



Curriculum Guidance for the Degree in Social Work

The Northern Ireland Context

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The Degree in Social Work

Curriculum Guidance: The Northern Ireland Context

1. Introduction

Social workers practise in a society of complexity, change and diversity. This diversity is reflected through religion, ethnicity, culture, language, social status, family structure and lifestyle. While social work training needs to prepare students to work with individuals from different backgrounds and cultures, it is important that it also takes account of the particular needs of providing services in Northern Ireland. The impact of past and current violence, conflicts and divisions in Northern Irish society requires particular emphasis in the education and training of social work students in Northern Ireland. (Adapted from the Northern Ireland Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work, March 2003)

The Framework Specification specifies the skills, knowledge and competence requirements of professional training and the curriculum content of degree courses is determined by the Framework.

This curriculum guidance has been produced to support course providers to:

- (a) help students understand the nature of social work services in a diverse society with particular reference to institutional and structural discrimination including sectarianism, disempowerment and anti-oppressive practice;
- (b) focus on the specific needs of social work students training to work in a society in which views about the conflict are contested;
- (c) prepare students to work with individuals in communities dealing with the reality and consequences of conflict.

This curriculum guidance has been produced to provide guidance and reference materials to assist course providers to deliver a curriculum that helps social work students to progressively locate themselves, as both products of, and change agents within, the dynamic environment of social work and social policy in Northern Ireland.

It contains a 'read across' to the Framework Specification references. It also includes references to relevant legislation, web based resources, reports, training materials and bibliography.

2. Curriculum Areas

- 2.1 To have an understanding of the Northern Ireland Context it is important to explore the different layers that make up the lived or felt experience for citizens. These layers overlap and are interdependent. It is important that providers, in constructing the curriculum, use a range of theories: historical, political, organisational, legal, sociological, psychological.
- 2.2 Whilst there needs to be a historical aspect to the political, organisational and legal contexts, there is also a need to address the history of Ireland discretely. Indeed this is the base from which the other aspects of the Northern Ireland Context should be taught. In examining international patterns of colonialism and of post-colonial development students can begin to examine the complexities of the situation in a comparative and fairly safe manner. Teachers and educators can then begin to weave the more personal and interpersonal aspects of the Northern Ireland Context into the curriculum in a measured, paced and sensitive manner. The challenge must be faced of equipping students with those values, knowledge and skills which will assist them in dealing with the prejudice and discrimination which arises out of a sectarian society. This can no longer be avoided – teachers and educators must take the lead in modeling a safe learning environment within which these difficult issues can be addressed.

3. Purpose of the Curriculum Guidance

- 3.1 This guidance and associated reference materials, is intended to be used in a dynamic manner. Students should develop their critical faculties in dealing with the Northern Ireland Context. There are many different perspectives which can be applied to the increasingly dynamic political and social circumstances which exist in Northern Ireland. It is important not to claim certainty or longevity for any particular understanding. It is important that educators assist students in examining issues from a range of perspectives, to demonstrate an understanding of complexities and to identify positive ways forward for individuals, groups and communities. This fits with the important view that students should qualify as reflective practitioners.
- 3.2 The guidance is intended for use in the academic, practice learning and practice fields, by lecturers, tutors, practice teachers and other staff. It can be applied in a range of settings, statutory, voluntary, and using different practice models - casework, family and community. The Northern Ireland Context ought to be integral in the teaching, supporting and assessing of students.

- 3.3 It is intended that this guidance will assist in helping students to progressively locate themselves, as both products of, and change agents within, the dynamic environment of social work and social policy in Northern Ireland. The Social Work profession needs confident, competent practitioners who understand themselves, know their society, can relate positively to service users and communities, and can challenge received ideas.
- 3.4 The references noted for each section are to be found in Column C of the Framework Specification document which sets out the underpinning knowledge required to achieve the Degree in Social Work.

4. Historical & Political

[Framework Specification References: C 7, 20, 32, 33, 34, 69]

- 4.1 The historical context must consider the development of the state in Northern Ireland and the complex, yet important factors which led to political and social violence. The curriculum should account for competing histories of the last hundred years, and relationships, not just within Northern Ireland (encompassing the civil rights movement, the collapse of Stormont and return to Direct Rule in 1972), but also between Britain and the Republic of Ireland, as well as wider international contexts.
- 4.2 Student social workers need the opportunity to develop political awareness, both in terms of process (how policy is made and also how to be proactive in informing policy) and in product (understanding political concepts and philosophies).
- 4.3 Some aspects for consideration are:
- The history of colonial patterns, and post-colonial patterns;
 - The history of Britain's involvement in Ireland;
 - The events leading to the foundation of the Northern Ireland state;
 - The long-lasting contested nature of state, including IRA campaigns up to the early 60s;
 - Patterns of Nationalist/Catholic emigration;
 - The development and impact of compulsory education and of segregated schooling by religion and disability;
 - The system of majority rule, defined along boundaries of national identity and religion;
 - The linking of this 'permanent' majority rule, by the Civil Rights movement, to claims of gerrymandering in elections and discrimination in employment and housing. The parallels drawn by

the Civil Rights movement to the Race issue in the United States of America;

- Early Civil Rights Protests, the reaction of the State, the resort to civil disobedience, the introduction of civil disorder and violence;
- The 'Troubles', suspicion, fear, harassment, intimidation, atrocities, increased sectarianism, increasingly segregated housing patterns, demographic change;
- The moves towards peace, 1994 ceasefires, 1998 Belfast Agreement, the Northern Ireland Assembly, return to Direct Rule etc;
- The development of Integrated, Independent and Irish Medium education;
- The changes to the criminal justice system and policing;
- The development of restorative justice;
- The influence of victims, survivors and a radical community sector; and
- The management of division.

4.4 Much of this material is adapted from the work of the University of Ulster's Future Ways Programme, which has interpreted the history, politics, identity and religious divides (including separated schooling) through international colonial and post-colonial patterns. Concepts such as 'contested society' and 'ethnic frontiers' are promoted which link localised issues to broader historical (and present day) patterns of state formation. The political perspective of this work includes understanding the:

- context and dynamics of an ethnic frontier;
- importance of the workplace in a contested society; and
- implications for agencies seeking to promote trust building on such a context.

5. Legal

[Framework Specification References: C 4, 17, 28, 32, 33, 36, 43, 62, 76, 79, 83]

5.1 This aspect of the Northern Ireland Context needs to deal with both process and product. A critical overview of how laws are made for Northern Ireland, highlighting differences in this system (for example the process of Orders in Council) should lead to an awareness of accountability and the workings of government. It is important also to note the role of quasi-autonomous, non-governmental organisations.

5.2 In addition the impact of the Peace Process and the process of implementation of the various aspects of the Belfast Agreement are relevant to the understanding of the legal framework in Northern Ireland. The establishment and suspensions of the Northern Ireland Assembly, the recognition of victims' issues and the establishment of

the Victims Unit in Office of First Minister & Deputy First Minister are some of the factors that must be understood within the Northern Ireland Context.

- 5.3 Reference should be made to the legislation and guidance for social workers in Northern Ireland in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 respectively.

6. Organisational

[Framework Specification References: C 2, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 31, 40, 52, 55, 57, 60, 62, 65, 66, 68]

- 6.1 Students need to be aware of the development of social work services, locally, nationally and internationally, as the mechanism of the market is introduced throughout the public sector. There is a need to trace the history of social work in Northern Ireland, from its early beginnings in the Poor Law through the development of the welfare state and recent developments in the provision for and delivery of care. Issues which are particularly relevant to the Northern Ireland Context include the establishment of integrated structures for the delivery of health and social services in Northern Ireland in 1973, the introduction of general management at area level in 1985 and at unit level in 1990 and the establishment of Trusts in 1992. The political arrangements that flow from a devolved government need to be understood and contextualized in practice.
- 6.2 In particular the following areas should be addressed in the curriculum.
- The founding and development of 'neutral' agencies such as H&PSS as a contrast to 'biased' local councils.
 - The locking-in of this notion of neutral, technocratic organisations and professionals; the denial of the personal. How this served a purpose for its time; how it led to a distancing of the professionals and organisations from grass-roots activity and influence.
 - The under-acknowledged and under-reported activities of certain front-line staff continuing to deliver services and negotiate with paramilitary representatives. That is, neutrality and pragmatism.
 - The influence of Thatcherism, private market techniques and philosophy and general management.
 - Recent policy trends towards partnership with service users, carers, group and communities.
 - The importance of service users, carers and communities within training and registration arrangements for social workers.
 - The spread of diversity issues into mainstream governmental initiatives and into the global private sector.

7. Social, Cultural and Sociological Contexts

[Framework Specification References: C 1, 7, 12, 20, 28, 30, 31, 83, 85]

7.1 The socio-economic context of Northern Ireland should be addressed by examining the relatively high levels of disadvantage in the province. From a sociological perspective the issues of poverty, unemployment, housing, education, crime, segregation, discrimination and dislocation need to be considered.

7.2 The following factors should be considered.

- The impact of the legacy of 'single party' Majority Rule, the contested nature of the state, attitudes to law, order and policing.
- The relationship of religions to the state and national and cultural identity.
- Similarities and differences in world views between Protestantism and Catholicism linked to mistrust, fear and division.
- The subjectivity of sectarianism.
- The impact of ghettoisation.
- The influence of paramilitary organisations.
- The traditionally social conservatism of Northern Ireland compared with historical radical perspectives.
- The impact of segregation in respect of schooling, housing, sport, leisure, employment, symbols, music, dance and language, for example.
- The traditional views of 'other' minorities as being unimportant, including the denial of race, gender and other issues that have the potential for discrimination.
- The development of the more recent radical perspectives and advocacy groups such as Women's Aid, Gay Rights and others.
- The break-up of traditional manufactory industries and the effects of globalisation.
- The impact of being on the 'fringe' of Europe, Britain and Ireland.
- Patterns of identity and belonging, including how sectarianism, fear etc. have influenced these and the forces pushing towards single identity.
- Mechanisms of coping with mistrust, fear, intimidation, harassment, violence, post-traumatic stress, victims issues, issues around healing, reconciliation.
- Adherence to, and influence of, non-state organisations e.g. Orange Order.
- Anti-oppressive practice in social work and beyond.

8. Psychological Context

[Framework Specification References: C 12, 18, 19, 20, 23, 56]

- 8.1 The psychological impact and legacy of the Troubles should have a clear focus. For example:
- Attitudes and prejudices;
 - Behavioural perspectives;
 - Mechanisms of defence and denial;
 - Trauma and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder;
 - Psychodynamic interpretations of the conflict;
 - Cognitive distortions and antisocial logic;
 - Family break-up; and
 - Community dislocation.
- 8.2 There needs to be consideration of the impact of these issues on children, young people and adults in terms of human behaviour and development. The formation and importance of identity in the Northern Ireland Context is an area that overlaps both sociological and psychological perspectives.

9. Personal and Interpersonal

[Framework Specification References: C56, 75, 77, 78]

- 9.1 It is vital that students' own attitudes are explored and challenged throughout training. Opportunities must be provided by tutors and practice teachers to enable students to address this area. Discomfort will be created for students, but this must be seen as a necessary, integral part of preparing to work in the Northern Ireland Context. Course providers and trainers need to be creative and sensitive in addressing the area of sectarianism. It is an area which requires skilful handling, and facilitators will require training, support and re-training in order to raise the issues and manage students' learning in a positive manner. Students need to be enabled to develop a reflective capacity and competence in active reflection. It is an area of risk for students, tutors and practice teachers.
- 9.2 Some of the themes, which are of relevance, are noted below:
- The defining of identity by religion and nationality;
 - The process of identifying who the other is in order to regulate conversation;
 - The denial of our backgrounds, identity, differences when meeting and working with people from 'the other side';
 - The conspiracy of silence and the need for risk taking;
 - Fears of being misunderstood, having stereotypes reinforced, or of being targeted;

- Trends towards challenging this silence, experiments in addressing inter-personal issues; and
- The need for cross community and single identity work.

10. Resources

- 10.1 The list of resource material (Appendix 3) is not definitive but is available to support all those involved in the teaching and learning process.

Appendix

I. Legislation for Social Workers in Northern Ireland

It should be noted that the following list is accurate at time of publication.

Adoption (NI) Order 1987

Carers and Direct Payments Act (NI) 2002
Children and Young Persons Act (NI) 1968
Children (NI) Order 1995
Children (NI) Order Regulations and Guidance (8 volumes)
Children's Evidence (NI) Order 1995
Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) 2002
Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons (NI) Act 1978
Commissioner for Complaints (NI) Order 1995
Commissioner for Children and Young People (NI) Order 2003
Criminal Evidence (NI) Order 1988
Criminal Evidence (NI) Order 1999
Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994
Criminal Justice (NI) Order 1980
Criminal Justice (NI) Order 1986
Criminal Justice (NI) Order 1991
Criminal Justice (NI) Order 1996
Criminal Justice (NI) Order 1998
Criminal Justice (Children)(NI) Order 1998
Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885

Data Protection Act 1998
Disability (Grants) Act 1993
Disabled Persons (NI) Act 1989
Disability Discrimination Act 1995
Disabled Persons Employment (NI) Act 1945
Domestic Proceedings (NI) Order 1980

Education (NI) Order 1996
Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986
Enduring Powers of Attorney (NI) Order 1987
Equal Pay Act 1970, amended 1984

Fair Employment (NI) Act 1989
Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998
Family Homes and Domestic Violence (NI) Order 1998
Family Law Act (NI) 2001
Freedom of Interpretation Act 2000 (implemented by 2005)

Health and Personal Social Services (NI) Order 1972
Health and Personal Social Services (NI) Order 1991
Health and Personal Social Services (NI) Order 1994
Health and Personal Social Services Act (NI) 2002

Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement etc.)(NI) Order 2003

Homosexual Offences (NI) Order 1982

Housing (NI) Order 1981

Housing (NI) Order 1988

Housing (NI) Order 1992

Housing (NI) Order 1996

Housing Support Services (NI) Order 2003

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990

Human Rights Act 1998

Justice (NI) Act 2002

Legal Aid, Advice and Assistance (NI) Order 1981

Magistrates' Courts (NI) Order 1981

Mental Health (NI) Order 1986

Northern Ireland Act 1974

Northern Ireland Act 1998

Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1973

Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978

Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996

Ombudsman (NI) Order 1996

Offences against the Person Act 1861

Parliamentary Commissioner Act (NI) 1969

Police and Criminal Evidence (NI) Order 1989

Power of Attorney Act (NI) 1971

Probation Act (NI) 1950

Probation Board (NI) Order 1982

Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults (NI) Order 2003

Protection of the Person and Property Act (NI) 1969

Public Order (NI) Order 1987

Protection from Harassment (NI) Order 1997

Race Relations (NI) Order 1997

Registered Homes (NI) Order 1972

Rent (NI) Order 1978

Rehabilitation of Offenders (NI) Order 1978

Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976

Sex Offenders Act 1997

Treatment of Offenders Act (NI) 1968

Treatment of Offenders (NI) Order 1976

Treatment of Offenders (NI) Order 1989

Appendix

II. Government Policy for Social Workers in Northern Ireland

It should be noted that the following list is accurate at time of publication.

People First: Community Care in NI for the 1990s, DHSS, 1990

Guidance on the abuse of vulnerable adults, DHSS, 1996

Guidance on Carer's Assessments, DHSS, 1996 (Legal provision now in place since 2002 regarding carers assessments)

Good practice in consent: Consent for examination, treatment or care, DHSSPS, 2003

Children (NI) Order Guidance and regulations:

Vol 1: Court Orders and other legal issues (1996)

Vol 2: Family Support, Childminding and Day Care (1996)

Vol 3: Family Placements and Private Fostering (1996)

Vol 4: Residential care (1996)

Vol 5: Children with a disability (1996)

Vol 6: Co-operating to Safeguard Children (2003)

Vol 7: Schools accommodating children (2000)

Vol 8: Northern Ireland Guardian ad Litem Agency

Guidance for Vulnerable or Intimidated Witnesses, including children.

Guidance on Discharge from Hospital, DHSS, 1996

Appendix

III. Resources

Websites

www.dhsspsni.gov.uk
www.hmsso.gov.uk
www.capacitybuilder.co.uk
www.childlink.co.uk
www.niwaf.org
www.nihrc.org
www.democraticdialogue.org

Reports and Training Materials

CCETSW(NI) (1999) Getting Off the Fence: Challenging Sectarianism in Personal Social Services, London: Belfast.

Conflict Trauma Resource Centre (Telephone 028 9092 6060)

National Social Work Qualifications Board/Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (2001) Crossing Borders Resource Pack, Dublin: NQSWB.

Triax Consultation Report (2003) Tackling Inequalities – Bridging the Gap.

The Future Ways Programme , University of Ulster in association with Counteract provides a range of training materials (Telephone 028 7032 4550 or 028 9023 7023)

The Equity, Diversity and Interdependence Framework : A Framework for Organisational Learning and Change. (2001) Future Ways Programme, University of Ulster in association with Counteract.

Investing in Trust Building and 'Good Relations' in a Public Sector Organisation : Summary Report. (2003). Future Ways Programme, University of Ulster in association with Counteract.

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Healey, A. (1996) 'Systemic therapy in a culture of conflict: developing a therapeutic conversation', Child Care in Practice, **3**, 1.

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McGuinness, D., Carney, J., Finn, P. and McGeehan, I. (2002) 'Crossing the bridge of hope with children in Omagh', Child Care in Practice, **6**, 4, 306-315.

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