

Northern Ireland

Social

Care

Council

Employing a social worker

guidance for new employers



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Checklist for employers new to employing social workers

- ✓ Read this Guidance and the Standards of Conduct and Practice for Employers before deciding to employ a social worker.
- ✓ Register with the Social Care Council as an Employer when you are sure you understand your responsibilities.
- ✓ Have clear lines of accountability and adhere to regional and organisational policies and procedures in place for reporting of child and adult protection issues and safeguarding concerns. Ensure liaison pathways with Trust social workers and other key professionals.
- ✓ Nominate your organisation Endorser by submitting the relevant proforma.
- ✓ Consider the level of social work experience and skills required for your post before advertising.
- ✓ Use rigorous and thorough recruitment and selection policies to ensure that only people with the right skills and values are employed.
- ✓ Employers who recruit newly qualified social workers must be able to provide the required level of developmental social work support and supervision to meet their mandatory AYE and Two PiP Requirements conditions of registration.
- ✓ Identify who will provide social work supervision; if this is not available within the organisation identify how this will be resourced.
- ✓ Identify and secure resources to support the social worker's training and development needs.
- ✓ Check the Social Care Council Public Facing Register to confirm current social work registration on Part 1 and any conditions attached to registration before offering employment.
- ✓ Have systems in place to ensure staff maintain their registration and conditions of registration.
- ✓ Ensure the social worker has access to peer support and a wide range of learning opportunities to grow their role and maximise impact.

- ✔ Report non-compliance with social work registration requirements and /or Standards of Conduct and Practice to the Social Care Council.
- ✔ Inform the Social Care Council of any issue that would call a registrant's fitness to practise in to question in line with our Standard of Acceptance Policy.
- ✔ Encourage the development of the social work role by promoting and targeting the service to those who would benefit from the support. Seek feedback and involvement from service users in order to shape and develop service improvements.
- ✔ Maintain contact with the Social Care Council for guidance and support.

An introduction by Aine Morrison, Chief Social Worker, Department of Health



A growing number of social workers are working in new environments with employers who have not employed a social worker before. There is increasing recognition and demand for the professional skills of social work across the life span and from early intervention and prevention to managing risk and supporting the most

excluded people in society. Making the decision to employ a social worker for the first time requires understanding of the continuous professional development requirements of social work and the Standards of Conduct and Practice which shape and govern practice.

Social work is a relationship-based profession concerned with supporting and safeguarding the wellbeing and empowerment of people by addressing the issues that lead to disconnection, harm, discrimination and abuse. Social work is an ever-evolving profession and the way we practice social work must respond to changing societal needs by creating new roles for social work including community development, multi-disciplinary Teams (MDTs), school social workers and with new employers for a system wide response.

Social work is a protected title, all social workers must be registered and actively maintain their registration. The decision to employ a social worker must be well thought through with consideration of resources, professional development opportunities, regulatory requirements and safeguarding pathways, policies and procedures. I welcome this Guidance for Employers new to employing social workers as an important resource to help them understand their responsibilities and plan for the support and professional development of their staff.

Employing a social worker and providing the right conditions for their professional development and leadership role will ensure that your organisation and the people and communities they support will benefit from the unique skill set of social workers.

Who is this guidance for?

The *Employing a Social Worker – Guidance for New Employers*, (the Guidance) has been developed to be used by organisations and employers that have employed or are considering employing a social worker. Once you employ a social worker you are subject to a number of regulatory responsibilities which you may not be aware of. This Guidance is to help you understand what that means for you.

Considering employing a social worker?

This Guidance is designed to help you when you are considering whether your organisation and the people they support can benefit from employing a professional social worker. It does this by briefly outlining the unique skills and attributes social work can contribute, as well as explaining the employer responsibilities you must be able to comply with before you decide to employ a social worker. The Guidance is also applicable when employers advertise posts open to a range of professionals including social workers.

As an employer new to employing social workers there are some important regulatory rules to know about.

Employers of social workers are bound by the **Standards of Conduct and Practice for Employers** and as such are expected to support and enable social workers in their employment to meet the **Social Work Standards of Conduct and Practice**.

This Guidance is a practical guide to walk you through these Standards and provide you with useful links to more detailed information on the **Northern Ireland Social Care Council (the Social Care Council) website**.

What do social workers do?

Social work is a relationship-based profession; it is concerned with the 'social' connectedness of people's lives and the issues that lead to disconnection, harm, discrimination and isolation; social workers are trained in interpersonal communication skills, listening, reflecting and advocating in partnership with the people they support to work towards solutions to help improve wellbeing.

Social workers recognise the bigger picture affecting people's lives and work for a more equal and just society where human rights are respected and protected. The problems social workers deal with are often rooted in social or emotional disadvantage, discrimination, poverty or trauma. Using their knowledge of law, social policy and structural systems they apply their values and ethics to help others achieve their full potential. They must be able to demonstrate and develop leadership skills at all stages of their careers (**Social Work Leadership Framework**). Social workers must use their relevant legal powers proportionately to protect people's rights and sometimes balance the rights of everyone involved. This combination of skills is unique to the social work profession.

Social workers seek to improve people's lives by helping with social and interpersonal difficulties, promoting human rights and wellbeing. Social workers must balance risk and protect children and adults with support needs from harm. From

helping a family under pressure to supporting someone with mental health problems, social work is a varied, demanding, often emotional but very rewarding career.

Social workers can work with a number of people at any one time. This is often referred to as a caseload. Day-to-day work can involve working in partnership with people to help complete an assessment of needs, focusing on strengths and wishes, working with individuals and families directly to help them make changes and solve problems through organising practical help, linking with communities, supporting carers, making recommendations or referrals to other services and agencies and building supportive networks. Social workers also work in partnership with other professionals to achieve holistic support. Social workers can work preventatively and with those at risk within a community-based environment or be located within statutory organisations where thresholds for acceptance of referrals may be based on critical and substantial needs.

Who employs social workers?

Social workers work with adults, children, families and communities and often specialise in a specific field of work – some examples include working with children and families, refugees and asylum seekers, people in the criminal justice system, people living with HIV or Aids, people who have substance misuse problems or with adults with a disability or mental health related needs.

Social workers may work with children in care (also known as children who are 'looked after'), young people in the criminal justice system, children who have experienced or are at risk of

abuse, children with health and mental health needs and with their families. This may include working specifically to assess and intervene where there are child protection concerns within a family or from elsewhere. They may also manage the adoption and fostering processes, and support children with a disability.

Social workers working in adult services may work with older people living with dementia, people with learning or physical disabilities or sensory support needs and people living in residential accommodation and supported housing and in hospital settings. Social workers will intervene across a continuum of activity from preventative support to adult protection and deprivation of liberty assessments.

The majority of social workers in Northern Ireland are employed by the five Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts whilst others are employed by the Education Authority (EA), Youth Justice, Northern Ireland Probation Board, (PBNI) and by a range of third sector (community and voluntary) organisations and independent providers. There are opportunities for social workers to move into new areas of work, often with employers who have never employed a social worker before.

Social workers may practice within specialist social work teams or as part of a multi-disciplinary team providing professional social work interventions. Social workers often work closely with social care practitioners but will carry responsibilities unique to social work.

How are social workers regulated in Northern Ireland?

The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (the Social Care Council) is the regulator for social work and for social care in Northern Ireland. The role of the Social Care Council is to protect people who access social work or social care services by ensuring registrants are competent and are adhering to the **Standards of Conduct and Practice** set by the Social Care Council and to the value base of social work.

Social work is a protected title, this means no one may use the term 'social worker' or work as a social worker unless they have undergone accredited social work training and are registered on Part One, (for social work registrants) of the Social Care Council Public Facing Register (the Register).

Social workers once registered, have to pay an annual fee and renew their registration every three years which includes evidencing compliance with any conditions of registration and Post Registration Training and Learning Requirements (PRTL). (See Sections under - **Maintaining Professional Social Work Registration**).

The Social Work Standards of Conduct and Practice

The **Standards of Conduct and Practice for Social Workers** describe the values, attitudes and behaviours expected of registered social workers in their day to day work and outline the knowledge and skills required for competent practice. These standards include protecting the rights and promoting the interests and wellbeing of service users and carers, balancing autonomy with safeguarding from risk of harm, upholding public confidence and trust in social work and being accountable for the quality of working and improving professional knowledge and development. Social workers must work in partnership with service users and carers and practise in a multi-disciplinary context.

Social workers must have regular professional social work supervision; this is an important standard of practice for social workers and needs to be built-in to any new social work post. Employers should refer to the **Department of Health Social Work Supervision Policy (2024)**.

The Social Care Council Workforce Development Team and Fitness to Practice Team can assist with queries about the **Standards of Conduct and Practice for social workers**. The British Association of Social Workers Northern Ireland (BASW NI) can offer advice on accessing social work supervision and professional support services for staff.

Underpinning the *Standards of Conduct and Practice* are social work values. Social workers must:



The standards are binding on all social workers registered with the Social Care Council. A registrant's fitness to practise will be judged against these standards and failure to comply could place a social worker's registration at risk.

If someone raises a concern about the conduct or practice of a registrant, it will be considered against the standards when deciding if action needs to be taken. Serious breaches of the standards may result in a social worker's practice being restricted, for example through the imposition of Conditions of Practice or in the most serious cases, their registration being removed.

Employers have a responsibility to proactively check the registration status of potential social work employees on the Register. Employers must apply rigorous and thorough recruitment and selection processes, check criminal records and relevant registers to make sure social workers are safe to practise. (See Section **Checking the Register**).

Raising a Fitness to Practise Concern

The Social Care Council recognises that, as an employer, you deal with situations regarding the conduct, competence and health of your staff every day and that in most cases, these situations can be resolved quickly and proportionately through local procedures without any need for referral to us.

Referral to the regulator should be regarded as a position of last resort where measures put in place by you at individual, team and organisational levels are not deemed to offer sufficient safeguards in relation to ensuring safe and effective practice to service users and carers.

Details of when a fitness to practise referral should be made are included in the Social Care Council's Standard of Acceptance Policy under Section 8: Employer Referrals. (See **Standard of Acceptance**). If you are unsure as to whether a matter should be referred, it is better to check with us. Our Fitness to Practise Officers can offer advice on a case by case basis.

Where we do open a fitness to practise case, you must co-operate with our investigation and hearing processes, including providing requested documents or information in a timely manner.

Maintaining professional social work registration; learning and development

All social workers have learning and development conditions attached to their registration which they must achieve before renewal can proceed. This is to ensure career long engagement with learning, keeping up to date with research, new models of practice and emerging knowledge so that people who access services receive the best support possible.

There are specific learning and development registration conditions for social workers throughout their career. In the first four years of practice after qualification social workers are registered with the Assessed Year in Employment (AYE)

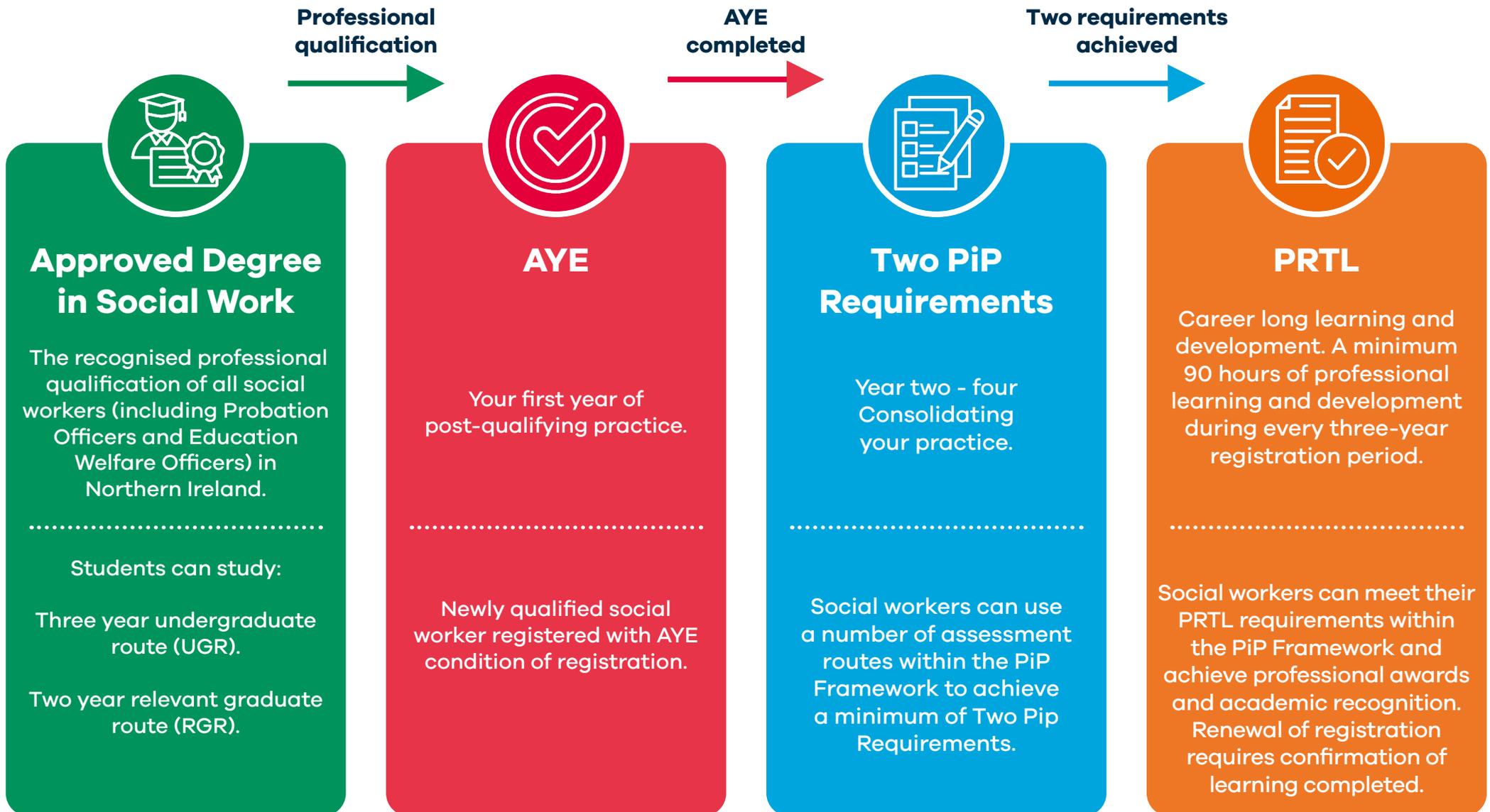
during year one, and once they have completed AYE their two Professional in Practice (PiP) requirements during year two to year four.

Social workers must then complete at least 90 Hours of Post Registration Training and Learning (PRTL) during every three-year renewal period. Each condition must be met in order to remain on the Register and this is both a registrant and employer responsibility.

As an employer you must promote a culture of learning, ensuring that the necessary resources and supports are in place to enable social workers to meet the standards and that these are built in to any new social work post. As an employer you must use rigorous recruitment and selection processes to make sure that only social workers with the appropriate level of knowledge and skills are recruited to your post.

Supporting social workers in career long learning

How continuous professional development is supported through regulation.



What is AYE?

All newly qualified social workers who register with the Social Care Council have an AYE condition attached to their registration and must demonstrate that they are confident and capable practitioners by the end of the assessment period.

The AYE assessment period of 198 full-time practice days is designed to help social workers make the significant transition from being a student to a newly qualified social work practitioner by continuing to build on learning through practice, developing further skills including assessment of risk, support planning and exploration of current models of practice.

Employers must provide a specified level of regular supervision from a registered social worker and ensure protected time for training and development days during the assessed year.

More detail can be found in the [Department of Health Social Work Supervision Policy \(2024\)](#) and the [AYE Guidance \(2022\)](#).

Research suggests that learning from other social workers within a social work team and from a supportive line manager is an important factor in professional development and wellbeing at work during this early stage of a social work career. Employers should consider the level of social work experience and developmental support required before advertising and selecting social workers for interview and appointment.

Employing an AYE social worker into a post where they may be the only social worker or into a team where there are already other AYE or early career social workers requiring support will require the employer to have arrangements in place to enable their social work staff to develop as practitioners and meet registration requirements.

Employers must have an identified, suitably experienced, supervising social worker to support and assess the progress of the AYE social worker against the Social Work National Occupation Standards. Employers must also nominate a Designated Signatory to quality assure that the standards for AYE completion have been met. Employer and registrant responsibilities are detailed in the [AYE Guidance](#) and the AYE Resource on the Social Care Council Learning Zone [Social Worker - Assessed Year in Employment \(AYE\) - NISCC Learning Zone](#).

Whilst newly qualified social workers can take up a social work post, once they have been registered with the Social Care Council, they can only start their assessed year when all the employer responsibilities can be met.

Completion of AYE is linked in statutory posts to career progression and banding as AYE social workers are employed at Band 5 (Agenda for Change Pay Scale) and move to Band 6 once AYE is completed. This is not the case for other employers and a range of pay scales are in place.

What are the two PiP requirements?

After completion of the AYE social workers are registered with a condition and date to achieve a minimum of two requirements in the Professional in Practice Framework (the PiP Framework) within the following three-year renewal period. There are a number of routes to achieve the two requirements and specific points in the year when two requirement submissions can be made and assessed. For more information about the PiP Framework, see: **[Professional in Practice \(PiP\) - NISCC Learning Zone](#)**.

Social worker employers need to have systems and learning and development supports in place to enable social workers to engage with the PiP Framework and meet this mandatory condition of registration. This may include development of a PiP representative role, (PiP Rep) for someone with expert knowledge in the framework and the standards of work required.

Third sector and not for profit organisations can access PiP support for their social workers; for further information check the list of PiP representatives in the **[PiP Learning Zone resources](#)**.

Failure to meet the two requirements condition of registration by the date specified, may result in the social worker being removed from the Register (and no longer able to work as a social worker) unless an extension has been agreed with the Social Care Council.

What is Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for social workers?

Beyond achieving AYE and the two PiP requirements conditions of registration in their early career, social workers must complete at least 90 hours of learning and development in every three-year renewal period afterwards. They must have a Personal Development Plan and record their learning and reflection on learning and be able to produce this if called for Post Registration Training and Learning (PRTL) audit. For more information about PRTL, see: **[Post Registration Training and Learning \(PRTL\) - NISCC Learning Zone](#)**.

There are a fantastic range of learning and development opportunities available to social workers within the PiP Framework to develop their professional and specialist knowledge and leadership skills, all of which will enhance the services you provide and the outcomes achieved for individuals, families and communities. See the Learning Zone to find out more about PiP: **[Professional in Practice \(PiP\) Framework](#)**.

As an employer you must support social workers to fulfil their PRTL requirements and have opportunities to develop specialist knowledge and skills. BASW offer a range of learning opportunities to help social workers meet their PRTL requirements; more information can be found on their website **[Training & CPD | BASW](#)**. You must also contribute to the education and training of social workers by offering workplace assessment and practice learning. You should consider how your social worker can maintain professional identity and have opportunities to engage with other social workers to benefit from peer support and shared learning if this is not readily available within their work location.

Social work registration - renewal and fees

Social workers are registered for a three-year period (which means they have to go through a registration application process every three years), and separately pay a fee every year to maintain their registration. They are required to renew their registration at the end of year three, completing an online form to update personal details and employer information. Social workers will also be asked to confirm that they have completed at least 90 hours of learning and development as part of the renewal application.

Failure to pay fees or renew when due will result in automatic removal from the Register and social workers will not be able to carry out their social work role until a new application has been made and processed by the Social Care Council. As an employer you must ensure that social workers are registered and be clear about the consequences of failing to register or maintain registration.

Policies and procedures

A growing number of social workers are working in new environments with employers who have not employed a social worker before. It is important that the duties and responsibilities of employers and social work staff are understood and clearly defined in organisational policies and procedures.

As an employer new to employing social workers you must have internal policies and procedures in place to ensure the safety and wellbeing of service users and staff. Employers must be able to describe their arrangements to support the employment of social workers and the systems in place to enable them to maintain their registration and meet their standards of conduct and practice. Social workers outside of the statutory sector do not have

statutory powers of investigation as these are held by social workers employed in Health and Social Care Trusts. They will still work under the wider child protection and adult safeguarding policies established for bodies under legislation including The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 and the Adult Safeguarding Policy 2015 and forthcoming Adult Protection Bill and the Mental Capacity (Northern Ireland Act) 2016.

All social workers are bound by the same regulatory standards as set out by the Social Care Council and have a duty to report. Close collaboration and clear referral pathways between social workers employed in your organisation and their counterparts in Trusts are essential.

Organisations providing support to children, young people, and adults at risk, should recognise the importance of keeping appropriate, accurate records of the work they are undertaking, and have systems in place to share information with the appropriate statutory agencies where they have information or concerns regarding the welfare or safety of a child, young person or adult.

Employers must work in collaboration with statutory services and in a multi-disciplinary context and ensure there are defined child protection and adult safeguarding pathways and policies in place and that staff are up to date with training in child protection, adult safeguarding and mental health legislation.

As an employer you must also support social workers to maintain an up to date knowledge base of relevant legislation, regional policies, Department of Health guidance, frameworks and reports as well as current research and findings from inspections and inquiries.

Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) registration and Social Care Council registration

How does RQIA registration link to social workers' registration with the Social Care Council? Some employers will employ social workers who need to apply for registration with RQIA, for example as a manager of a children's home or Responsible Individual.

During the process of assessment which results in a judgement regarding approval RQIA will ask for verification of registration with the Social Care Council. Depending on the role RQIA may require additional evidence that the social worker has met their AYE and the two PiP conditions of registration.

When registering your establishment or agency you should check in the legislation and/or Standards if it is a mandatory requirement for the manager to be a registered social worker, for example a Registered Manager of a Children's Home as described in these Standards, see [Minimum Standards for Children's Homes](#).

During the registration process, RQIA ask providers to outline their staffing and management structure, this is initially written at the time of application into the Statement of Purpose. On receipt of this document RQIA may ask for additional evidence to verify the fitness of the manager or for other key staff that are social work qualified including professional registration details.

RQIA, or other regulators including commissioners of your service may ask to see the policies and procedures to gain assurance your arrangements are robust. Examples asked for

may be in relation to recruitment, supporting social workers to maintain their registration, supervision arrangements, training and management of concerns regarding conduct.

Services applying to register or that are registered with RQIA whom employ social workers will need to maintain evidence of compliance with their policies and procedures which may be required for inspection. To find out more about standards for services regulated by RQIA, see: rqia.org.uk/guidance/standards.

Policy, guidance and frameworks

Examples of other relevant policies and resources include:

- [Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland, Department of Health](#).
- [Children and Young People's Strategy](#).
- [Guidance issued by the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland](#).
- [Social Services Northern Ireland: Reflections - SCIE](#).
- [Mental Capacity Act, Department of Health](#).
- [Learning NSPCC](#).

Registering your organisation as a social work employer

If you are an organisation that wishes to employ social workers, you must register your organisation with the Social Care Council. You can find out more about your responsibilities and view relevant forms on the Social Care Council's website, see: nisc.info/employers-responsibilities.

Endorsers are nominated representatives of social work employing organisations who will be required to endorse applications to register from relevant social work staff via our employer portal.

Completed organisation and nominate endorser forms should be returned to the Social Care Council Registration Team via email at: registration@nisc.hscni.net. Alternatively, you can contact the Registration Team and ask for the forms to be sent to you.

In accessing the employer [portal account](#), you will have the ability to see all registered social workers employed by your organisation.

Checking the register: Social work registration and renewal

To check your social workers are registered, check the [Public Facing Register](#) on the Social Care Council website. Nominated endorsers can also use the Employer Portal to access this information and view other registration details, for example; application status, annual fee and renewal due dates, whether a registration has a condition attached or to check if a social worker has been removed from the register.

The period of registration for social workers is three years. All registered social workers will pay an annual fee by accessing their online [portal account](#). In the third year of registration social workers must renew their registration through completion of a short online form and payment of the appropriate fee.

The Social Care Council issue email reminders to all registered social workers in advance of their fee and renewal due date (this is on the anniversary of the registration date each year).

The employer will also be able to monitor this by accessing the Employer Portal. Social workers who do not pay or renew on time will be removed from the register, cannot practise as a social worker, and will need to reapply to return to the register in order to resume practice. Notifications of removal will be sent to staff via their email address they provided at registration. The employer will also be able to monitor this using the employer portal. It is important to check with your staff that they know when fees and renewal are due.

[Registration guides](#) can be accessed on the Social Care Council website.

Glossary - words we use to describe our work

ALB	Arm's length body.
AYE	Assessed Year in Employment – the first year in assessed practice for newly qualified social workers.
BASW NI	The British Association of Social Workers, Northern Ireland. The professional association for social work and social workers in Northern Ireland.
Board	This is the Board of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council who provide strategic oversight and direction.
CEO	Chief Executive Officer.
CORU	The regulator for health and social care professionals in Ireland.
CPD	Continuing Professional Development – ongoing learning and training.
DoH	Department of Health – the government body responsible for health and social care in Northern Ireland.
EA	Education Authority- responsible for delivering education services across Northern Ireland.
FtP	Fitness to Practise – a registrant's suitability to work in social work or social care.
HSC	Health and social care – the people, systems and facilities that provide medical and personal care and support.
IAR	Individual Assessment Route – an option within the Professional in Practice Framework for social workers to have their learning and practice assessed to achieve PiP requirements and awards.
IPD	Initial Professional Development.
IFSW	International Federation of Social Workers – a worldwide body representing social work.
ISO	Interim Suspension Order – temporary action to stop a registrant working while we make enquiries about a very serious complaint.

OU	Open University.
PiP Framework	Professional in Practice – Framework for social workers to have their learning and practice assessed to achieve PiP requirements, awards and qualifications.
PRTL	Post Registration Training and Learning – ongoing learning and development that all social workers must do to keep their registration up to date. A minimum of 90 hrs in every three-year registration period.
QUB	Queens University Belfast.
Register	The Social Care Council’s register is an electronic list of social workers and social care workers working in Northern Ireland (and also students studying for the Degree in Social Work in Northern Ireland).
Registrant	A person approved for registration on the Public Facing Register – social workers, social care workers and social work students.
Registration	Social work is a protected title. All social workers practicing in Northern Ireland must be registered with the Social Care Council and pay a yearly fee.
Renewal	Social workers must apply to renew their registration every three years.
RQIA	Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority – checks health and social care organisations are doing their job to standards set.
Social Care Council	Refers to the Northern Ireland Social Care Council.
Stakeholders	People who are involved with our work or who are affected by what we do.
Two PiP Requirements	Mandatory condition of social work registration applied after AYE: social workers must achieve at least two requirements within three years.
Third sector	Umbrella term for voluntary, community, not-for profit and church based organisations.
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service.
UU	University of Ulster.

Useful contacts

- ▷ Registration Team
registration@niscc.hscni.net.
- ▷ Fitness to Practise Team
ftp@niscc.hscni.net.
- ▷ Workforce Development Team
workforcedevelopment@niscc.hscni.net.
- ▷ Professional in Practice Team
pip@niscc.hscni.net.
- ▷ Learning Zone
learningzone@niscc.hscni.net.

Other useful websites

- > **[Social Services Northern Ireland: Reflections - SCIE.](#)**
- > **[Reflections - Community Development | Department of Health.](#)**
- > **[Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders.](#)**
- > **[Children in Northern Ireland.](#)**
- > **[NSPCC Learn.](#)**
- > **[Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action.](#)**

Useful resources for social workers and employers

Visit the **[Social Care Council](#)** and **[Learning Zone](#)** to find out about current and new resources such as lunchtime seminars, conferences, campaigns and much more.

Update emails are regularly sent to all registrants, so it is important that email addresses and contact details are kept up to date, this can be done using the registrants **[portal account](#)**.

For further information about professional social work support and professional development contact the **[British Association of Social Workers, BASW \(NI\)](#)**.

For information about RQIA visit: **[rqia.org.uk](#)**.

Need more information about employing a social worker?

Contact Workforce Development Team at:
workforcedevelopment@niscc.hscni.net.

Or BASW (NI) at: **n.ireland@basw.co.uk.**

Northern Ireland



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