



Northern Ireland Social Care Council

Complaints and Feedback Annual Report

2024/25

Introduction

The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (Social Care Council) always aims to deliver high quality services in all aspects of its business and works to identify how improvements can be made on an on-going basis.

The Social Care Council also recognises that sometimes things can go wrong and when this happens it is in everyone's best interest to resolve concerns and complaints at the earliest possible stage. To support this the Social Care Council has a Complaints Policy ([click here to access](#)) – which explains how complaints about the Social Care Council's processes, systems or staff can be raised.

If a complaint or concern is about a social worker, social care worker or a student studying for a degree in social work – this is managed through a different system and by our 'Fitness to Practise' (FtP) team. Our website explains how to raise these types of concerns ([click here to access](#)).

It is important that the Social Care Council learns from its experiences and mistakes and uses the feedback it receives in a positive way to improve its services for everyone.

This report looks at the complaints or feedback we received from April 2024 to March 2025, the outcome of those complaints, what we learnt as a result of investigating them, and what else we did to improve our services and the way in which we support members of the public and registrants to raise any concerns.

Who we are

The Social Care Council is responsible for the registration and regulation of the Social Care Workforce which comprises around 48,000 people who work in a range of social care services (social work, social care, and also people studying for a degree in social work). The organisation was established in 2001, under the Health and Personal Social Services Act (NI) 2001 and is an Arms' Length Body, sponsored by the Department of Health in Northern Ireland. The Social Care Council delivers its programme of work across four strategic themes which are –

- Delivering effective regulation;
- Developing the capability of the workforce;

- Leading with influence; and
- Innovating and improving.

Our Vision and Values

Its vision is ‘to improve standards in social work and social care’. The Social Care Council’s values underpin its culture and explain how they work with others. The Social Care Council’s values are

- promote respect
- work with integrity
- believe in partnership
- strive for excellence.

Our Complaints Policy

The Social Care Council’s Complaints Policy was last reviewed in December 2023. A number of changes were made to the policy to improve the way complaints and feedback are recorded, how they are managed (to improve how long it takes to respond), and to improve how the organisation learns from complaints.

In addition, all staff were trained on the new policy, and it forms part of the induction for all new staff.

The Complaints Policy aims to

- resolve problems at the earliest opportunity;
- assist the Social Care Council in improving its services by learning from the feedback, experiences and concerns of its registrants and the public;
- protect the rights and confidentiality of those who raise concerns;
- ensure that senior management are informed of issues being raised so that services can be improved;
- provide consistent equal treatment of all persons who raise concerns.

When a complaint or feedback is received, it is registered by staff and immediately sent to the team who are best placed to respond to it. It is

also acknowledged within 2 working days of receipt. The complaint or feedback is then overseen by the senior manager in that function and a response is issued within 20 working days.

If the complaint or feedback is complex and/or requires a lot of time to investigate fully, the senior manager can escalate it to the Director of Registration & Corporate Services

If the person is not satisfied with the response they receive, they can also raise it with the Head of Corporate Services.

If the Social Care Council cannot resolve the issue to the individual's satisfaction, they can raise their concern with the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO). Their contact details can be found at **Annex A** at the back of this report. Engagement was undertaken in March 2025 with colleagues from the NIPSO around the new Complaints Standards. NIPSO resources will be used to ensure that the current complaints process is in compliance with the standards and to support staff training.

The Social Care Council's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) reviews reports on complaints and feedback every 3 months. Reports on complaints and feedback also form part of the reporting to the organisation's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and its Board. Finally, the organisation produces an annual report on the complaints and feedback it received during the year – and includes an overview of this in its Annual Report and Accounts.

This flow of information is designed to support the Senior Leadership Team and the Board in *making decisions* about the services the organisation delivers. It is also one of the ways the Senior Leadership Team and Board receives *assurance* on how well the organisation and its staff are delivering its services.

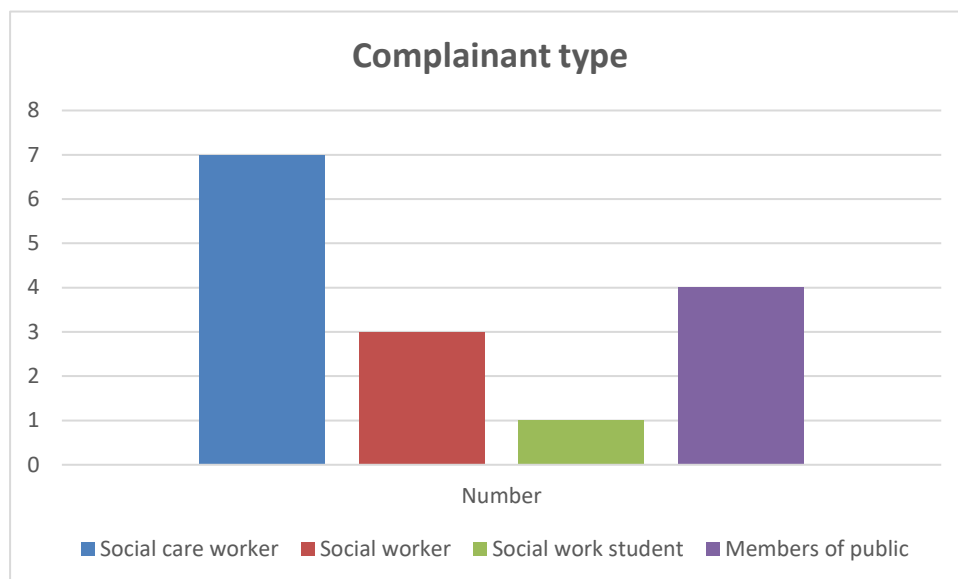
Complaints and Feedback during 2024/25

During the year 2024/25 (April 2024 to March 2025), the Social Care Council received 15 complaints. A breakdown of the complaints is set out in Table A below.

The majority of complaints were acknowledged within 2 working days and responded to within 20 working days in line with the Complaints Policy. In one instance where an acknowledgement was issued outside of 2 working

days, internal refresher training was provided.

A breakdown across complainant categories is provided below:



All of the complaints received were either directed to the Registration Team or Fitness to Practise Team to consider in the first instance in line with the Complaints Policy.

Nine out of the fifteen complaints were upheld following investigation.

There were no complaints escalated to the second stage of the Complaints Policy for further review/investigation.

Table A below provides more detail in relation to the nature of complaint received complainant category, acknowledgement and response times and lessons learned.

Table A

| Complainant | Nature of Complaint | Outcome | Acknowledgement time | Response time | Lessons Learned |
|---------------------|--|--------------------|--|---|---|
| Public | Raising practice concern for FtP investigation | Resolved | 1 day | 13 days | None identified |
| Social care worker | Fee payment issue and call waiting time | Resolved | 2 days | 5 days | Call handling pilot in place with NI Hub |
| Social care worker | Removal from register | Resolved | 2 days | 16 days – investigated and responded by Head of Registration Services | None identified |
| Public | Raising practice concern for FtP investigation | Actioned under FtP | 2 days | Taken forward under FtP process | None identified |
| Social care worker | Re-registration issues and call waiting time | Resolved | 1 day | 1 day – system issue resolved by Database team | Call handling pilot in place. |
| Social care worker | Re-registration issue and call waiting time | Resolved | 1 day | 1 day - system issue resolved by Database team | Call handling pilot in place |
| Social care worker | Re- registration issues | Resolved | 3 days (delayed referral to Complaints team) | 18 days | Internal refresher training and registration support given – Meeting held with DoRCS proposed participation in Social Care Registrant Forum |
| Social work student | Certificate access issue | Resolved | 1 day | 8 days | None identified |
| Social care worker | Call waiting time for fee payment | Resolved | 1 day | 7 days | Call handling pilot in place |
| Social worker | Experience of FtP Committee Hearing | Resolved | 2 days | 17 days | None identified |
| Social worker | Removal from register/payment issue | Resolved | 2 days | 6 days | Payment system software testing completed |
| Social worker | Call waiting time and FtP response | Resolved | 1 day | 19 days | Call handling pilot in place |

| | | | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|----------|-------------|---------|---|
| Social care worker | Training information on website | Resolved | 1 day | 1 day | Website updated for access by all HSCTs |
| Public | FtP related | Resolved | * see note | 15 days | None identified |
| Public | FtP related | Resolved | ** see note | NA | None identified |

* Acknowledgement was not sent to allow for consideration of appropriate process as complaint was related to an associated ongoing FtP case and submission of a Freedom of Information request.

** Complaint was received anonymously

Table B below outlines the volume of in year complaints received over the previous five-year period.

Table B

| Business Year | Volume |
|----------------------|---------------|
| 2024/25 | 15 complaints |
| 2023/24 | 10 complaints |
| 2022/23 | 2 complaints |
| 2021/22 | 1 complaint |
| 2020/21 | 1 complaint |

The number of complaints made by a member of the public increased from zero to four during the 2024/25 period and were all related to fitness to practise. This may be an outworking of increased public awareness around the process for raising a fitness to practise concern and ongoing guidance and refresher training for staff on the arrangements and management of complaints.

Between April – September 2024, there were eight complaints received from social care registrants that were related to difficulties in accessing telephone support to resolve registration/renewal issues. These were all resolved at local level within 1- 3 days. It is of note that there were no similar complaints received between October 2024 – 31 March 2025 which may be attributed to the positive impact of the implementation of a call handling pilot initially introduced in October 2024. The pilot has subsequently been extended to provide continued support to registrants and to release resources for other key registration processes.

To note:

Days refer to working days – complaints must be acknowledged within 2 working days. Complaints must be responded to in full within 20 working days.

Complaints may be:

Resolved – complaint upheld

Not upheld – complaint has not been upheld

Escalated/resolved – individual remains unsatisfied and the complaint has escalated to the next level of review as set out in the Complaints Policy. Complaint upheld on appeal to second level.

Escalated/not upheld - individual remains unsatisfied and the complaint has escalated to the next level of review as set out in the Complaints Policy. Complaint not upheld on appeal to second level. The individual may appeal to the NIPSO at this stage.

Findings and Learning as a result of the Complaints

Five of the fifteen complaints were in relation to difficulty in contacting the Social Care Council by telephone. It is expected that complaints in this area should reduce in the coming months due to the continued implementation of a call handling scheme that was initially piloted in 2024/25.

The impact of the call handling scheme has been two-fold in that it is supporting an enhanced first line telephone call service for registrants and has also enabled the release of resources to focus on email management and other key registration deliverables which will support overall improved service delivery.

Three of the complaints were system related issues. These were referred to the organisation's Database Team and were considered and resolved to as part of system development work.

What else?

Of the fifteen complaints received:

- None were escalated to the NIPSO
- 5 were from male registrants and 9 were female (one was from an employer rather than individual)
- One complaint was received anonymously in relation to attendance at online seminar hosted by the Social Care Council.

Complaints Management – 2025/26

The Complaints Policy will be kept under review to take on board any learning from the Complaints Standards developed by the NIPSO and any updated training requirements will be rolled out to all staff in a timely manner.

The Social Care Council has also broadened the data it records in relation to complaints to include workforce data, trends based on previous years, and triangulating this information to build a broader picture on the impact of services delivered by the organisation. This will include evaluating the effectiveness of its Complaints Policy to ensure it is fit for purpose.

[April 2025]

Annex A

Contacts

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