

**NORTHERN IRELAND
SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL**

**QUALITY 2020 ANNUAL
PROGRESS REPORT**

APRIL 2020 – MARCH 2021

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FOREWORD BY PATRICIA HIGGINS, INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE

I am pleased to present the Northern Ireland Social Care Council's (Social Care Council) Annual Quality 2020 Report for 2020/21. This is the eighth Report produced by the Social Care Council in response to the Quality 2020 Strategy which was produced by the Department of Health (DoH) in 2012.

The Social Care Council is the regulatory body for the social care workforce in Northern Ireland and is responsible for promoting high quality standards of workforce training and practice.

This has been an exceptionally difficult and challenging year for everyone both personally and professionally. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on everyone on a world wide scale. The Social Care Council, like many organisations and employers, started working remotely from home from March 2020. That in itself presented many challenges however as can be seen in this report and our Annual Report 2020/21, we have found new and innovative ways around delivering our services and have strengthened our support for registrants, employers and the Department of Health (DoH) who are our sponsoring body.

We have also taken the opportunity this year to include a section in this Report on some of the quality improvement initiatives that we have delivered during the year. Responding to front line responsibilities and initiatives however has come at a cost with some of our planned ambitions and activities being on hold or deferred – and some that just took longer to do.

As this Report is written the COVID pandemic is still very much with us and while some social distancing measures have reduced, there is still transmission of the pandemic across the population and for this reason, and to keep our staff safe, we continue to work remotely from home.

Now more than ever delivering quality services, quality initiatives and quality change is important. The initial three to six months of this business year found us all focusing on core services – and getting that right. However as we transition into different ways of working – some of which have brought many benefits – the how we deliver services really matters. That part of delivering services that remains about quality. It remains about high standards. And it remains about transformation.

During the year we were recognised with the European Social Services for our co-production work in developing COVID-19 resources and won the 'Outstanding Team Award'. Towards

the end of the business year we were also notified of being assessed as an IIP Gold Standard employer under the new framework – and were the first HSC body to be awarded this accreditation – and only one of three public sector organisations in Northern Ireland to be assessed as Gold Standard.

To do this, and the many other initiatives referred to in this report is a significant achievement. Quality remains one of our corner stones of delivering high quality services to all.

We set out the various ways in which we have delivered quality improvement in our business throughout this Report which are detailed under the following headings –

- Transforming the Culture;
- Strengthening the Workforce;
- Measuring the Improvement;
- Raising the Standards;
- Integrating with Care.

As in previous years' Annual Quality Reports, we have also added an action plan for 2021/22 building on our learning to date and the environment in which we currently operate.

We welcome feedback on this Report and our services generally, to help us ensure we are doing the right things in the right way to provide high quality services to all our customers and stakeholders.



Patricia Higgins

PATRICIA HIGGINS
INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE,
NORTHERN IRELAND SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL

INTRODUCTION

When Quality 2020 was published by the then Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in 2011, it set out a ten year strategy with the guiding principle to protect and improve the quality of services delivered in health and social care. Significant progress has been made since then which is evidenced through each of our annual progress reports. We continued to make progress with our Quality 2020 programme during 2019/20 and this is explained in this year's Q2020 Annual Report.

The ten year strategy identified five strategic themes against which organisations, including the Social Care Council, could monitor progress and set achievable targets. These are –

- Transforming the Culture;
- Strengthening the Workforce;
- Measuring the Improvement;
- Raising the Standards;
- Integrating with Care.

The extent to which the Social Care Council has delivered against each of these themes is detailed throughout this Annual Report.

The Social Care Council is a non-Departmental Public Body sponsored by the Department of Health (DoH). It is the regulatory body for the social care workforce in Northern Ireland. Its role is to regulate and register social workers, social care workers and those studying for the Degree in Social Work. It also supports professional development across the workforce.

The Social Care Council's vision is to ***'Improve Standards in Social Care'***

To achieve this the Social Care Council delivers its work programme aligned to five strategic themes –

- ***Standards*** – Putting Standards at the heart of social work and social care practice and education and training;
- ***Regulation*** – Regulate the Workforce and Social Work Education and Training;
- ***Workforce Development*** – Develop the Social Work and Social Care Workforce;
- ***Systems Leadership*** – Promote a Systems Leadership Approach across the Social Care Sector; and
- ***Communications and Engagement*** – Communicate, Connect and Engage.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The Social Care Council started working remotely from home from 19 March 2020 in response to Government advice and the social distancing measures which were announced last year. All staff were already equipped with laptops to enable them to work remotely and were supported in adjusting to working from home. The organisation developed a Supplementary Plan to its Business Continuity Plan to set out its priorities and operational arrangements during the pandemic.

Since then staff have remained working from home. The impact of the pandemic has been unprecedented on home lives, working lives, families and communities. The Social Care Council continued to deliver an ambitious programme of work to support the sector in the quality of care provided to so many during the pandemic.

Supporting the Sector

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought into sharp focus the value and importance of the social work and social care workforces. Throughout the pandemic social workers and social care workers remained resolute, delivering care and support to those in need. However, it was a workforce that, like others in the HSC, was also impacted by the pandemic and there was a recognition that additional support was required. In the early stages of the pandemic the Department of Health asked the Social Care Council to support a 'call-out' to social workers and social care workers who had previously left the workforce, to return to help support their colleagues. The Social Care Council supported this campaign through social media and videos, while within the organisation 'emergency procedures' were put in place to fast track registrants onto the register.

Online Services



With the social care workforce under pressure to deliver services, more accessible ways to access learning and support resource materials were needed. The Social Care Council remodelled a number of its learning platforms on its 'Learning Zone' so that these could be accessed by registrants and employers 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This flexible approach meant that registrants could also access learning advice and

support when they were actively working. An example of this was the 'Supporting Good Infection Control' guidance which was shared with the workforce.

In addition, the Social Care Council had been working on its new website and registrants' portal. These new websites were launched during the year, and provided for all of the Social Care Council's services to be accessed remotely.



Communications and Engagement

The Social Care Council delivered an extensive range of online resources and used social media to push out key messages and information to the sector. This included presentational videos with front line social care workers and also supporting the 'Clap for Carers' on a Thursday evening.

When the DoH asked the Social Care Council to help promote and support its vaccination campaign to encourage the social care workforce to avail of the vaccine, the Social Care Council developed a communication campaign in support of this.



The Social Care Council started to redevelop its lunchtime seminars during the year. Prior to COVID-19 these seminars were held (up to 12 each year) in the Social Care Council's offices in Belfast and were very popular – often being oversubscribed and restricted to up to 60 people within the office environment. With social distancing and remote working, the Social Care Council launched its first online lunchtime seminar in September 2020. The uptake was significant, and since then the organisation has hosted 12 seminars across a wide range of topics.

The advantage of this approach also enabled a greater reach across the workforce – with 150 and more attending each of the seminars – with the only restriction on attendance being the capacity of the video conferencing software. Going forward the Social Care Council will wish to get the balance right between face to face seminars and online engagement.

These initiatives and quality improvements are captured throughout this Quality 2020 Progress Report – a year of high quality delivery and improvement throughout a worldwide pandemic.

Our Vision - Improved standards in social work and social care

Our Values

There are four key values which underpin our culture that set a foundation for how we work with those around us.

Respect

Integrity

Partnership

Excellence

We promote Respect

We are trusted by the sector to support good social work and social care practice. We respect the rights, dignity and inherent worth of individuals.

We work with Integrity

We work with integrity and are mindful of our responsibilities and hold ourselves and others to account. We are open, honest and respectful with all our stakeholders.

We believe in Partnership

We are a people focused organisation that is committed to doing what is right. Through genuine partnership, we work to ensure what we do makes a difference.

We strive for Excellence

We take a professional approach in putting standards at the heart of social work and social care. We proactively support the development of the social care workforce and we proactively support the development of our staff.

Our Purpose - To protect the public and safeguard service users through the regulation and development of the social work and social care workforce

The Social Care Council also has a strategic objective to support its corporate function which is to ***'ensure it has the right infrastructure and leadership in place across its people, resources, governance, quality and systems'***.

The Social Care Council's core values are embedded in its work practices and culture. The four core values are –

- ***Respect – we promote respect***

We are trusted by the sector to support good social work and social care practice. We respect the rights, dignity and inherent worth of individuals.

- ***Integrity – we work with integrity***

We work with integrity and are mindful of our responsibilities and hold ourselves and others to account. We are open, honest and respectful with all our stakeholders.

- ***Partnership – we believe in partnership***

We are a people focused organisation that is committed to doing what is right. Through genuine partnership, we work to ensure what we do makes a difference.

- ***Excellence – we strive for excellence***

We take a professional approach in putting standards at the heart of social work and social care. We proactively support the development of the social care workforce and we proactively support the development of our staff.

Registered Workforce

The Social Care Council is responsible for the registration and regulation of the social care workforce in Northern Ireland. There were 52,013 people registered with the Social Care Council at the end of March 2021.

PROGRESS AGAINST OUR 2020/21 ACTION PLAN

Every year we set out a range of actions in support of our Quality 2020 agenda. Last year we set out five key actions. Of these three actions were completed. The remaining two outstanding actions will be carried into 2021/22 and 2022/23 respectively, as set out in the table below. (A new action Plan for 2021/22 can be found on page 27 of this Report).

	ACTIVITY	HOW AND WHEN	PROGRESS
1	We will ensure quality is part of the Quarterly Check in conversation with all staff	By March 2021 This will be tested during the year through surveys and one to one feedback.	Completed. Quarterly check ins continue to be effective however we will also continue to review their impact and ensure they remain fit for purpose.
2	We will develop a new website to improve the user experience and journey online.	By March 2021 – we will launch the new website and keep it under regular review.	Completed. We launched our new website to ensure the focus was on the user journey.
3	We will develop our online Portal and the Learning Zone to encourage more registrants and employers to engage with us in this way.	By March 2021 – we will have a new Portal and revamped Learning Zone in place.	Completed. We developed a new Portal and developed a wide range of new and remodelled resources to support the sector.
4	We will review the effectiveness of our Socrates Improvement Board against its Terms of Reference.	By March 2021 – we will carry out a self-assessment against the ToR.	Not Completed. It was not possible to complete this work due to pressures on the team to respond to front line matters in support of the social care sector. This work will be completed in 2021/22.
5	We will start a review on how quality is embedded in the organisation (with a view to reporting on this in the following business year).	By March 2021 – we will create a hub of all evidence of quality improvement and initiatives and test for any gaps or missed opportunities.	Not Completed. Work to develop the hub was deferred due to resourcing issues. These resourcing issues have continued and this work will be deferred until 2022/23.

TRANSFORMING THE CULTURE

Q2020 states: “We will make achieving high quality the top priority at all levels in health and social care. We will promote and encourage partnerships between staff, patients, clients and carers to support decision making.”

This means creating a new and dynamic culture that is even more willing to embrace change, innovation and new thinking that can contribute to a safer and more effective service. It will require strong leadership, widespread involvement and partnership-working by everyone.

TRANSFORMING THE CULTURE IN THE SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL

The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (Social Care Council) primarily delivers its services to the social care workforce (social workers, social care workers, and those studying for the Degree in Social Work) with the aim of ensuring people have a safe and high quality experience when using social work and social care services. In addition, the Social Care Council works with and supports a range of partners and stakeholders, including employers in the statutory, voluntary and private sectors, universities and colleges, commissioners, regulators and service users and carers.

In striving for excellence the Social Care Council ensures quality improvement is at the heart of its business. For this reason the Social Care Council’s quality agenda sits across multiple levels of business operations which are explained below.

Leadership

The Social Care Council has two Directorates: Registration and Corporate Services, and Regulation and Standards. The Directors along with the Chief Executive comprise the Social Care Council’s Senior Leadership Team (SLT). ***An organisational structure for the Social Care Council is attached at Annex A.***

The Registration and Corporate Services Directorate is responsible for the registration of the social care workforce, and a number of corporate service functions including Database Development, Finance, HR, Procurement, Administration, and Regulatory Committee Management.

The Regulation and Standards Directorate is responsible for the regulation of the social care workforce including setting the Standards of Conduct and Practice for the workforce, setting the standards for and regulating social work education and training, and ensuring appropriate qualifications and training frameworks with relevant content and resources are in place to support the continuous development of both the social work and social care workforce. The Directorate is also responsible for investigating allegations relating to a registered worker’s fitness to practise.

The Social Care Council accounts for its performance against quality standards in monthly Business Performance Reports to the SLT and to the Social Care Council's Board in quarterly Business Performance Reports. Both reports focus on achievement of outcomes and identify areas for improvement, enabling SLT and/or the Board to scrutinise assurances, support innovation and make policy decisions. The Social Care Council also has an Evaluation Framework in place which details how it ensures the outcomes and impacts detailed in its Corporate and Business Plans are measured and analysed.

The Board, in providing strategic direction for the Social Care Council, has been actively committed to supporting quality improvement both within the Council and in its outward engagement, setting ambitious objectives that include an influencing role for the Council at a system leadership level across Health and Social Care. This positioning provides opportunity to influence and contribute to quality and improvement at a whole system level.

Securing Involvement

The Social Care Council has continued to ensure that it plans, delivers and assesses its business with a focus on high quality and improvement based on feedback, involvement and participation at all levels – including from registrants, service users and carers, staff and other stakeholders.

Examples of securing involvement in relation to staff during 2020/21 include –

- Senior Leadership Team (SLT) meetings with all staff to discuss a range of business matters. This includes monthly online Townhall meetings with all staff. During the year, teams took the opportunity to present and share their experiences of working and living during the pandemic using innovative and creative presentations and videos to capture the essence of their experiences.
- The organisation designed a new appraisal system and started to embed this during the year – this new approach is called Quarterly Check-Ins, which provide a much more conversation based and engaging way to have constructive conversations, and including opportunities to discuss leadership, quality and values in addition to performance and development;
- All staff were engaged in the development of the new Business Plan for 2021/22. This included events to bring all staff together to inform the new Business Plan, joint sessions with the Board and the Participation Partnership (which comprises people who use services and their carers) and through team meetings;
- The Chief Executive and Senior Leadership Team held meetings with staff to congratulate individuals and teams' efforts. This was supplemented with emails to all staff and teams noting key team efforts and milestones;
- Monthly team meetings take place across all teams in the Social Care Council where all team members can discuss projects which went well and those which have been a challenge. Monthly team meetings are in place across every team with information

being cascaded between teams and also to the Operational Leadership Team (OLT) which comprises the heads of each function and with the SLT;

- Registration statistics are shared openly in the office, with staff and team members working fluidly between teams and ensuring resources are continually placed where the pressure most demands it. This includes the sharing of information with all staff on a monthly basis.

The Social Care Council has a 'no blame' culture and as part of this, continual learning and training around near miss and data breaches are discussed with relevant staff, procedures amended and improved if possible and learning taken forward from these issues. In addition, all managers encourage an open and honest dialogue with their teams to ensure staff feel they can raise issues. Securing involvement of staff is recognised as a critical element of creating a learning and improvement culture. This has highlighted the importance of listening and empowering people to lead and be part of real change.

Values, Behaviours and Culture

The HSC Cultural Assessment Survey reported a very strong culture within the organisation – with strength in leadership and partnership working. The findings of the survey were shared with all staff with a view of continuing to do what we do well. We also used a number of pulse surveys during the year to ensure we kept the culture relevant and that it reflected the change in working from a home rather than office environment. These surveys also demonstrated a strong supportive culture across and between teams.

Engagement

The Social Care Council has a strong track record of engaging with its workforce but also in terms of engaging its registrants, stakeholders, service users and carers, and employers. Engagement however went online during the year. This was enabled through a number of Social Care Echo workshops and Lunchtime seminars. Due to the online format, we found a greater reach out to the sector and will wish to keep aspects of this form of engagement ongoing in the future.

Partnership Working

The Social Care Council has four partnerships in place which supports its business. These are –

- Participation Partnership
- Registrants' Forum
- Leaders in Social Care Partnership
- Professional in Practice Partnership

Participation Partnership

One of the ways in which the Social Care Council oversees its engagement with service users and carers is through its Participation Partnership which is chaired by a Board Member

and comprises a number of people who use services and carers with a wide experience of the social care system in Northern Ireland. The Participation Partnership oversees the quality and quantity of engagement and challenges the way in which the Social Care Council designs and delivers its business, ensuring it is people focused and impactful.

The Participation Partnership, has been instrumental during the year in overseeing the quality and quantity of engagement by the Social Care Council, including –

- Working with the Social Care Council to develop its Business Plan for 2021/22; and
- Social Work Awards – Members gave a significant amount of personal time to prepare for and take part in the Awards judging panels.
- Review of the Landscape Review of the organisation;
- Joint presentation to the International Association of Schools of Social Work.

Registrants' Forum

The Social Care Council's register at the end of March 2020 included almost 45,000 registrants across Northern Ireland. To co-ordinate engagement with this group, the Social Care Council supports a Registrants' Forum, chaired by a registrant and comprising representatives from each part of the register. The Registrants' Forum provides a vehicle through which the views of registrants can be properly and adequately represented.

Leaders in Social Care Partnership

The Leaders in Social Care Partnership (previously called the Workforce Development Partnership) was reformed during the year with a focus on supporting the transformation and development of the social care workforce in Northern Ireland.

Professional in Practice Partnership

The Social Care Council supports a Professional in Practice Partnership which is chaired by a Board Member and comprises employers and Higher Education Institutions who are key to successfully supporting the delivery of the Professional in Practice framework for social workers. This enables the Social Care Council to ensure that the arrangements for supporting the professional practice of social workers remain fit for purpose and meaningful for those who extend their development using this route.

Each of these Partnerships provides a structured means through which the Social Care Council can engage successfully with its stakeholders and review the quality of the service it provides. During 2020/21 each of these Partnerships have, where relevant, informed the work of the Social Care Council, provided feedback on draft policies and plans, informed the culture of the Social Care Council (particularly in relation to communications and the language used to engage with the social care workforce, service users and carers), and

contributed to a more effective service through the challenge and assurance function they provide.

STRENGTHENING THE WORKFORCE

Q2020 states: “We will provide the right education, training and support to deliver high quality service. We will develop leadership skills at all levels and empower staff to take decisions and make changes.”

The people who work in health and social care (including volunteers and carers) are its greatest asset. It is vital therefore that every effort is made to equip them with the skills and knowledge they will require, building on existing and emerging HR strategies, to deliver the highest quality.

STRENGTHENING THE WORKFORCE IN THE SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL

The Social Care Council has a staffing complement of 57 staff at end March 2021, in addition to a number of staff employed through an agency and working on a sessional basis¹ –

- Administrative Staff – often providing front line services;
- Managers – including team leaders and heads of function;
- Professional Advisers – professionally qualified social workers;
- Directors – who form part of the Social Care Council’s SLT.

Social Care Council staff work using a variety of working patterns including full-time, part-time, job-share and compressed hours. They can also avail of flexi time, special leave (including carers leave), career breaks and unpaid leave. Staff are assigned across two Directorates as demonstrated below –



The Communications and Engagement Team, report directly to the Chief Executive, to ensure communications and engagement is at the heart of every aspect of delivering quality services across the Social Care Council.



¹ Sessional staff (sometimes called bank staff) are staff who are employed for short periods of time to deliver specific pieces of work)

Appraising, Learning and Developing

The Social Care Council promotes a learning culture across all aspects of the organisation, including empowering individuals to take control of their own development and career management. In support of this all staff are required to have a set of SMART² objectives in place which reflect an individual's/team's contribution to the Social Care Council's Corporate Plan, Business Plan, Operational Plan and Key Performance Indicators and Standards.

Last year all staff developed a new system to appraisal called 'Quarterly Check-Ins' which take place four times a year. They provide a collaborative approach to review and enable the individual and their manager to focus on the conversation rather than the paperwork against a simple framework which is designed around the individual organisational footprint. The system was designed on the back of feedback from staff that the current system was paper heavy, and was sometimes a 'tick box' exercise with many staff seeing the appraisal as something that was done to them rather than with them. The new system was rolled out this year and there is very positive feedback for the system. We will however keep the system under review to ensure it continues to meet the needs of the organisation, of teams and of individuals.

In 2020/21, 98% of staff had an annual performance appraisal and a learning and development plan agreed by end June 2021.

Learning and Development Plans for all staff in the Social Care Council are reviewed to identify team training needs, essential and developmental needs, and professional learning. This work is carried out by the Social Care Council's Operational Leadership Team (OLT) which comprises each of the Head of Functions across all of the business areas in the Social Care Council (Fitness to Practise, Workforce Development, Corporate, Committee, Communications, Registration, and Database teams). OLT review the individual, team and organisational training needs and identify where these can be delivered in partnership with the HSC Leadership Centre, who the Social Care Council have a Service Level Agreement with.

During the year the organisation co-designed a 'Supporting and Empowering You' Programme to help every member of staff manage their work, their work/life balance, their health, and the impact of working remotely through a pandemic. The Programme started in March 2021 and will be largely delivered during the new business year.

The Social Care Council focus on learning and development was largely based around mental and physical health wellbeing and also the IT skills needed to support remote working. Change Management Programme.

² SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound

Investors in People (IIP)

The Social Care Council achieved IIP Gold accreditation status in March 2021 under the new 6th Generation IIP model. This was a significant achievement and is part of the organisation's ongoing improvement agenda in the way it invests in its workforce. This is an outstanding achievement and we will use the new business year to work through any actions arising and how we best promote this achievement.



**Investors
in People**

Health &
Wellbeing
Award

The Social Care Council is also recognised under the IIP's Health and Wellbeing Award in recognition of its work to support and improve health and wellbeing for all staff.

As part of its IIP Programme the Social Care Council undergoes an annual review with its IIP assessor to take stock on its journey and seek direction and assistance where necessary.

Recognising Good Performance

The Social Care Council appreciates the importance of taking time to recognise and acknowledge good performance whether that is on an individual basis, as a team, or for the organisation as a whole. Feedback from IIP Reports indicate that managers in the Social Care Council are well equipped and skilled on giving direct feedback, in a positive and constructive way, while also acknowledging excellent work that stands out whether as a result of an individual/teams commitment, or as a result of the challenge the work presented in the first instance.

This type of feedback manifests itself on a day to day basis, through one to one meetings and through mid-year and end-year performance appraisal reviews. At the same time, the Senior Leadership Team and the Board take the time to email and/or meet staff to personally acknowledge the success of a team/teams and of the organisation.

Providing an interactive culture which provides time for staff to connect in this way is also underpinned by the SLT's commitment to supporting the Social Care Council's Health and Wellbeing Committee. The Health and Wellbeing Committee organised a number of functions throughout the year including a staff barbeque where individuals and teams had an opportunity to interact, including with teams whom they might not normally have an opportunity to engage with on a day to day basis.

In addition to these 'staff events', the Health and Wellbeing Committee also takes an active role in organising and supporting a number of charities throughout the year, including some online challenges to keep teams connected, healthy and motivated.

Values and Behaviours

The Social Care Council's Corporate Plan identified four corporate values for the organisation –

- ***Excellence*** – we are committed to excellence in everything we do;
- ***Respect*** – we respect the rights, dignity and inherent worth of individuals;
- ***Integrity*** – we are honest and work in an open and transparent way;
- ***Partnership*** – we are a listening and learning organisation. Working in partnership to ensure what we do makes a difference.

As indicated earlier, the Social Care Council is also working on developing a list of behaviours that underpin these values.

The Social Care Council is using a number of opportunities to embed and promote its values, including ensuring they are reflected in policies and strategies, and in recruitment and job descriptions.

Senior Leadership Commitment to Quality

Ensuring a quality agenda and culture exists, and can be evidenced throughout the Social Care Council, starts at the top level of the organisation and is led by the senior leadership structure.

The Social Care Council's Senior Leadership Team ensure quality and evidence of quality (business reports, feedback reports, evaluation) is part of their regular agenda. At the same time, and to cascade this approach, the SLT put in place an Operational Leadership Team (OLT) which comprises the heads of function from each of the areas across the organisation (Fitness to Practise, Workforce Development, Corporate, Committee, Communications, Registration and Database). OLT meet monthly and report to SLT; not only on the day to day business (delivery, outcomes, risks), but also issues in relation to quality, service improvement, culture, and learning and development.

As part of this work, OLT required all staff to complete the e-learning module on Q2020 Attributes Framework level 1, which was achieved. The module now also forms part of the induction programme for all new staff appointed to the Social Care Council.

MEASURING THE IMPROVEMENT

Q2020 states: “We will improve outcome measurement and report on progress for safety effectiveness and the patient/client experience. We will promote the use of accredited improvement techniques and ensure that there is sufficient capacity and capability within the HSC to use them effectively.”

The delivery of continuous improvement lies at the heart of any system that aspires to excellence, particularly in the rapidly changing world of health and social care. In order to confirm that improvement is taking place we will need more reliable and accurate means to measure, value and report on quality improvement and outcomes.

MEASURING THE IMPROVEMENT IN THE SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL

The Social Care Council understands the need to have robust and reliable information to hand to help inform whether it is doing things well – or well enough. To support this the Social Care Council has a number of reporting and feedback mechanisms in place which include –

- Annual business objectives which are reported to the Board/SLT on a quarterly basis;
- Monthly business reporting to SLT;
- Key Performance Indicators and Quality Standards;
- Internal Audit Reviews and compliance reports;
- Data Quality Reports;
- Surveys, reviews and evaluations;
- Customer Feedback Reports;
- Complaints Management and Learning Reports;
- Robust Registration database and reporting.

Staff at all levels are encouraged to challenge processes that are no longer effective. As an example, a number of registration procedures have been improved such as enabling registrants to advise the Social Care Council of changes of contact details and employment over the phone, rather than asking registrants to put their request in writing. This has improved the customer service experience for registrants who can get certain issues resolved quickly in a way that best suits them.

Teams also meet on a monthly basis to review their own performance and suggest ways in which work can be streamlined and improved to the direct benefit of those people we provide a service to.

All of these arrangements do not however operate in isolation; instead they are open to challenge, review and compliance assurance. This includes reviews by Internal Audit to provide relevant assurance, and oversight by the Social Care Council’s Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.

Quality Improvement in Service Delivery

During 2020/21, the Social Care Council delivered the following –

- A review of online e-learning resources to make these readily available to the workforce;
- A new website was launched with a focus on the user journey;
- A new pathway to support registrants joining the register quickly in response to the call out to the sector to encourage those who had left the sector to return to support the HSC during the pandemic;
- Support for the DoH programme including encouraging the workforce to get vaccinated and the ‘Clap for Carers’ initiative.

Quality Improvement IIP Oversight Group

The work of this group is particularly focused on quality and quality improvement. During the year the Group focused on consulting with staff to agree a definition of Quality Improvement. Following engagement with all staff this was agreed as –

‘Quality improvement in the Social Care Council is the continual efforts of us all to improve our processes and performance to achieve better outcomes.’

To underpin this work the Group developed a set of **principles** –

1. We will be a listening and learning organisation.
2. We will adopt a collective leadership approach to improvement.
3. We will be inclusive and ensure that all staff have equal voice.
4. We will recognise and respect each other’s expertise and knowledge.
5. We will involve those closest to the issue in identifying and undertaking improvement initiatives.
6. We will follow through on ideas.
7. We will be courageous enough to ‘ditch’ what is not working.
8. We will ensure that our approach is rigorous, systematic and underpinned by analysis and evaluation.
9. We will be committed to the pursuit of excellence.
10. We will develop and empower our people to ensure that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to participate fully in quality improvement.
11. We will be innovative and creative in our approach.
12. We will use our resources efficiently and effectively.

13. We will work in partnership with our stakeholders.

14. We will share best practice.

The Group is continuing to work on embedding these principles into all parts of the organisation.

Complaints Management

It is important for any organisation to provide a clear mechanism for dispute resolution, particularly if an individual is concerned about the service they have received, how they were treated by a member of staff or the systems/processes which are in place in the Social Care Council's business.

The Social Care Council encourages its staff that wherever possible, complaints or disputes are managed locally and at source where an immediate resolution can resolve concerns, and reduce the stress or anxiety caused to the individual. The Social Care Council also recognises that, at times, having a mechanism (through the organisation's Complaints Policy) provides a means through which a complaint can be independently reviewed and investigated. The Complaints Policy encourages individuals to raise their complaint with the Social Care Council's Complaints Manager, if the matter cannot be resolved at a local and informal level, and if the individual still remains unsatisfied with their response they may elevate their complaint to the Director of Registration and Corporate Services, and ultimately the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman. The purpose of all of this is to ensure that the Social Care Council listens and responds to concerns, and where necessary puts improvements in place, regardless of whether these are on a small or larger scale.

RAISING THE STANDARDS

Q2020 states: “We will establish a framework of a clear evidence-based standards and best practice guidance. We will establish dynamic partnerships between service users, commissioners and providers to develop, monitor and review.”

The service requires a coherent framework of robust and meaningful standards against which performance can be assessed. These already exist in some parts, but much more needs to be done, particularly involving service users, carers and families in the development, monitoring and reviewing of standards.

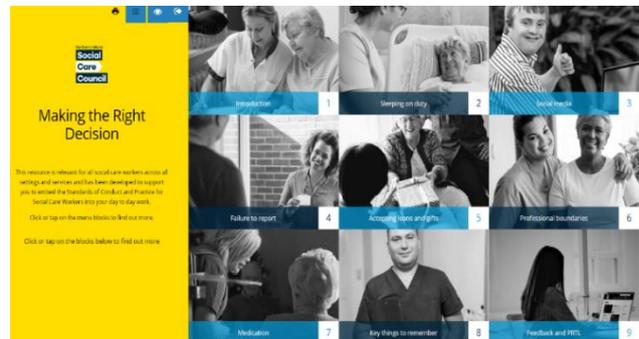
RAISING THE STANDARDS IN THE SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL

The Social Care Council promotes its Standards of Conduct and Practice including a suite of Easy Read versions. During the year we supported the sector in embedding the Standards in particular as the workforce responded to the unprecedented demands and challenges of the pandemic.

The Standards of Conduct and Practice explain the standards expected of the social care workforce in Northern Ireland. They set out very clearly what is expected in terms of an individual worker’s conduct i.e. values, attitudes and behaviour as well as standards for their Practice which outline the knowledge and skills required for competent practice.

Only a very small percentage of registrants breach the Standards expected and where this happens the FtP team have a range of measures available proportionate to the event which occurred.

During the year we developed and promoted ‘Making the Right Decision’ – a Learning Zone resource to support registrants and employers to understand the Standards in Practice. The resource uses work based scenarios to provide practical examples of how to use Standards to guide decision-making and good practice.



We also delivered a number of ‘Registration Matters’ webinars and a Digital Campaign to promote the Standards, registration and continuing professional development.

Registration Matters



- 600 people were engaged across the 10 sessions in the webinar series.
- 81% of registrant attendees said the ‘Registration Matters’ materials would assist them in maintaining their Registration & Standards

Professional in Practice Framework

The Social Care Council's Professional in Practice (PiP) Framework continues to make a positive impact on the professional development of social workers. Engagement with the framework enables social workers to gain professional recognition for their learning and development that improves the quality of their practice.

During 2020/21, 17171 PiP Awards granted at the summer 2020 virtual event:

- ✓ 54 Consolidation Awards
- ✓ 108 Specialist Awards
- ✓ 6 Leadership and Strategic Awards
- ✓ 3 Advanced Scholarship Awards



Best Practice for the Board

Over the last number of years, the Board has carried out an annual Board Self-Assessment to benchmark its performance and governance against best practice and provide assurance that it is conducting its business in accordance with best practice.

The Board carried out its annual self-assessment during 2020/21 to assess to what extent it was efficient in delivering high quality services. As a result of this the Board developed an action plan to raise its standards where it was deemed necessary.

As a result of this process, the Board are able to review the extent to which they are raising standards in their own work to the benefit of the organisation and its stakeholders as a whole.

INTEGRATING THE CARE

Q2020 states: “We will develop integrated pathways of care for individuals. We will make better use of multidisciplinary team working and shared opportunities for learning and development in the HSC and with external providers.”

Northern Ireland offers excellent opportunities to provide fully integrated services because of the organisational structure that combines health and social care and the relatively small population that it serves. However, integrated care should cross all sectoral and professional boundaries to benefit patients, clients and families.

INTEGRATING THE CARE IN THE SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL

The Social Care Council is an organisation of the health and social care sector in Northern Ireland. While provided with a specific remit regarding the regulation and registration of the social care workforce, it carries out its functions in close working partnerships with others in the health and social care sector in Northern Ireland.

The Social Care Council is represented on all relevant groups and committees and is active in contributing to and driving forward the agenda to the benefit of the social care workforce. It also integrates its work at a direct level with employers, Trusts, universities, the voluntary and community sectors, and service users and carers.

Systems Leadership Agenda

During the year, the Social Care Council continued to work to support and inform the systems leadership agenda across the HSC and beyond.

The Board of the Social Care Council identified a key ambition for the organisation to inform leadership at all levels across Health and Social Care. The Social Care Council continues to work to both contribute and influence the development and transformation of the system as well as being a connector for many parts of the system that do not always have a prominent position.

The Social Care Council brings together key interests from across the social care sector to discuss strategic issues and identify opportunities for shared working to improve recruitment and retention, development, profile and positioning of the workforce.

During the year the Social Care Council had a focus on supporting and strengthening social care leadership networks. As part of this the Workforce Development Partnership was reviewed and became the Leaders in Social Care Partnership with a new mandate and focus on social care leadership. The Partnership developed a detailed programme of work based on collaboration and outcomes. It brings together 30 senior social care leaders from the statutory, independent and 3rd sectors to establish a strategic framework for the transformation and development of the social care workforce in Northern Ireland that will ensure the sustainability of a skilled, competent and fit for purpose workforce. Work also

continues with the Leaders in Social Work, a more established network which is collaborating on current and future needs for the profession in NI. The Social Care Council has also supported the development of a 3rd Sector social work leadership group. It also has a range of partnerships which support collaborative working and co-production to support and strengthen the social work and social care sector in Northern Ireland.

The Social Work Leadership Network has been established under the auspices of the DoH Social Work Strategy and comprises leaders from the statutory, voluntary, education and justice sectors. This year our Interim Chief Executive chaired the Leadership Network and the focus of work has been to build a communication strategy to raise the profile of social work in all sectors, and to work towards a collaborative approach to developing the social work workforce into the future.

SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL QUALITY 2020

ACTION PLAN 2021/22

To inform the Social Care Council's continued improvement in relation to embedding quality, demonstrating quality and measuring quality outcomes, it has identified the following areas for delivering during 2021/22 –

	ACTIVITY	HOW AND WHEN
1	We will review the effectiveness of our Socrates Improvement Board against its Terms of Reference.	By March 2022 – we will carry out a self-assessment against the ToR.
2	We will start a review on how quality is embedded in the organisation (with a view to reporting on this in the following business year).	By March 2023 – we will create a hub of all evidence of quality improvement and initiatives and test for any gaps or missed opportunities.
3	We will review our Quarterly Check-In system for appraisal.	By March 2022 – we will have a benchmark on which to routinely review the system to ensure it remains fit for purpose.
4	We will review the benefits of remote working and the lessons learnt.	By March 2022 – we will carry out a lessons learnt and benefits gained review into remote working over the past two years.
5	We will review the extent to which Quality is embedded in our organisation and develop an action plan for any gaps identified.	By June 2022 – we will have an indicator of how we view quality, how we demonstrate it and how we can build upon it.

Organisation Structure

at 31 March 2021



Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

Annex B

CE	-	Chief Executive
CPD	-	Continuing Professional Development
DoH	-	Department of Health
HSC	-	Health and Social Care
HR	-	Human Resources
IIP	-	Investors in People
KPI	-	Key Performance Indicator
OLT	-	Operational Leadership Team
PIP	-	Professional in Practice
PLO's	-	Practice Learning Opportunities
PPI	-	Personal and Public Involvement
QI	-	Quality Improvement
SLT	-	Senior Leadership Team