

Honours Degree in Social Work in Northern Ireland

Advice for Applicants



This booklet contains information on:

- **Course locations and requirements**
- **Key features of the Degree in Social Work**
- **How to apply to the Degree in Social Work**
- **Financial assistance for NI students**

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NB: Please note that while every effort has been made to ensure the information contained in this leaflet is accurate at the time of going to print, the NISCC does not accept responsibility for any errors or omissions in the information provided.

Introducing the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC)

The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) is the regulatory body for the social care workforce in NI and it operates a Social Care Register which has a part specifically for social work students. The aim of the NISCC Social Care Register is to ensure that social care workers, including social work students, are suitable to work or undertake practice learning opportunities in the social care sector.

NISCC is also responsible for regulating social work training to ensure all social workers are trained to the highest standard to undertake the job expected of them. As part of this process NISCC holds the statutory duty of promoting, approving and quality assuring social work education and training at both qualifying and post qualifying level.

NISCC Information Service - Here to help

The Information Service promotes social care and social work careers to the general public, careers advisory staff, education providers, employers and our stakeholders. As part of this work, we have produced a range of information leaflets and publications which are available from the NISCC website at **www.niscc.info** Individual copies of information booklets can also be supplied free of charge.

The Honours Degree in Social Work

The Degree in Social Work (the Degree) is the recognised professional qualification for all social workers throughout the UK, as well as for Probation Officers and Education Welfare Officers in Northern Ireland and Criminal Justice Social Workers in Scotland.

Key features of the Degree in NI include:

- **A three year Honours Degree level qualification based on the “Northern Ireland Framework Specification”, which sets out the values, knowledge and practice requirements for the degree.**
- **An accelerated route for relevant graduates – the Relevant Graduate Route.**
- **A significant proportion of professional training will be practice learning in the workplace.***
- **Registration as a social work student on the NISCC Social Care Register.**
- **Financial support available to NI domiciled social work students who study in NI.**

***Please note that students will be allocated appropriate practice learning opportunities by the regional allocation system.**

What does the Degree offer students?

The Degree is designed to equip students with the skills and knowledge they need to cope with the broad range of people they will work with and the communities in which they live. It will enable students to understand, work with and value people as individuals with unique life histories. They will need to be able to assess people's needs and help them to make choices to improve their quality of life. At times they will have to make difficult decisions for people to allow them to live as independently and safely as possible.

Therefore, the Degree offers a generic training, which will prepare students to work across a range of social work settings and sectors, making it possible to move between jobs and gain a wide range of experience during their career.



Where is the Degree available in NI

You can normally study for the Honours Degree in Social Work at six education institutions in NI:

- Queen's University of Belfast (QUB)
Website: www.qub.ac.uk
- University of Ulster, Magee (UUM)
Website: www.ulster.ac.uk
- Belfast Metropolitan College, Belfast (BMC)
Website: www.belfastmet.ac.uk
- South West College, Dungannon (SWC)
Website: www.swc.ac.uk
- South Eastern Regional College, Newtownards (SERC)
Website: www.serc.ac.uk
- North West Regional College, Derry (NWRC)
Website: www.nwrc.ac.uk

Contacting these courses

Full contact details for the above courses can also be found in the NISCC **Social Care Contacts** booklet. This booklet is available from the NISCC Information Service.

Routes to the Degree in NI

Currently there are two routes to the Degree in NI, both of which are **full-time, undergraduate** courses. There are no part-time routes to social work training at present in NI.

3 Year Course

This course is normally available at all six locations listed on page six of this booklet. Students who chose to undertake the Degree through the Regional Colleges should note that the first two years are normally delivered at all six locations with year three being delivered at either the UUM or BMC.

2 Year Course (Relevant Graduate Route)

This course is a two year accelerated route for applicants who already hold a relevant honours degree. (For more information on what a relevant degree is, go to page nine.) The Relevant Graduate Route is **only** available at:

- **Queens University, Belfast**
- **University of Ulster at Magee**

All applications to the Degree in NI are made through the UCAS system at **www.ucas.com** For more information about how to apply go to page 14.

Admission requirements for the Degree

To be eligible for entry to the Degree, applicants must demonstrate they have the potential to train to be a social worker at degree level—this means they must:

- **Meet academic entry requirements set by their chosen university/college.***
- **Pass a suitability for social work training interview.**
- **Be suitable to be registered as a social work student with NISCC.**

Academic entry requirements

3 Year Course

- 3 'A' Levels, or other accepted equivalent qualifications e.g. HND, BTEC, Access, Open University, Irish Leaving Certificate.
- GCSE English and Maths (minimum grade C), or equivalent.

2 Year Course

- A relevant Honours degree* at 2:2 or above.
- GCSE English and Maths (minimum grade C), or equivalent.

***Academic criteria for entry to the Degree are set by the academic institutions and may vary accordingly.**

Applicants should always check with social work admissions/social work departments at each institution to confirm the current entry requirements for the year they are applying to the Degree.

***What is a relevant degree?**

A degree (second class lower division or higher) will be deemed to be a relevant degree where at least 33% of the course passed at Honours level comprises one or more of the following: Sociology, Psychology, Social Policy, Social Administration, Law, Teaching, Nursing, Community Work, Youth Work, Early Childhood Studies and other cognate subjects at the discretion of the course provider.

HNC/HND qualifications do not meet the criteria for applications to the 2 Year Relevant Graduate Route.

Graduates with a relevant degree can also apply to the 3 Year Course at any of the institutions. They must however specify this on their UCAS application form.

The Relevant Graduate Route is only available at:

- **Queen's University Belfast**
- **University of Ulster at Magee**

Suitability for social work training interview

As well as meeting academic entry requirements, all applicants being considered for a place on a Degree course in NI will be interviewed to assess their potential to train as a social worker at degree level. (See page 17 for more details.) All applicants are therefore advised to have some relevant experience. This may include: life experience, voluntary work, paid work or a mixture of all three.

For more information about relevant experience check out the NISCC leaflet — **Relevant experience for entry to the Degree in Social Work in NI**. This leaflet looks at why having relevant practical experience and knowledge of social work is beneficial to applicants. It is available to download from the NISCC website www.niscc.info or can be ordered direct from NISCC Information Service.

Suitability to be registered as a social work student with NISCC - fitness to practise

Social work involves working with people in sensitive situations. NISCC is responsible, by law, for ensuring that all social workers and social care workers are registered as '*fit to practise*' or '*safe to begin work*'. This includes social work students.

All applicants to the Degree in NI must be assessed as suitable for registration on the social work student part of the NISCC Social Care Register. NISCC will assess applicant's suitability by:

- **Asking the applicant to declare all criminal offences in the Criminal Offence section of the application form.**
- **Asking the applicant for information about any health condition(s) that may prevent them from practising social work safely.**

Declaring convictions

All applicants must provide NISCC with details of any criminal conviction, caution or binding over they have received, or which they may have proceeding against them. **Failure to do so may result in a referral to a Registration or Conduct Committee.**

In addition to the above, a criminal records check is required by employer organisations which provide practice learning opportunities in the workplace for social work students as an integral part of the social work course. The universities/ colleges will provide more information about this.

Disclosing health conditions

All applicants must provide NISCC with details about any health condition which may prevent them from practising safely and effectively. Telling NISCC about a criminal record or health condition will not necessarily prevent a social work student from becoming registered. All information provided will be treated in confidence. NISCC will consider the information provided and will take account of a range of factors before making a decision on registration.

How do I register with NISCC?

Application forms for the NISCC Social Care Register will be sent automatically to all applicants who have accepted a Degree place at a NI academic institution.

Registration with NISCC requires all social work students to pay a fee on an annual basis. For more information about fees or any aspect of registration, contact the registration team at **registration@nisocialcarecouncil.org.uk** or Tel: **028 9041 7633**.

Other Qualifications

Candidates with substantial experience in social care, or a related career, but holding alternative qualifications such as access courses are encouraged to apply, if they meet the current entry criteria for the Degree.

These students will need to demonstrate their potential to study at honours degree level and their applications will be considered on an individual basis.



What if my qualifications are not sufficient to meet the entry criteria for the Degree?

Applicants with alternative qualifications, should contact the Admissions Office of the university/college of their choice for further advice on what courses to undertake or to check if the qualifications they hold will be accepted as equivalent.

Alternatively, applicants can contact the following for further advice on access to higher education and suitable courses:

- Educational Guidance Service for Adults (EGSA).
- Careers Service NI.
- Regional Colleges of Further & Higher Education.

Contacts for the above can be found in the NISCC **Social Care Contacts** booklet.

Disabled Students

Increasing numbers of disabled people are expressing an interest in the Degree. As social work is a demanding occupation and will require a range of physical abilities to undertake the role, it is advisable to discuss your prospective application with the academic institution prior to applying. All higher academic institutions have support services in place to help disabled students take full advantage of higher education opportunities.

Disability advisers are employed to provide information on what is available for disabled students including eligibility for funding from the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) or any other appropriate source of funding. More information about DSA can be obtained by logging on to **www.studentfinancenl.co.uk**

For full details on what support is available, applicants should contact the disability adviser at the university/college they are applying to.

Do applicants need a driving licence/access to transport?

Applicants are advised that it would be to their advantage to hold a current driving licence or have access to a form of transport. Although this is not an essential requirement, it would be invaluable to allow students to attend their practice learning placements. Students can **not** be guaranteed a placement close to their home or university/college and **may** need to travel.

Applying to the Degree in NI

How do I apply to the Degree in NI?

All applications for the Degree in NI including those to the Regional Colleges and Relevant Graduate Route are through the UCAS system.

Applications are available from the UCAS website at **www.ucas.com** and can be made **online**.

If you need help or advice with your individual application, you should contact the UCAS Customer Service Unit as follows:

Customer Service Unit

UCAS

PO Box 28

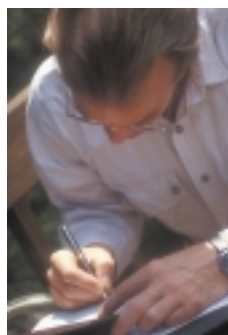
Cheltenham GL52 3LZ

Tel: 0871 468 0 468 or 0870 1122211 (for those outside the UK)

Email: **enquiries@ucas.ac.uk**

If you are at school or college you can also find out more about how to apply by talking to your careers adviser.

For confirmation of UCAS course codes, go to the UCAS web site "Course Search" section. This information should also be available in the universities/colleges prospectuses.



Timescales for applications

Applications to the Degree in NI can be made from **September**. The closing date for receipt of UCAS applications to the Degree in NI is **the following January (usually 15 January)**.

Can I make a late application?

UCAS will accept completed application forms until **the following June (usually 30 June)** but they will be stamped **late** and only forwarded to those courses that still have vacancies. Applicants considering making a late application are advised to contact the universities/colleges of their choice and ask if they are still considering applications. If places are still available, applications can be downloaded from the UCAS website at **www.ucas.com**

In practice, it is very unlikely that late applications will be considered by NI courses.

Acknowledgement of applications

Once applicants have applied, they will receive a 'Welcome Letter' from UCAS confirming their details and the courses they have applied for, which they must confirm is correct.

Tracking your application

The 'Welcome Letter' also provides details of the applicant's application number which they will need to access the tracking system. This system allows applicants to keep up to date with the progress of their application, respond to offers made and amend their personal details if necessary.

Northern Ireland interview and selection process

The universities/colleges will shortlist applicants initially on the basis of their UCAS application form. This is to ensure that the universities/colleges **minimum academic entry requirements** have been/are likely to be met. This may also include consideration of the personal statement on the UCAS form and applicants are encouraged to express their interest in social work at this stage.

The following process will then be applied to each applicant who has met the universities/colleges academic entry requirements.

- Stage 1:** Suitability for social work training — personal statement
- Stage 2:** Suitability for social work training — interview
- Stage 3:** Offers/Confirmation of offer
- Stage 4:** Application to register on the NISCC Social Care Register (see page 10 for details)

Stage One: Suitability for social work training — personal statement

All applicants who meet the universities/colleges academic criteria* will be required to complete a **600 word statement** on their knowledge of and aptitude for social work training.

All applicants will be selected for the suitability for training for social work interview on the basis of this statement.

When applicants are completing their personal statement, they must provide a typed statement of not more than 600 words that clearly answers the questions provided. At this stage it is important to highlight any relevant experience that they have gained to indicate their knowledge and/or understanding of social work and social services and to explain how their experience relates to social work. It is also vital for applicants to express their interest in social work, stating clearly their motivation and reasons for applying.

***Academic criteria for entry to the Degree are set by the academic institutions and may vary accordingly.**

Applicants should always check with social work admission/social work departments at each institution to confirm the current entry requirements for the year they are applying to the Degree.

Stage 2: Suitability for social work training — interview

The interview will assess if the applicant is suitable to train to be a social worker at degree level. Only those successful at the interview will be considered for offers.

Interview panels will consist of a minimum of two interviewers:

- **one from an educational establishment**
- **one from a statutory or voluntary organisation.**

Applicants are given the opportunity to highlight any practical/ personal experience and knowledge they have about social work and social services.



The practical/personal experience applicants have gained should help them understand some of the rewards and demands of working in a caring profession. It should inform their knowledge and understanding of social work and social services for example:

- **What has motivated them to apply to train to be a social worker?**
- **Do they understand the role of social workers and social services?**
- **Can they demonstrate some basic social work skills?**
- **Have they the ability to be flexible and open to new ideas and attitudes?**
- **Are they able to respect and respond to different cultures and perspectives?**
- **How have they obtained these attributes, knowledge and understanding?**
- **How has their academic training to date prepared them for social work training at degree level?**

Stage 3: Offers/Confirmation of Offer

Every university/college applied to will respond to each applicant individually through UCAS. There may be a variation in the grades which each university/college requires for entry, or the type of offer made.

The applicant must then inform UCAS of the offer(s) they wish to accept and the order of preference. Applicants are advised to refer to the UCAS handbook and correspondence for the specific details that affect their choice at this stage.

Applicants are expected to honour their commitments at Confirmation. If they are placed at a university/college in the UCAS system, they must take up that place or withdraw completely from that year's application cycle. They cannot turn down an offer and then enter Clearing or deal with any other institution which recruits through UCAS.

UCAS (UK) Clearing

Applicants who are unsuccessful in obtaining a place on a Degree course in NI will become eligible for the UCAS UK wide Clearing. They will automatically be sent a Clearing Passport as soon as they become eligible.

Applicants should also note if they do decide to take up a place outside of NI within the UK, they must find out what financial support is available to them. See page 25 for more information.

Financial support for NI students

Applicants should note, that NISCC does not have the authority or funding to provide any financial assistance to social work students.

This function is carried out by:

- **Education and Library Boards (ELBs) in NI who have the responsibility to assess student's eligibility for student support under the Student Support Regulations.**
- **Department of Health, Social Services, and Public Safety for NI (DHSSPS (NI)) - Incentive Scheme may also support some social work students.**

All students applying to the Degree in NI should, before accepting a place on any course, explore all funding options to check what financial support they are eligible to.



Education and Library Board Financial Support

Similar to other undergraduates, applicants applying for the Degree in Northern Ireland, who are not already employed as Regional Social Work Degree Trainees (see page 26 for details), may be eligible for financial support from their Education and Library Board. This can include access to student loans, fee loans, educational maintenance grants, disability allowances or childcare allowances.

Applicants should contact the student finance section of their local education and library board for more information on what is available, and if they are eligible for support.

Contact details for the boards can be found in the NISCC **Social Care Contacts** booklet.

Useful websites

Alternatively, you can log on to the Department of Employment and Learning websites for information on higher education funding at:

- www.studentfinancenir.co.uk
- www.delni.gov.uk (and follow the links to higher education and student funding)

DHSSPS - Incentive Scheme

In addition to any provisions made to students by their local Education and Library Board, the DHSSPS provides a Student Incentive Scheme. This includes up to £4,000 per year towards costs of studying, and a contribution of £500 per year towards the expenses related to work based learning.

These students must be domiciled in NI and studying for the Degree in Social Work in NI.

More information on the current arrangements for the Incentive Scheme for the Degree in Social Work can be obtained by contacting the DHSSPS as follows:

**Office of Social Services
DHSSPS,
Room C4, 22,
Castle Buildings,
Stormont,
Belfast,
BT4 3SQ**

Tel: 028 9052 0517

Web: www.dhsspsni.gov.uk

Applicants may also obtain a copy of the DHSSPS information leaflet from the NISCC website.

Applying for the DHSSPS Incentive Scheme

NI students, who have successfully **obtained** and **accepted** a place on the Degree in NI will be provided details of how to access the Incentive Scheme by their university/college.

This information will normally be forwarded to students with their course enrolment packs. Students must return the documentation to the DHSSPS.

This scheme does not apply to Regional Social Work Degree Trainees, who are salaried employees.

GB Students

Students domiciled in England, Scotland or Wales **will not be eligible** to benefit from the DHSSPS Incentive Scheme. Such students should contact their local education authority (LEA) for details of financial support available to them. Alternatively, they can contact their relevant social care council for more information about who their LEA or funder is as follows:-

Students from England should check the General Social Care Council (GSCC) website at:

- **www.gsc.org.uk**

Students from Wales should check the Care Council for Wales (CCWales) website at:

- **www.ccwales.org.uk**

Students from Scotland should check the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) website at:

- **www.sssc.uk.com**

EU Students

If a student has been accepted on to a NISCC approved degree course in NI but is normally resident outside of NI they will not be eligible to benefit from the DHSSPS Incentive Scheme, unless they have been resident in NI for three years or more before the start date of a course. EU students who do not meet this residency criteria should contact:

The EU Customer Services Team
Student Loans Company
Room 38, Mowden Hall, Staindrop Road,
Darlington, Co. Durham DL3 9BG

Tel: 0141 243 3570 (10am to 4pm)

Email: EU_Team@slc.co.uk

Qualifying for Social Work outside NI

NISCC will register social workers who have qualified elsewhere in the UK, provided they have undertaken an approved social work course. This refers to social work courses that have been approved by one of the four social care councils within the UK. (See page 24 for details of the councils.)

Please note: Applicants domiciled in NI and applying to social work courses outside of NI **will not be eligible** to benefit from the DHSSPS Incentive Scheme. They are advised to contact their local education and library board to ascertain what funding they are eligible to, before accepting a social work place.

Regional Social Work Degree Trainee Scheme

The Regional Social Work Degree Trainee (RSWD Trainee) scheme is an **employment** scheme introduced in 2003 to facilitate more mature and suitably experienced men and women to enter the social work profession. RSWD Trainees are employed by a Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT) or by a voluntary organisation, and are paid a salary while they complete the full time Degree in Social Work.

How does this scheme work?

Since it was first introduced RSWD Trainee positions have normally been advertised through the regional press, usually the Belfast Telegraph and some local papers during February or March of each year for recruitment of trainees by the following September.

If applicants are successful in securing a RSWD trainee position, they will usually start employment with either a HSCT or voluntary organisation in September. This will be a **salaried position**.

During the RSWD Trainees first year of employment, they are expected **as a condition of their contract** to apply through the UCAS system for a place on the Degree in Social Work in NI. **If they are successful** in obtaining such a place, they will be seconded on full salary to complete the Degree in Social Work from the following September or start date of their course.

Entry criteria for the trainee scheme

As this scheme is recruited on an annual basis entry requirements may vary from year to year.

Generally applicants must have:

- **GCSE Mathematics and English (at Grade C or above) or equivalent.**
- **3 'A' Levels at grade B or an equivalent performance in other qualifications such as, HND, BTEC, Irish Leaving Certificate, Open University, Access programmes.**
- **3 years regular and sustained paid or voluntary work experience in social care or a related field* in the past 5 years.**
- **Hold a full current driving licence and have access to a car at the closing date or have access to a form of transport.**

***Related experience can be defined as the following - Education, Health, Community Work & Youth and Community Work.**

Please note, RSWD Trainees are not guaranteed a place on a Degree course.

RSWD Trainees should note that they are only contracted for the duration of their degree course and they must seek employment in open competition once they qualify or their course ends.

**Contact
Information Service**

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

Tel: 028 90 417600
Fax: 028 90 417601
Textphone: 028 90 239340

Web: **www.niscc.info**
Email: **info@nisocialcarecouncil.org.uk**

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