

Northern Ireland

Social

Care

Council

Coronavirus and Our Work: What You Need to Know

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

Last Updated: 25th March 2020

Last Updated: 25th March 2020

Coronavirus and Our Work: What You Need to Know



**Coronavirus and the Social Care Council:
What you need to know**

- Introduction
- Our Working Arrangements
- General Advice
- Registration
- Advice for Employers
- Advice for Social Work Students
- Fitness to Practise & Hearings
- Social Care
- Professional in Practice (PiP)
- Learning and Training
- Further Information
- Contact Us

Introduction

As the regulator for social workers and social care workers in Northern Ireland everything we do is focused on supporting high quality care for people who need it. We are all adapting. As the regulator we remain committed to supporting high quality standards of social work and social care for everyone who needs it. However we understand and know the impact this is having for social workers, social work students and social care workers, as they respond to challenges never experienced before.

We are committed to protecting people who use services while also maintaining public confidence in social work and social care. The onset of Covid-19 doesn't change that, but it is changing, and will continue to change the way we work. Like other regulators we have made some changes to how we do things. Our approach going forward is based on the core principles of:

- **Minimising the time pressure we impose on registrants and;**
- **Maximising the flexibility for registrants to manage their professional development activities during the challenges of Covid-19.**

The information below outlines the actions we have taken to support registrants, providers and people using services during this time. This document was published on Wednesday 25th March and will continue to be updated as the epidemic and its consequences unfold.

People in our communities are relying on the skills, compassion and kindness of the social work and social care workforce over this challenging period. We want to thank everyone working on, and supporting, the frontline for their professionalism and dedication at this unprecedented time.

Our Working Arrangements

Frequently Asked Questions



Is the Social Care Council office open?

Like other regulators, we have made some changes to how we do things and that includes our office closing to visitors and our staff working from home.

The Social Care Council as of Friday 20th March 2020 will be providing services remotely. Please be assured that the Social Care Council services will continue to operate. We would ask that you check our website for regular updates and direct any enquiries to the specific email addresses on our website.

What if I have meetings planned with the Social Care Council?

There will be no face-to-face meetings or training events until further notice. Wherever possible, those meetings will be held by phone or video conferencing. If you have a face-to-face meeting booked with any of our staff and have not heard anything about changes to arrangements, please reach out to your relevant contact via email for guidance.

General Advice

Frequently Asked Questions



Do you have any general advice about how we should work at this time?

The best place to go for up-to-date information on coronavirus is the Public Health Agency and Government websites, where you will also find more specific information for certain providers of care and support. We also encourage our registrants and employers to use and share our free open access digital [Learning Zone](#) with targeted Covid-19 resources.

Where can I find more advice related to my local area?

For more localised advice, you should first and foremost speak to your line-manager or employer who may have more specific guidelines about how you go about your work in a safe and professional way.

As a social worker or social care worker where can I find more specific advice?

First and foremost speak to your line manager or employer who may have more specific guidelines about how you go about your work in a safe and professional way. Also follow Department of Health updates and guidance on their website and on social media.

Registration

Frequently Asked Questions



How do I register?

We will continue to provide our registration services via our website. To expedite applications for registration there will be a new streamlined registration form available on the portal from Monday 23rd March.

How much does registration cost and do I need to register during this time of high demand?

The application fee from Monday 23rd March will be waived for 6 months for new applicants. All individuals undertaking social work and social care roles must apply for registration.

I was previously registered and wish to return to work to assist during this time. Can I start straight away?

Social workers and social care workers previously registered and wishing to return to the register must be registered before commencing employment. The new application process will expedite this which includes the fee waiver.

Will removal from the Register continue during this emergency?

We will not be removing anyone from the Register during this emergency, except where we believe there is a risk to the public or if the individual asks to be removed.

I am due to pay my annual fee OR renew my registration – what will happen?

We understand the difficulties and pressures which the sector faces at this time and that your registration will not be one of your priorities. We will therefore email you a reminder when your annual fee OR renewal is due and we will help you use the online portal to renew and pay your fee.

Who should I contact if I have enquiries about registration?

E-mail Registration@nisc.hscni.net and we will aim to respond as soon as possible.



Advice for Employers

Frequently Asked Questions

As an employer what do I need to know or do to get staff registered quickly?

In order for the registration application to be approved the employer must endorse the form via the portal on our website. We remind employers that applicants coming into social care roles for the first time have up to 6 months to register and can commence employment while this process is underway.

Demand is so high and I've no time to induct staff. Are there any online resources I can use or share?

Employers should ensure that new registrants are sufficiently inducted into their role in order to provide safe care. Please use the: [Induction for Social Care Workers](#) resource in our Learning Zone easy to share digitally and access at anytime.

It is important during Covid- 19 that social workers and social care workers are supported to maintain high quality care see our Standards of Conduct and Practice.

Do social workers and social care workers need to register during this time of high demand?

We will continue to provide our registration services via our website. To expedite applications for registration there will be a new streamlined registration form available on the portal from Monday 23rd March.

The application fee from Monday 23rd March will be waived for 6 months for new applicants. All individuals undertaking social work and social care roles must apply for registration.



What are the key must I do to register staff?

In order for the registration application to be approved the employer must endorse the form via the portal on our website. In line with our Employer Standards it is critical that employers maintain safe recruitment practices to assure the Social Care Council that the applicant for registration is fit to practise. This emergency process relies on employers to:

- **Check the identity of their new recruit as this will not be undertaken by the Social Care Council during this period.**
- **Request a barred list check from Access NI while awaiting the full Enhanced Disclosure Certificate.**

We remind employers that applicants coming into social care roles for the first time have up to 6 months to register and can commence employment while this process is underway.

Who can I contact in relation to learning and development during this emergency period?

Our Workforce Development team of Professional Advisors will be working directly with employers to provide support and guidance to enable more people to deliver frontline services quickly, safely and to high standards.

If you have a query you can email the Workforce Development Team directly: workforcedevelopment@niscc.hscni.net

Advice for Social Work Students

Frequently Asked Questions



What about Social Work students who are trying to qualify?

In working to support social work service delivery and frontline social workers, we are working with the universities to bring forward the completion of the final year of the Degree. This will mean the opportunity to complete the course a couple of months ahead of time, but within the required standards, to facilitate your entry into social work posts as quickly as possible.

Who will notify students of a revised schedule?

Your university will issue a detailed communication that will include a revised assessment schedule and associated guidance. These arrangements have been regionally agreed with both universities, and social work employers.

What can students do in the meantime?

As a registered Student Social Worker you are able to work in social care or roles that assist Social Workers. We are asking Level 2 students to consider supporting the workforce at this difficult time should the HSC Trusts and other social work employers reach out because they are in need of help.

Fitness to Practise and Hearings

Frequently Asked Questions



Can I still raise a concern during this time?

The safety and wellbeing of people who use services remains our priority. Even in current circumstances, people may have legitimate concerns, and it is important that they are able to raise them with us. If they do, the Social Care Council is under a legal duty to investigate them. We will continue to record and make a risk assessment of new fitness to practise concerns and we will continue to progress new and existing cases as far as we can. We will focus specifically on high risk concerns that are raised with us.

Will Hearings continue during this period?

We will, where it is safe to do so, postpone Fitness to Practise final hearings, however we will continue to take forward cases where we believe people pose a risk and, if necessary, suspend them from working on the sector. During Covid-19 we will be holding hearings remotely using videoconferencing and teleconferencing and will support registrants to participate.

As far as we can, we will keep requests for information to a minimum and in particular will avoid asking for information from the health and social care sector unless there is an urgent, risk based, need to do so. We appreciate that many people will have difficulty providing information to us for various reasons, and we will take a pragmatic and reasonable approach. If that's likely to delay progress on a particular case, we will let all parties know and offer appropriate support.

How do we contact you with any Fitness to Practise Concerns?

For raising concerns and enquiring about any current cases please contact the Fitness to Practise Team by email: Ftp@niscc.hscni.net

Also see our [Standard of Acceptance](#) for guidance.

Social Care

Frequently Asked Questions



We currently deliver a short induction for all new Social Care staff. If we have high levels of sickness and need new staff quickly can we reduce induction?

Employers should take a flexible approach during Covid-19. Within our standards registrants have up to 6 months to complete induction. You have free and open access to our Induction Programme for Social Care Workers and Guidance for Managers on the Learning Zone:

<https://learningzone.niscc.info/learning-resources/86/induction-programme-for-social-care-workers>

What support is available if we are unable to recruit new Social Care staff to cover increased work demands?

It is important to consider recruitment now as part of your planning for responding to Covid-19 and discuss potential demand with the relevant Trust. We have revised our regulatory arrangements to support faster recruitment during this time. Please see updated information on our website:

<https://niscc.info/news/322-important-regulatory-changes-during-covid-19>

Professional in Practice (PiP)

Frequently Asked Questions



I have just submitted an assessment via the Individual Assessment Route. Will that work be assessed?

At this point assessments are taking place online, as normal. You should receive an outcome from your submitted assessment soon. The deadlines around ratification of results, finalising outcomes may change but we will work to get the assessments completed as originally planned and within original timescales. We hope to notify you of your result by mid-May, however this date may change as the impact of Covid-19 evolves.

What happens if my submission to the Individual Assessment Route is not successful? Will I be able to resubmit?

Yes, you will be able to resubmit at the next assessment point in October 2020. We are planning for this to proceed as normal.

I am due to complete the 2 PiP mandatory Requirements before my registration renewal date. Will I be able to do that or will my registration be at risk?

We will continue to provide opportunities for registrants to complete their mandatory Requirements. There are a number of routes available to you and you should discuss the most appropriate option with your Agency PiP Rep. If you are in the midst of completing work for the mandatory Requirements you will be supported to complete as planned but if you have concerns consult with your Agency PiP Rep.

Professional in Practice (PiP)

Frequently Asked Questions



I am currently undertaking a PiP Approved programme. Will I be able to complete my course and gain my professional Requirements?

The university programmes are moving to online teaching to enable PiP Approved programmes to conclude their teaching for current modules and provide teaching for upcoming modules. The course provider will provide you with information about accessing the teaching and the assessment process. If you have concerns talk to the course provider or your Agency PiP Rep.

I am currently on a PiP Approved programme but my employer needs me to engage in additional work as a result of the Covid-19. Can my place on the programme be retained?

Individual programmes will have their own arrangements for deferral. On confirmation from your employer, you will be able to defer and return to complete the programme at another time. You are advised to contact the course coordinator. You can find the contact details via the following link:

<https://learningzone.niscc.info/professional-in-practice/64/approved-programme-route>

Can I continue to log my training, learning and development on the portal?

Yes please continue to record and log all training, learning and development that you undertake during Covid-19 in your PiP record and claim the PiP Credits that you are entitled to. It is important to reflect on the learning that you have achieved during this pandemic and how this has impacted on your practice.

Professional in Practice (PiP)

Frequently Asked Questions



What happens if I cannot access support from my Agency PiP Rep?

Individual organisations will make their own arrangements which might include online communication only. We advise that you contact your Learning and Development Team regarding their individual arrangements.

<https://learningzone.niscc.info/professional-in-practice/65/agency-representatives-contact-details>

Who do I contact at the Social Care Council about any PiP queries?

Please email the Professional in Practice Team directly at:
PiP@niscc.hscni.net

Learning and Training

Frequently Asked Questions

What learning resources can I access while working remotely?

The Northern Ireland Social Care Council provides a range of free, open access and targeted learning resources from our Learning Zone, for example: [Good Infection Control](#) and much more.

We have also updated the resource with open access HSC Covid-19 training guides. You can use all learning for your PRTL requirements, or PiP Credits if you are a Social Worker. Please remember to record and log all of your learning during Covid-19 on your portal account.

I have been selected for audit of my Post Registration Training and Learning. Do I need to submit by 1st June 2020?

The date for receipt of PRTL submissions has been extended to the 1st December 2020. If you have already submitted your work it will be assessed in December and you will be notified of the outcome shortly after. If you have decided to submit via the Credit Accumulation route you can continue to log your learning and training items via the portal as normal.

Further Information

Frequently Asked Questions

Further Information

Our information and services will be reviewed and updated as the Department of Health, NI Assembly and UK Governments make new announcements and we will be responding with agility to what is a fast-moving situation.

Our website will be regularly updated.

In the meantime we are grateful and deeply humbled by how the social work and social care workforce along with our health care colleagues are working together to provide the highest standards of care.

Contact Us

Frequently Asked Questions



If you have further questions you can contact us directly:

For all new registration application queries and renewals contact:

Registration: Registration@niscc.hscni.net

For account password reset, employer portal access and any other related digital queries contact:

Portal: Database@niscc.hscni.net

For raising concerns and current cases contact:

Fitness to Practice: Ftp@niscc.hscni.net

For employer liaison, careers, Degree in Social Work, Professional in Practice (PiP) and learning and development for the social care workforce contact:

Learning and Training: Workforcedevelopment@niscc.hscni.net

For further information: [Contact Us](#).



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

Northern Ireland

Social

Care

Council