



# **Northern Ireland Social Care Council**

Reference Paper:

**Practice Learning for the Degree in  
Social Work**

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This paper provides a summary overview of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council's (the Council) role in respect of practice learning as an integral component of the Degree in Social Work. It provides a guide of where practice learning is referred to within the various documents produced by the Council in respect of the new Degree.
- 1.2 It is hoped this summary will be helpful to course providers, course planning teams, the Regional Body and other key players as a reference paper to ensure the Council's requirements inform the planning, development and implementation of practice learning for the new Degree.
- 1.3 The reference paper should be used as a pointer to the relevant Council publication and it is recommended that the original texts are consulted as they gave the specific details of the requirements and standards.

## 2. The Regulatory Role of the Council

- 2.1 "The Council may, in accordance with rules made by it, approve courses in relevant social work for persons who are or who wish to become Social Workers" (HPSS Act (NI) 2000)
- 2.2 The legislation gives the Council the statutory responsibility to set standards for the Degree in Social Work and to approve and quality assure courses against these standards. Practice learning is an integral component of course provision and must be approved by the Council as part of the overall course approval. The Council may approve with conditions.
- 2.3 The Council will satisfy itself on an ongoing basis that approved course providers continue to comply with the Rules and any conditions of approval that may apply. This will involve quality assuring any aspect of course provision at regular intervals, including academic and practice learning, according to requirements set by the Council and any other relevant quality standards determined by the Council.

## 3. Standards for Practice Learning

- 3.1 The standards for practice learning for the degree in social work have been defined by the Council and are contained in a number of publications<sup>1</sup> as listed overleaf:

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<sup>1</sup> These publications can be accessed on [www.niscc.info](http://www.niscc.info)

4. NISCC Codes of Practice (December 2002);
5. The Northern Ireland Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work (March 2003);
6. The Rules for the Approval of the Degree (May 2003);
7. Practice Learning Requirements (June 2003);
8. Learning Teaching and Assessment Requirements (March 2004).

#### 4. NISCC Codes of Practice

- 4.1 The Code of Practice for Employers of Social Care Workers sets out the responsibilities of employers in regulating social care workers. As students will be registered with the Council all aspects of the Code apply. Section 3 is of particular relevance to practice learning and employers are expected to contribute 'to the provision of social care and social work education and training, including effective workplace assessment and practice learning'. (Employer responsibilities for practice learning will also be addressed in a DHSSPS Circular for Practice Learning.)
- 4.2 The Code of Practice for Social Care Workers describe the standards of professional conduct and practice required of social care workers as they go about their daily work. The Code is relevant to all students who will be registered with the Council and also to all staff who are registered with the Council. Section 6 is of particular relevance to practice learning and states that social care workers 'must be accountable for the quality of (their) work and take responsibility for maintaining and improving (their) knowledge and skills.' In addition social care workers are asked to contribute to the learning and development of others.

#### 5. The Framework Specification

- 5.1 The Northern Ireland Framework Specification for the Degree In Social Work (the Framework) is a joint publication by DHSSPS and the Council and sets out a single comprehensive set of learning requirements and outcomes for the honours degree in social work. The framework incorporates both academic and practice learning and takes account of the full range of social policy, laws and service delivery arrangements for social work in Northern Ireland. It also specifies the value base as an integral part of the knowledge and practice learning requirements. A course specification must demonstrate how the Framework Specification and Practice Learning Requirements (see 7 below) will be delivered and assessed.

## 6. Rules for the Approval of the Degree

6.1 The Rules establish a legal obligation that must be adhered to by the Council and Course Providers. They include the Standards for the Approval of Courses.

6.2 Specific reference to practice learning within the Rules as follows:

### ***Content and provision of the Degree (1)***

- (i) The 'Northern Ireland Framework Specification for The Degree in Social Work' determines the content of the degree.
- (ii.) Plans for the location and mode of delivery of specific course provision must be consistent with regional agreements and take account of academic and practice learning resource requirements.

### ***Approval (6)***

#### *6.10.5 Resources and staffing*

- (i) Sufficient staff with qualifications and experience to manage student learning in line with the academic and practice learning requirements specified by the Council.
- (ii) Sufficient academic and practice learning resources to meet student learning and assessment needs.
- (iii) Sufficient resources to deliver all aspects of the course, including the academic and practice learning components, and meet the requirements specified by the Council.

#### *6.10.6 Public Participation*

- (iv) Mechanisms to ensure user and carer feedback on agreed aspects of student performance.

#### *6.10.8 Selection & Registration*

- (v) Arrangements to confirm that students are registered with the Council before they commence the course, or in exceptional circumstances before they commence direct supervised practice.

#### *6.10.9 Teaching, practice learning and assessment*

- (vi) A course specification that demonstrates how the Northern Ireland Framework Specification and the Requirements for Practice Learning for the Degree in Social work will be delivered and assessed.

- (vii) A course specification that aligns learning outcomes, learning strategies (including practice learning) and assessment methods and meets the requirements for teaching and assessment.
- (viii) Sufficient guided, structured and assessed academic and practice learning to enable students to attain the required learning outcomes as set out in the Northern Ireland Framework Specification and the Requirements for Practice Learning
- (ix) Assessment arrangements, including arrangements for AP(E)L, which meet the Council's requirements.
- (x) Policies and procedures to ensure that responsibilities for the provision of practice learning opportunities meet the Council requirements.

#### *6.10.10 Governance and continuous improvement*

- (xi) Quality Assurance arrangements which are consistent with the Rules and any requirements set by the Council and address both academic and practice-learning components of course provision.

### **Provision of Information to the Council (8)**

#### *8.3.2 Information regarding:*

- (ii) Availability and quality of practice learning opportunities
- (iii) Terminations, complaints and appeals

8.4 Course providers will report on the outcomes of any evaluation or formal reviews to the Regional Body as required.

8.5 Course providers must supply the Council annually with:

- (i) Reports on the outcomes of any relevant quality assurance process, in the education institutions or social work agencies involved in the provision of the Degree.

### **Governance and Continuous Improvement (9)**

9.5 The Council will quality assure any aspect of course provision at regular intervals, including academic and practice learning according to requirements set by the Council and any other relevant quality standards determined by the Council.

9.7 The Course provider will invite the Council to participate in all relevant education institution quality reviews and any other relevant quality reviews relating to any aspect of course provision and will provide the Council with reports on the outcomes of such reviews and reports and on the outcomes of action plans where these are required.

## 7. Practice Learning Requirements

- 7.1 The Practice Learning Requirements set out details regarding the broad parameters for the delivery of practice learning. They cover:
- Definition Of Practice Learning – practice learning can include real-life practice and learning through a range of techniques including simulation, action learning, project work, visits of observation. (Section 2)
  - Principles of Practice Learning – (Section 3)
  - Requirements of Practice Learning – including levels, volume, eligibility for APEL and assessment.
  - Teaching and Assessment Requirements for Practice Learning (see 8 below)

## 8. Learning, Teaching and Assessment Requirements

- 8.1 These requirements reflect the philosophy that all learning, teaching and assessment should involve the application of learning to practice. They apply to both academic and practice learning and are of particular relevance to curriculum design and implementation. The requirements include the following:
- Principles
  - Course Provision
  - Course delivery
  - Level and Duration
  - Staffing & Learning Resources For Course Provision
  - Academic & Agency Support for Students in Practice Learning
  - Assessment

## 9. Planning and delivery of Practice Learning

- 9.1 Course providers are responsible to ensure practice learning is planned and delivered to both the Council's standards and to the appropriate academic standards to confer the award of the Degree in Social Work.
- 9.2 Arrangements for the delivery may be planned, developed and co-ordinated through regionally agreed approaches but course providers must ensure they have arrangements in place to monitor and quality assure the practice learning component of their course and that there are mechanisms in place to deal with student complaints, termination of practice learning and fitness to practice.

9.3 The Regional Body for the Honours Degree in Social Work has established a Regional Strategic Group or Practice Learning, which is addressing regional strategic issues on practice learning. Work is being progressed through sub groups including:

- Volume, numbers & sequencing for practice learning.
- Preparation for Practice.
- Assessment Issues.
- Practice Learning Models.

## 10. Ongoing development work – Reform of Social Work Training

### *10.1 Quality Assurance Arrangements*

Work is underway to develop the Council's quality assurance arrangements. This work will include setting standards for the provision of practice learning and arrangements to quality assure practice learning as a major component of course provision. Consultations will take place with key interests regarding proposals for the Council's quality assurance arrangements including education institutions, agencies and the Regional Body.

### *10.2 External Examiner Requirements*

Course providers are responsible for the appointment of external examiners. The Council will set requirements to ensure that both the academic and practice learning aspects of course provision are externally examined.

### *10.3 Practice Learning Policy*

An interim DHSSPS Circular covering practice-learning provision 2004/05 has been issued. Further work is planned to develop a new practice learning policy and commissioning arrangements from 2005 onwards. It is expected that this will involve all key stakeholders and will be completed by late 2004.