

Introduction to the Revised National Occupational Standards in Health and Social Care

October 2004

Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) was established as part of the Government Quality Agenda to improve standards in health and social care. The Council has been tasked with raising standards of training and practice across the social care workforce in Northern Ireland. It aims to achieve this by registering the workforce and by setting standards to regulate their training and practice. Social care workers registered with the Council must meet standards for their work, as agreed in the NISCC Code of Practice for Social Care Workers.

NISCC has been part of the UK project to revise the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for Social Care. National Occupational Standards (NOS) in social care explain what social care workers are expected to do and how they should carry out these tasks. These are national standards, which means that people using social care services, anywhere in the United Kingdom, should receive services from staff working to the same standards. National Occupational Standards will help to develop a skilled workforce and a better quality of service. This will benefit the people who use services and those who provide them.

The new NOS, the corresponding National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) structures, and the assessment strategy for NVQs, were endorsed earlier this year by the United Kingdom Coordinating Group (UKCG). This group has been set up by the education regulatory bodies to approve standards and qualifications.

The new standards are available on CD Rom from NISCC. The CD contains:

- Information sheet - Review of the National Occupational Standards for Social Care
- Units and elements for the new standards
- Leaflet – A Managers Guide to Strategic Uses of Occupational Standards
- Signposting for Key Skills
- Signposting for Core skills
- Assessment strategy
- Statements of service user and carer expectations.
- NISCC Codes of Practice for Social Care Workers
- NISCC Codes of Practice for Employers of Social Care Workers

Email: If you require further information about this project, contact Veronica Callaghan (NISCC Professional Adviser) at veronica.Callaghan@niscc.n-i.nhs.uk

How the Standards can be used:

National Occupational Standards can be used by employers to and staff in a number of ways:

For Business Planning:

- To gauge skills already in the workforce
- To set out recruitment plans
- To write job descriptions
- To devise selection interview questions
- To consider investment in upgrading
- To form the basis of contract specifications
- To assist risk management
- To support role diversification and change
- To embed organisational processes, policies and protocols

For Training and Development:

- To design induction programmes
- To assess existing skills and knowledge
- To identify training needs
- To design training programmes
- To evaluate the effectiveness of training

For Quality Assurance:

- To set benchmarks for best practice
- To provide a framework for supervision
- To evaluate performance in staff appraisal initiatives
- To encourage personal development
- To evaluate service level agreements
- To provide evidence for Investors in People accreditation

To Develop Qualifications:

- To inform course content
- To map programmes against standards
- To set out learning outcomes
- To measure course effectiveness

For Information and Marketing:

- To promote the values underpinning the service
- To demystify the complexity of care work
- To reveal the reality of care work to employers, employees, and the public.
- To raise awareness of the diversity of care services.

The leaflet "A Managers Guide to Strategic Uses of Occupational Standards" contained on this CD will provide more detailed suggestions on making best use of NOS.

About the Standards

The Standards consist of “units of competence” which relate directly to individual job functions, forming a well established and comprehensive competency framework for the social care sector. The Standards define how a skilled and competent worker carries out each function. They describe the actions, knowledge and understanding necessary to do the job properly, and will be the most likely required or recommended qualifications for over 80% of the social care workforce. In total these Standards will have relevance for over 2 million workers in the UK.

The new suite of NOS have taken account of the Knowledge and Skills Framework, Codes of Practice and Service User and Carer perspectives. They have also drawn upon National Minimum Standards and Induction Frameworks, which apply in England and Wales.

The NVQs consist of mandatory (core) units, which all candidates must achieve, and optional units chosen by candidates because of their relevance to their job.

To complete an NVQ level 2 in Social Care, candidates must complete 6 units of competence, 4 mandatory (core) units, and a further 2 units chosen for the list of optional units.

At levels 3 and 4 in Health and Social Care, candidates choose an (Adult) or (Children and Young People) route to an award. Each award at levels 3 and 4 consists of 8 units of competence, 4 core units and a further 4 units chosen from **any** of the optional units. The large suite of optional units at each level reflects the growing diversification and specialisation of the Social Care sector.