

PiP Partnership Committee
Strategic Meeting
Thursday 12 March 2026 at 10am
Via Teams

1. Introductions & Apologies
 2. Minutes from December Meeting
 3. IAR Direct Observation Paper for Review and Approval
 4. Workforce and Career Pathways Presentation – Susan Ritchie, Department of Health
- Tea Break
- Questions and Discussion
5. PiP Award Ceremony 2026
 6. **Dates of Future meetings:**
Business Meeting: Wednesday, 3 June 2026
Strategic Meeting: Tuesday, 8 September 2026
Business Meeting: Wednesday, 2 December 2026

Professional in Practice Partnership Committee

Thursday, 12 March 2026
 Via Teams

Confirmed Minutes

Attendance:

Roslyn Dougherty
 Gloria Kirwan
 Elaine Pollock
 Tina O'Reilly
 Davy Hayes
 Eileen McKay
 Michaela Glover
 Ciaran Traynor
 Brenda Horgan
 Debbie Grieves
 Campbell Killick

Chair
 External Assessor
 Interim Head of Service: SEHSCT obo Fiona Gunn
 PiP Lead: Voluntary and Community Sector
 Queens University Belfast
 Assistant Director: BHSC
 Head of Social Work Governance: SPPG
 Community and Voluntary Sector
 SHSCT, OBO Marita Magennis
 Ulster University: OBO Jennifer Hamilton
 Ulster University: OBO Jennifer Hamilton

In Attendance:

Catherine Maguire
 Gillian McAuley
 Mandy Cowden
 Heather Graham
 Nicola Lewis
 Susan Ritchie

Head of Workforce Development: Social Care Council
 Professional Adviser: Social Care Council
 Professional Adviser: Social Care Council
 Professional Adviser: Social Care Council
 PiP Team Manager: Social Care Council (minute taker)
 Professional Social Work Officer: Department of Health

Apologies:

Bria Mongan
 Jennifer Hamilton
 Danielle Boyd
 Gillian McAllister
 Marita Magennis
 Maura McMackin
 Adrian Nugent
 Ursula Crickard
 Stephen McLaughlin
 Lee Wilson
 Gillian Montgomery

Incoming Chair
 Head of School: Ulster University
 Youth Justice Agency
 Acting Deputy Director: Youth Justice Agency
 Assistant Director: SHSCT
 Principal Consultant: HSCNI Leadership Centre
 Head of Education Welfare Services: EANI
 Assistant Director, Children's Court Guardian Agency
 Assistant Director: WHSCT
 Assistant Director: NHSCT
 Director of Operations: Probation Board for Northern Ireland

1.	Welcome and Apologies

1.1	The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted apologies.
2.	Declaration of Interest
2.1	None noted.
3.	Approval of Minutes and Actions from previous Meeting
3.1	The minutes from the 12 December 2025 business meeting were agreed and confirmed.
4	Chairs Business
4.1	The Chair acknowledged the Research Conference which took place on Wednesday, 11 March 2026. She highlighted the interesting and relevant content, especially in relation to the AI and its consequences for social work. She also noted the specific issues and opportunities for PiP.
4.2	<u>Showcasing Learning</u> The Chair reminded Partnership members to keep this on their radar and to continue to share any ideas on how best to showcase learning by contacting GMcA or CM. GMcA stated that the Community Development Digital Resource launch which will take place later today, Thursday 12 March 2026 and will showcase a wide range of work from the Programme. GMcA stated that this format for sharing learning could be considered and used as a template going forward. GMcA advised Partnership members that this will be RD's last meeting as Chair of the PiP Partnership Committee and thanked her for her support and commitment to PiP over many years. CM thanked RD on behalf of the Social Care Council for her work over the last 8 years on the Social Care Council Board, and as Chair of the PiP Partnership over the last 4 years. CM highlighted that much of RD's career has been dedicated to Social Work education and training having very much 'walked the walk' in terms on ongoing professional development. Members stated that RD has been a huge driver and support and will be missed. RD noted that it had been an absolute joy and privilege being able to do the work she loves. She thanked NL, GMcA and CM for their support to enable her to successfully Chair the Partnership meetings, and thanked all Partnership members for their commitment to the Partnership, and Partnership working and wished them all the best for the future.
5	IAR Direct Observation Paper for Review and Approval
5.1	A proposal paper was shared with the Partnership members on behalf of the Information and Development (I&D) Forum in advance of the meeting for their review and consideration.

GMcA provided the background to the review of the Direct Observation method, including the input of the working group, noting that the paper shared with members was brought to the I&D Forum in February 2025 and received widespread support.

I&D members acknowledged that the method has been significantly under-utilised. Agency representatives had reported that candidates are discouraged from pursuing this option due to the perceived disproportionate level of effort required compared with other submission methods. Ulster University had also noted that the workload associated with direct observation is misaligned with the academic credit available.

GMcA advised that a small working group had proposed:

- Removing the requirement for recording
- Replacing the written prep with a consultation with Practice Assessor
- Giving greater weighting to the observed practice
- Direct Observation assessed by practice assessor
- Written piece is critical reflection that is double marked

GMcA put the proposal to Partnership members and asked for approval of the proposed changes and for the changes to be introduced at the October 2026 IAR Assessment point.

The decision to accept and approve the proposed changes for implementation at the October 2026 IAR Assessment Point was unanimous. It was agreed that in moving forward with the proposed changes the direct observation submission method would be greatly streamlined and improved, allowing for direct demonstration of competence which would reduce the burden to candidates, create an authentic assessment process and led to a higher level of engagement and uptake. The role of the Practice Assessor, and their expertise was particularly welcomed.

Members agreed that there is a need to use a standardised format for the preparation piece, build in evaluation and consider the process for managing a 'failed' observation. This will be written in to the guidance for candidates and will be modelled on good practice from other programmes.

The External Assessor, GK also stated that having reviewed past direct observation submission she felt the candidates had been constrained and limited due to having to record the session, and therefore fully welcomed the removal of the need for recording.

DG stated that it might be beneficial to link in with Practice Assessors currently observing on approved programmes, and get feedback on what happens if and when they encounter a failed observation.

GMcA thanked the Partnership on behalf of the I&D Forum members and stated that work would commence to design a Direct Observation Method Candidate Handbook. She advised that submissions using the current format will still be accepted during a led in period, and that an evaluation process for

	Practice Assessors and Candidates would be in place for the October 2026 Assessment Point.
6	Social Work Workforce Guidance: Making connections to PIP/CPD
6.1	The Chair welcomed Susan Ritchie (SR), Professional Social Work Officer (SW Workforce Policy & Guidance), Department of Health Office of Social Services for attending the meeting. Susan gave a background on her role over the last 2.5 years in producing social work workforce policy and guidance, and shared a presentation to the Partnership linking the Social Work (NI) Supervision Policy, Guidance on supporting Social Workers, and Safer and Effective staffing in Social Work guidance to PIP and CIP. After a short comfort break the Chair and SR opened the floor to questions and discussion. The Partnership members discussed the definition of mid–late career social work and when this occurs in Northern Ireland. CM confirmed that the average time on the social work register in NI is 16.5 years (out of 20-year register). The importance of supporting social workers in mid/late career was highlighted, and finding ways to engage people in this stage of their career. CM stated that conversations around this have come up in terms of PRTL and audits, and the Social Care Council Board are interested in how these social workers can be further supported with CPD. Members also discussed at length the need for social workers to understand that learning and development is not limited to formal training courses, and how broader continuous learning can be framed, recognised, and accredited. Links between CPD, career pathways, and practice development were also discussed. There was an agreement that bite-sized learning is appropriate and CT highlighted the role of the IAR in supporting this, which was developed to capture ongoing professional development. Partnership members supported the guidance documents discussed in the presentation, and the progress being made in the right direction to support social workers to engage with CPD and PiP and to understand the barriers to this. Recognition was given to workforce pressures affecting engagement and the ability to influence, support and encourage social workers. Some members suggested that mandated requirements can help to support contracting and SLA's in smaller organisations. It was agreed that it was not the right time to introduce additional requirements. MC advised that audit findings show social workers are unclear about the required 90 hours and what is needed to meet these. She also noted the need for clear language (PRTL vs CPD vs CPL). MC updated the Partnership on work ongoing to review PRTL and learning from other regulators. TO'R shared findings from a recent survey conducted within the community and voluntary sector on engagement in PiP identified challenges and barriers

for social workers in organisations without a strong social work identity or limited social work workforce.

Members highlighted activities to support retention of staff, progression and development of specialisms for mid to late career social workers, and the important role of team leaders within their organisations.

BH highlighted the need for accessible recording of reflection and learning following attendance at course or training (e.g., handheld logging tools). There was a discussion on the re-development of CAR and the Partnership were advised that the route remains in use and that social workers are submitting via IAR to claim requirements.

DG commented that she was pleased to see the career pathways included sideways development (trellis approach) and the recognition that not everyone wants to move up the ladder. She enquired about the potential to look at a work-based assessment route around on-going mentoring support and development of the mentoring role.

GMcA recognised the role of IAR and highlighted the need to consider the pressure on system for assessors to drive and support IAR as demand continues to grow.

HG welcomed the acknowledgment that CPD is not just training courses and recognised the practice leadership role of mid to late career social workers who bring vital experience in supporting a team, risk assessment and safeguarding. HG also acknowledged that PiP reps are really skilled in helping people recognised that these roles can then be used through IAR to gain recognition.

SR advised that feedback from the Supervision Policy noted that supervision is balanced, reflective and meaningful. SR also stated that her focus has been on the role and function of Team Leaders, and highlighted the importance of the role in retaining and supporting staff, alongside the operational oversight, which makes it a really complex role. A future modularised programme focused on preparing social workers for the role of team leader would be an aspiration.

EMcK acknowledged a gap in current training for aspiring managers. CT suggested that recognition for mentoring social workers into team leader roles could be formulated into an IAR submission. There are templates already available that could form the basis of this. The item will be added to the next I&D agenda for further development.

EP confirmed that the SEHSCT currently offer training and workshops for aspiring team leaders which is open to those 2 years post AYE. EP also advised that she is currently undertaking a Masters on service improvement and is looking at manager confidence and capability in delivering group supervision using a toolkit which she has developed.

SR mentioned that there will be a regional event to share and disseminate learning from projects. SR suggested that EP could present at this event - provisionally scheduled for September 2026.

	The Chair thanked SR for her insightful contribution and wished her all the best with the next stages in developing the career pathways and invited her to return to the Partnership to present the detail at a later stage. Action: IAR mentoring assessment pathway to be brought to the next I&D Meeting Action: A copy of the presentation and associated papers will be shared along with the minutes of this meeting. Action: SR to be tabled to return and present once further on with career pathways.
7	2026 PiP Award Ceremony
7.1	GMcA advised that the date for the 2026 PiP Awards Ceremony has now been confirmed as Tuesday, 22 September 2026, and will take place in the La Mon House Hotel, Belfast. Criteria for the Judith Mullineux Award are being developed by the Council will be shared with Partnership members.
8	Matters for Reporting to the Board
8.1	The Chair confirmed that the minutes of this meeting will be presented at the next Board meeting on 25 March 2026.
9	AOB
9.1	Social Work Awards – 4 December 2026 Belfast City Hall. EMcK noted that there will be an Award for Partnership working and that the PiP Partnership represents an excellent example of partnership in practice.
10	Dates of Meetings:
10.1	Business Meeting: Wednesday, 3 June 2026 Strategic In Person Meeting: Tuesday, 8 September 2026 PiP Awards 2026: Tuesday, 22 September 2026 Business Meeting: Wednesday, 2 December 2026

Signed:



Bria Morgan, Chair of PiP Partnership Committee

Dated:

03 June 2026

December 2025

Item	Owner	Action	Status
3.1	NL	Key departmental members to be invited to attend the March and September 2026 Strategic Partnership Meetings.	Closed
6.1	NL	External Assessor report to be circulated with minutes.	Closed
8.1	CM	Take the “Care to Chat” idea back to the Communications team.	Open
8.1	GMcA	Social Care Council to compile and gather information on existing initiatives to provide clarity on what can be shared with candidates.	Open
11.1	NL	Research paper to be circulated with minutes	Closed

March 2026

Item	Owner	Action	Status
6.1	NL	Presentation and associated papers to be circulated with minutes.	Open
6.1	GMcA	IAR mentoring assessment pathway to be brought to the next I&D Meeting	Open
6.1	CM/ GMcA	SR to be tabled to return and present once further on with career pathways.	