. It was noted that whilst queues could be frustrating, it was necessary to control the flow of calls.

4.3.8 Complaints – A Member asked if the public were aware of the NISCC in relation to making complaints about social workers/social care workers. The Director of Registration stated the public are aware and do make complaints. However, the NISCC has not engaged in a widespread communication strategy. It was noted that there were risks that people may attempt to bypass the proper processes and go straight to the NISCC.

4.3.9 Communications – The Committee was surprised to note that the NISCC has a small communications team of only two part-time staff. The Director of Registration noted that this was an area the NISCC needed to grow. She also stated that the NISCC has concluded the consultation on the Roles and Tasks of Social Work, and that the final report is to go to the DHSSPS on 13 March.

4.4 The Chair thanked the Director of Registration for the presentation and for taking the time to share it with the Committee.

(5) Any Other Business

5.1 The Committee briefly discussed the procedure for adding items to the agenda. It was agreed that Committee Members should forward proposed items to Peggy Carlile for compilation. The Committee noted the following items for the next meeting's agenda:-

- NISCC Business Plan
- Workstreams/Subgroups
- Promotion of Codes of Practice
- Assessed Year in Employment
- Roadshows
- Communication with Students

5.2 The Chair agreed to seek clarity in relation to who would be arranging roadshows with the Director of Registration.

Chair

5.3 Travel Forms – Julie Dines, Finance Assistant, gave a brief explanation of the travel forms. Peggy Carlile will email Committee Members with the dates of previous meetings and send a travel form with each Committee Members' papers.

Peggy Carlile

(6) Date of Next Meeting

6.1 The next meeting will be Wednesday 4 March 2009 at 10.30am.

Brian Smyth
Chair of Registrants' Committee
Northern Ireland Social Care Council