



Northern Ireland Social Care Council

Guidance on Approval for Course Providers of the Degree in Social Work

September 2003

Authors: Ellis Barry, Professional Adviser
Christine Smyth, Professional Adviser

Produced by:

Northern Ireland Social Care Council
7th Floor, Millennium House
19-25 Great Victoria Street
Belfast
BT2 7AQ

Tel: 028 90417600
Fax: 028 90417601
Textphone: 028 90239340

Web: www.niscc.info
Email: info@niscc.n-i.nhs.uk

September 2003

Contents

	Page
1. Introduction	1
2. Approval Process	3
3. Appeals	8
4. Post Approval	9
5. Introduction to Guidance on Standards for Approval	10
6. Guidance on Standards for Approval	11

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Health and Personal Social Services Act (NI) 2001 confers on the NISCC (Council) the authority to approve courses in social work. The Council is cognisant of its duty to maintain public confidence in its ability to protect the public and to set standards to regulate professional social work training. The Council will therefore need to be satisfied that its standards for the approval of social work courses are being met and will be met as required under this legislation.
- 1.2 All courses leading to the Degree in Social Work must be approved by the Council. The Council has published Rules for the Approval of the Degree in Social Work¹ (the Rules). This approval process is based on those Rules and gives a fuller guide for Course Providers intending to submit a course for approval. It is aimed, therefore, mainly at those in educational institutions and agencies who will be responsible for ensuring that the Degree meets the Council's requirements.
- 1.3 To gain approval Course Providers must demonstrate how they meet the Standards for Approval (the Standards) as laid out in Section 6 in the Rules. The Standards are reproduced with guidance on their interpretation in Section 6 of this document. Course Providers will be expected to submit evidence and/or information against each of the standards in their submission.
- 1.4 The ethos of the approval process is to encourage a developmental approach, enabling Course Providers to prepare submissions for approval with guidance and feedback at key points. The approval process is based on the following six key principles: -
- 1.4.1 **Flexible and facilitative** – the Council will seek to be responsive and supportive to the needs of Course Providers. This means the Council and Course Provider will work together to plan and agree timescales for submissions for approval.
- 1.4.2 **Continuous improvement** – the Council will seek to encourage constructive dialogue between Council staff and Course Providers throughout the process, enabling Course Providers to prepare their submissions for approval with feedback at key points.
- 1.4.3 **Efficient and effective** – the Council will seek to avoid duplication of effort and documentation where possible and jointly approve course with Higher Education Institutions where appropriate.
- 1.4.4 **Consistent** – the Council will be consistent in their approach to all Course Providers and in the interpretation of the Standards. This means that a common understanding of the Standards will be communicated and that all Course Providers will be required to demonstrate valid, reliable, authentic, current and sufficient evidence of how they meet or plan to meet the standards in their submissions.
- 1.4.5 **Collaborative** – the Council will seek to work collaboratively with Course Providers, education institutions and agencies.
- 1.4.6 **Transparent** – approval decisions will be based on open and appropriate, objective evidence.

¹ Rules for the Approval of the Degree in Social Work are obtainable from NISCC, 7th Floor Millennium House, 19-25 Great Victoria Street, BELFAST, BT2 7AQ or can be downloaded from www.niscc.info

- 1.5 The Council recognises that Higher Education Institutions have validation processes for degree courses. The Rules require validation of the Degree in Social Work from a Higher Education Institution and / or confirmation of franchise agreements between education institutions to deliver the Degree where appropriate.
- 1.6 The Council will, as far as possible, work to streamline the Council approval of a course with the Higher Education Institution validation process. Where joint validation is agreed, procedures, setting out the detail of panel membership, remit and procedures will be agreed by the Council with the relevant Higher Education Institution.
- 1.7 The final decision regarding approval of a course following a joint validation event will be made by the Council.

2 Approval Process

2.1 Overview of the Approval Process

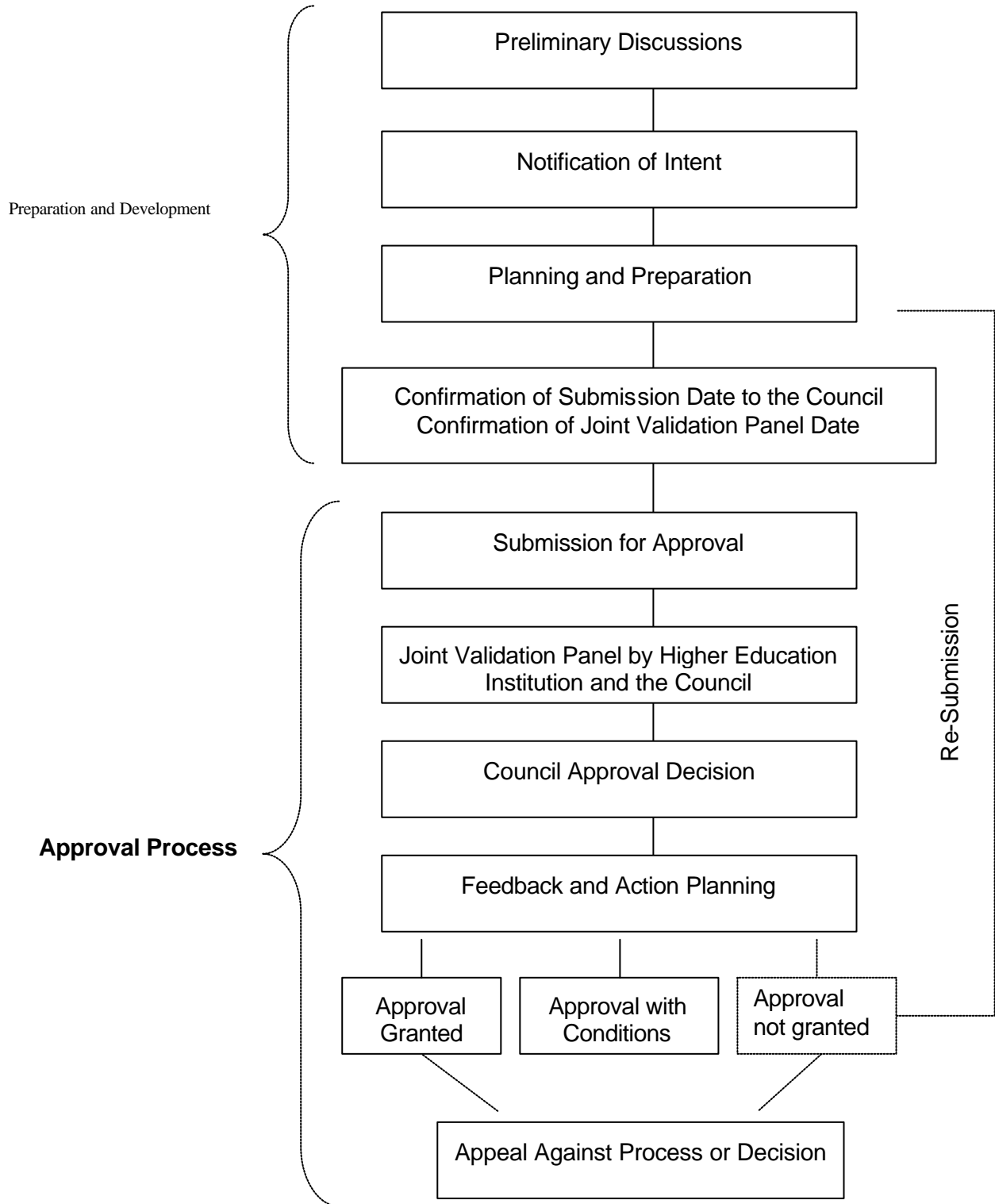


Figure 1

2.2 Key Participants in the Approval Process

Course Provider	A partnership of one or more education institutions together with social work employers.
Course Provider's Official Correspondent	The Course Provider's official correspondent is the person through whom negotiations about approval are carried out. The official correspondent will speak with authority about the resources and design of the course. If the official correspondent is not directly responsible for these aspects of the course (s)he will be in direct contact with those who are responsible so that discussions progress smoothly.
Professional Adviser	A professional adviser can provide advice and guidance to the Course Provider throughout the approval process, including guidance about the process, the Standards for Approval and documentation required.
Joint Validation	Process whereby a course leading to the Degree in Social Work is jointly evaluated and approved by a Higher Education Institution and the Council.
Higher Education Institution	A university with degree awarding powers.
Education Institution	Any university or Further & Higher Education college intending to, or providing, the Degree course in partnership with social work employers.
Regional Body	A body set up by, and accountable to the Council with representatives from education institutions and social work employers engaged in the provision of social work education and training. The body is responsible for planning social work training arrangements across Northern Ireland.
Appeals Panel	The Appeals Panel will hear appeals from Course Providers concerning the validity of the process and/or the decision. The panel will consist of 3 members of the Council not connected with the Course Provider.

2.3 The Stages of Approval

The Approval Process is comprised of eight stages; four involving Preparation and Development and four comprising the Approval Process itself.

Figure 2: The Stages of Approval for the Degree in Social Work

	Action	Who
Preparation and Development		
	Stage 1: Preliminary Discussions	Course Provider, Regional Body and Professional Adviser
	Stage 2 Notification of Intent	Course Provider
	Stage 3 Planning and Preparation	Course Provider, and Professional Adviser
	Stage 4 Confirmation of Submission date to the Council & Joint Validation date	Course Provider, Professional Adviser and Higher Education Institution
Approval Process		
	Stage 5: Submission for Approval	Course Provider
	Stage 6 Joint Validation Panel	Council, Higher Education Institution and Course Provider
	Stage 7 Approval Decision	Council
	Stage 8 Feedback and Action Planning	Professional Adviser/ Course Provider

2.4 Notification of Intent

Course Providers wishing to be approved to offer the Degree in Social Work should, following initial discussions with the Council and the Regional Body, submit a Notification of Intent to the Director of Education and Training in writing, indicating the official correspondent for the Course Provider.

2.5 Planning and Preparation

A Professional Adviser will be available to provide advice and consultation to support preparation and development work leading to submission.

Course Providers will be expected to have preliminary discussions with the Regional Body to ensure their planned submissions are consistent with regional agreements.

The Professional Adviser will discuss and clarify the Standards for Approval, the process for approval and documentary evidence required with the Course Provider.

The submission document must show evidence of how the Standards for Approval are met or will be met and that the Course Provider has adequate resources to deliver the course.

A date for submission by the Course Provider to the Council will be negotiated and agreed with the Professional Adviser at the planning stage. The submission date must be at least 4 weeks before the agreed date for the Joint Validation and/or Approval Panel meeting. The date for the Joint Validation and/or Approval Panel meeting will be agreed at the same time as the submission date.

2.6 Approval Process

2.6.1 Submission for Approval

Once the submission date to the Council is agreed, it is very important that the documentation is submitted on time to the Council by the Course Provider.

All submissions must be made in the format required by the Council.

Course Providers will need to show how the proposed course meets or plans to meet the Council's Standards for Approval.

At the point of submission, Course Providers must include written agreements detailing the rights and obligations of the relevant parties and signed by the accountable officer of each organisation. (Rules for the Approval of the Degree in Social Work 6.10.2).

2.6.2 Validation

The Council will, as far as possible, work to streamline Council approval of the course with the Higher Education Institution's validation process. Joint Validation Panels will be arranged, wherever possible, to evaluate courses. The Higher Education Institution will negotiate with the Council the date, venue and arrangements for a meeting of the Joint Validation Panel and any requirements/action needed in advance.

2.6.3 Joint Validation Processes

A Joint Validation Panel will be established by the Higher Education Institution and the Council in line with agreements between the two parties on constitution and procedure. These will set out the detail of the membership and remit of the panel, procedures for meetings and decision-making process.

The Joint Validation Panel will consider the submission and any reports that have been submitted by Panel members. The details of the submission will be discussed with the Course Planning Team. The Joint Validation Panel must ensure that the Council's Standards for Approval and any academic requirements are met.

If considered necessary, selective visits to institutional facilities and/or practice learning sites may be undertaken as part of the joint validation process.

2.6.4 Approval Decision

Feedback to the Course Provider representatives will be given by the Panel at the end of the Joint Validation Event. This will be on the clear understanding that a final decision is dependent on consideration of the Panel's recommendations independently by the Council and the Higher Education Institution. The Council will satisfy itself that its Standards for Approval have been fully met.

The Joint Validation Panel will submit a report including its conclusions and recommendations to a named officer of the education institution and a named officer of the Council.

The outcome of Council's consideration of the Joint Validation Report will be communicated in writing by the Council to the Chair of the Joint Validation Panel. This report will contain a statement of the decisions reached. This will include confirmation (or otherwise) of course approval, any conditions which apply, and an action plan for the first year of approval.

2.6.5 Council Approval

Where joint validation mechanisms and procedures are not in place, the submission document, together with the report/recommendations from the Professional Adviser will be considered by an Approval Panel established by the Council. The outcome will be communicated to the Course Provider's official correspondent by the Council.

2.6.6 Resubmissions

In practice, it is extremely rare for applications to be rejected, and the Council or where appropriate, the Joint Validation Panel will seek in the first instance to work with the Course Provider to develop and improve the initial application. However, should the amount of development work needed effectively involve a new application, the Course Provider will be informed by the Council.

2.6.7 Approval with Conditions

Where Council approval is conditional upon certain conditions being met, the Course Provider will submit revised documentation within the specified timescale.

3 Appeals

3.1 A Course Provider may appeal against an approval decision by the Council on the following grounds:

- the Council did not take into account material information which was made known to it at the time of the decision; or
- new information which could not have been made available at the time of the decision and which materially affects the outcome has since become available; or
- the Council did not observe its own procedures and this failure materially affected the decision.

3.2 Appeal Panel

If the Course Provider is dissatisfied with any aspect of the approval process, the Course Provider should write to the Chief Executive of the Council within six weeks of receiving the approval decision. The letter should set out the grounds for appeal and request formal consideration by the Council.

The Chief Executive will consult with the Chair of the Council, who will appoint an Appeals Panel of three members of the Council not connected with that Course Provider to consider the relevant paperwork and decide whether there is a prima facie case for further consideration.

If it is agreed that a prima facie case exists, the Course Provider will be invited to meet the panel and/or send further written statements.

The panel will consider all relevant evidence, and determine on behalf of the Council whether to uphold the appeal.

The decision of the appeal panel will be final.

3.3 Complaints Procedure

The Council has a Complaints Procedure, which may be used by any user of the Council's services at any time. Copies of the Complaints Procedure are available from the Council's office to which complaints should be addressed in the first instance.

4 Post Approval

4.1 Certificate of Approval

Once the Council is satisfied that the submission for approval meets all the Council's Standards for Approval and requirements, a Certificate of Approval will be issued.

4.2 Public Record

Once approval has been granted, the approval submission will become a public record. The Council will produce an annual report on the outcome of its approval activities and will publish information about the type and location of approved courses.

4.3 Governance and Continuous Improvement

Following initial approval all course provision will be subject to periodic review. The first formal review will be within 5 years, the date of which will be confirmed at the point of approval. The Council will also undertake, annual monitoring of course provision, where possible in collaboration with education institutions.

4.5 Withdrawal of approval

The Council may withdraw approval of a course where there are serious concerns about the quality of course provision. All attempts will be made to resolve matters with the Course Provider before such action will be taken.

4.6 Modifications

The Course Provider must notify the Council of any material change in the course provision and must not make any such change without the Council's consent in writing. A material change is one that involves change and/or restructuring of a course, which has a substantive impact in terms of course delivery.

5. Introduction to Guidance on Standards for Approval

5.1 The Standards for Approval are laid out in Section 6 of the Rules for the Approval of the Degree in Social Work. This guidance is produced to assist Course Providers in the interpretation of the standards and to promote a common understanding of what is required to gain approval.

5.2 The Standards cover the follow key areas:

- ***Regional consistency;***
- ***Collaborative arrangements;***
- ***Management and organisation;***
- ***Policy and planning;***
- ***Resources and staffing;***
- ***Student participation;***
- ***Public participation;***
- ***Selection and registration;***
- ***Teaching, practice learning and assessment;***
- ***Governance and continuous improvement.***

These Standards provide the framework for the planning, delivery and evaluation of course provision.

5.3 It is recognised that at the point of approval the course will not be operational and therefore the submission will largely be based on planned inputs and processes. The emphasis at the point of approval will be on:

- the commitment of the Course Provider to meet the standards;
- agreements of key parties to work together to meet the standards;
- policies, systems, procedures and protocols in place that reflect the standards; and
- action plans to ensure standards that cannot be demonstrated until the course is underway will be met.

5.4 There will be an expectation that all Standards for Approval are fully met by the first annual monitoring visit by the Council, or earlier if specific timescales have been set as a condition of approval. The emphasis in monitoring will be on how effective planned inputs and processes are in achieving the desired quality and results. Feedback from staff, students, external examiners and other key players will therefore be crucial in monitoring the quality and effectiveness of course provision how approved Course Providers continue to meet the Standards.

6.1 Regional Consistency

How effective are arrangements to implement regional approaches?

This standard addresses the need for Course Providers to contribute to and co-operate with agreed regional approaches in course provision.

The Standard	In the context of approval, this means:
6.1 (i) A viable, strategic and operational plan for proposed course provision.	Plans which show course rationale, evidence of demand, targets and timescales for first year of operation and planned development for second year.
6.1 (ii) Membership on Regional Body.	Named Course Provider representative.
6.1 (iii) Collaboration with regional approaches.	Signed agreement by accountable officer on behalf of Course Provider to terms of reference of Regional Body.
6.1 (iv) Procedures to facilitate regional approaches.	Evidence of co-operation with any regional approaches.
6.1 (v) Communication System	<p>Outline of operational and administrative procedures showing lines of accountability between regional body and Course Provider</p> <p>Outline of how Course Provider representative will communicate between regional body and with Course Provider colleagues.</p>

6.2 Collaborative Arrangements

How effective are arrangements to ensure collaboration between education institutions and social work employers in the planning, design, delivery and evaluation of course provision?

This standard addresses the need for course provision to be managed and delivered in partnership by education institutions and social work employers.

The Standard	In the context of approval, this means:
6.2 (i) Collaborative arrangements in place to plan, manage and deliver course provision.	Details of participating partner(s) and their representatives.
6.2 (ii) Written agreements between relevant partners.	Signed agreements by relevant parties at senior management level showing respective roles and responsibilities for planning, management, decision-making, communication, quality assurance and resource allocation (including financial).

6.2 (iii) Procedures and systems to facilitate communication between relevant parties.

Outline of how representatives will communicate with their constituency in respect of course provision.

6.3 Management and Organisation

How effective is the management and organisation of course provision?

This standard addresses the quality of leadership and management of course provision. Aspects addressed include finance, information, complaints, employer responsibilities and the promotion of equality of opportunity.

The Standard	In the context of approval, this means:
6.3 (i) Higher Education Institution validation of the award of the Degree, or franchise agreement.	Confirmed date for validation outcomes by Higher Education Institution. Where appropriate written agreement between Higher Education Institution and other education institutions confirming arrangements for provision of a route to the degree.
6.3 (ii) Financial control systems	Outline of financial control systems and name of accountable officer.
6.3 (iii) Information Management Systems	Outline of Information Management Systems and name of accountable officer.
6.3 (iv) Clear line management structures	Organisational chart showing lines of responsibility, accountability and communication, particularly in relation to quality assurance. (This should include lines of accountability and communication between Course Provider and the education institution and social work agency infrastructure).
6.3 (v) Code of Practice for Social Care Employers	Outline of how Course Provider intends to implement the standards set out in the code and where these complement existing policies within education institutions or social work agencies.

The Standard	In the context of approval, this means:
6.3 (vi) Protocols to co-operate with the Council.	Protocols to co-operate with the Council in respect of student registration and in respect of any issue that relates to conduct of students or registered staff.
6.3 (vii) Procedures for complaints, appeals, termination of training and whistle blowing.	Outline of procedures and protocols, which ensure co-operation between professional and academic processes particularly in respect of Fitness to Practise and disciplinary matters.
6.3 (viii) Provision for students with special learning needs.	Arrangements for students to transfer from the course. Information regarding resources available to support the learning and assessment of students with special learning needs.

6.4 Policy and Planning

How well the Course Provider sets a clear direction leading to high quality education and training and promoting equality of opportunity for all learners.

This standard addresses the effectiveness of planning and policy

The Standard	In the context of approval, this means:
6.4 (i) Viable plans consistent with regional agreements.	Viable strategic and operational plans for course provision identifying resources secured (or to be secured) to implement the plan. These plans should reflect regional agreements for the co-ordination and management of any regional arrangements.
6.4 (ii) Policies and procedures reflecting a commitment to equality, human rights and anti-oppressive practice.	Policies and procedures that promote equal opportunities, human rights and anti-oppressive practice. An action plan for implementation and monitoring of these and name of accountable officer. Course Regulations.

6.5 Resourcing and Staffing

How the Course Provider identifies and secures sufficient resources to support the delivery of the course.

This standard addresses the quality and accessibility of resources to support course delivery in line with requirements specified by the Council

The Standard	In the context of approval, this means:
6.5 (i) Sufficient staff resources to manage student learning.	<p>Identification of numbers of staff required and available to deliver the course. Details of staff secured to deliver the course (including brief curricula vitae). Action plan to secure additional staff, if appropriate. Information on proposed student/staff ratios for tutorial support and skills teaching. Action plan for induction, support, continuous professional development of permanent and temporary staff. Information on the use of part-time lecturers/teaching assistants/social work agency personnel/users and carers.</p>
6.5 (ii) Sufficient academic and practice learning resources	<p>Details of learning resources, accommodation, ICT equipment, library facilities etc available and accessible to support target number of students. Action plan identifying practice-learning resources required to ensure all students access practice learning opportunities during their training during the first two years of operation, including resources to support skills teach and preparation for practice. Agreements from employing agencies about the provision of practice learning.</p>
6.5 (iii) Other Resources	<p>Identification of resources required and available to support course delivery including assessment and administration and those to support collaborative arrangements and regional approaches.</p>

6.6 Student Participation

How effectively the course actively involves learners in course delivery and enables them to take responsibility for their own learning.

This standard addresses how well Course Providers promote a shared responsibility between staff and learners for the quality of course provision.

The Standard	In the context of approval, this means:
6.6 (i) Mechanisms to ensure formal and systematic participation of students in course provision.	Action plan of how the Course Provider will encourage and enable students to participate in the design, delivery and evaluation of course provision at course/modular level and at learning/teaching level. Summary of range of teaching, learning and assessment strategies to encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning.

6.7 Public Participation

How the Course Provider ensures the involvement of users and carers in course provision.

This standard addresses the need for Course Providers to pro-actively plan and support the formal and systematic participation of users and carers in the design, delivery and evaluation of course provision.

The Standard	In the context of approval, this means:
6.7 (i) Mechanisms to ensure formal and systematic of users and carers in course provision.	Action plan of how the course will identify and secure users and carers participation in the design, delivery and evaluation of course provision.
6.7 (ii) Policies on remuneration, induction, training and support for users and carer participation.	Written policies and action plan for implementation and monitoring and name of accountable officer.
6.7 (iii) Mechanisms to allow input and feedback from others interested in social work education and training.	Action plan of how Course Provider will facilitate input and feedback from identified others either through regional approach or at Course Provider level.

6.8 Selection and Registration

How Course Providers ensure selection processes are fair and equitable and enable a wide range of people from different backgrounds and with different experiences to access social work training.

This standard addresses the need of Course Providers to balance the aim of broadening participation in professional training with the need to ensure those with the potential to meet the learning outcomes and who are suitable to be registered as a student social worker with the Council are selected for professional training.

The Standard	In the context of approval, this means:
6.8 (i) Selection process.	Admissions Policy. Plan of how selection, including promotion and recruitment, will be managed and carried out by Course Provider including co-operation with any regional approach and name of accountable officer.
6.8 (ii) + (iii) Explicit entry criteria.	Details of entry criteria.
6.8 (iv) Registration with the Council.	Procedures and protocols to enrol students on the course and to process registration of students with the Council.

6.9 Teaching, Practice Learning and Assessment

How effective are the teaching and learning in achieving the required outcomes and how effective are the assessment and monitoring of learners progress.

This standard addresses the quality of the learning experience and the quality of assessment and associated recording of course provision. It also assesses the quality of input and support given by staff to ensure that learner progress is monitored and maintained.

The Standard	In the context of approval, this means:
6.9 (i) Course specification based on the Northern Ireland Framework Specification and Practice Learning Requirements	Outline of course specification showing how the Framework Specification and Practice Learning Requirements will be delivered including course structure diagram and module descriptions.
6.9 (ii) Course specification that aligns learning outcomes, learning strategies and assessment methods.	<p>Outline of course design showing how learning strategies and assessment methods will enable students to attain the learning outcomes.</p> <p>Details of assessment requirements and arrangements.</p> <p>Relationship with other courses in School/Faculty/subject.</p>
6.9 (iii) Course specification with details of guided and structured learning activities and planned assessments.	<p>Summary of proposed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • direct teaching timetable; • guided independent study time; • minimum number of individual and group tutorials; • assessment schedule; • attendance requirements and monitoring arrangements; • student support and guidance.

The Standard	In the context of approval, this means:
6.9 (iv) Assessment arrangements, including AP(E)L.	<p>An assessment framework showing how students claiming credits for AP(E)L will be assessed.</p> <p>Academic progression and internal coherence and opportunities for student choice.</p>
6.9 (v) Policies and procedures to ensure provision of practice learning to meet Council's requirements.	<p>Policies and procedures about practice learning identifying roles and responsibilities of all parties, name of accountable officer and arrangements to co-operate with regional approach.</p>

6.10 Governance and Continuous Improvement

How effectively the Course Provider implements quality assurance arrangements to ensure continuous improvement in course provision and the promotion of quality and best practice.

This standard addresses the need for Course Providers to implement effective quality assurance systems and procedures which lead to action and ongoing improvements in course provision.

The Standard	In the context of approval, this means:
6.10 (i) Quality assurance arrangements to address both academic and practice learning components of course provision.	<p>Systems and procedures for quality assurance of all aspects of course provision including annual monitoring and periodic review including details of who is responsible and accountable for the operation of the system and overseeing the necessary remedial action or planned improvements</p> <p>Details of how key people including students, staff, partners will be involved and names of accountable officer(s). Information of how Course Provider arrangements activities complement QA systems of education institution(s) and social work employers and any plans to streamline.</p>
6.10 (ii) Annual Reporting arrangements to Council.	<p>Action Plan of how Course Provider will collate and compile annual report to Council and name of accountable officer.</p>
6.10 (iii) External Examination.	<p>Details of external examiners which evidence how they meet the criteria and requirements set by the Council.</p>