

# Quick guide:

## Registration fee review consultation

### Who we are and what we do

The [Northern Ireland Social Care Council](#) (the Social Care Council) was established in 2001 to regulate the social work and social care workforce in Northern Ireland.

We protect the public by maintaining a [Public Facing Register](#) (the Register) of social workers, social care managers, social care practitioners and social work students – currently almost 50,000 registered professionals, including over 42,000 social care practitioners, over 6,900 social workers and almost 700 social work students.

Registration is compulsory for those working in regulated social work and social care roles in Northern Ireland. Registrants must meet our [Standards of Conduct and Practice](#) and pay an annual registration fee.

### Why are we reviewing registration fees?

Our registration fees were last reviewed in 2016 – over ten years ago. Since then, the Register has grown by 53%, and the cost and complexity of regulation has increased significantly.

Referrals relating to conduct or practice have risen by 40%, and we now, for the first time, have waiting lists for Fitness to Practise referrals and Interim Suspension Orders. This is not a sustainable position for a regulator whose focus is public safety.

Our funding has also reduced substantially. Despite reducing our workforce capacity elsewhere, this is not enough to meet current demand.

Our current fees remain lower than almost all comparable UK regulators, and that gap continues to widen.

For example, from April 2027 for other social work and social care regulators:

- Scottish Social Services Council – Social care practitioner **(£43)**
- Scottish Social Services Council – Social worker **(£104)**
- Social Work England – Social worker **(£122 and £127 from 1 Dec 2028)**
- Social Care Wales – Social worker **(£80)**
- Social Care Wales – Social care manager **(£80)**
- Social Care Wales – Social care practitioner **(£30)**
- Social Care Wales – Social work student **(£15)**

A review is needed to ensure fees remain fair, sustainable and capable of supporting our public protection responsibilities.

## What changes are we proposing?

We propose a phased, two-year approach to fee increases:

| Part of Register              | Current fee level | Proposed Fee First year | Proposed Fee Second year |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Social worker                 | £65               | £120                    | £127                     |
| Senior leader - social worker | N/A               | N/A                     | £150                     |
| Social care manager           | £65               | £120                    | £127                     |
| Social care practitioner      | £30               | £40                     | £40 (no change)          |
| Social work student           | £20               | £20 (no change)         | £20 (no change)          |

Fee increases for social care practitioners will only apply in year one one – there is no further increase for this group in year two. Social work student fees will not increase during this three-year period.

For context, in Year 1 the proposed social worker fee of £120 is £2 less than the equivalent fee in England, £23 less than for nurses, and £3 less than most other regulated healthcare professionals across the UK. The proposed social care practitioner fee is £1 less than the equivalent fee in Scotland.

We are also exploring the option to pay annual fees by Direct Debit, and are proposing that fees increase annually in line with inflation (currently 2.6%, per the Office for National Statistics) and are formally reviewed at least every three years.

## **What are the guiding principles?**

Our proposals are shaped by three principles:

### **Principle 1**

The fee structure should be fair, proportionate and sustainable.

### **Principle 2**

The fee structure should reflect the separate parts of the Register, with fees proportionate to the differing levels of accountability and responsibility associated with registered roles.

### **Principle 3**

Fee levels and payment methods should be reviewed regularly and should support delivery of efficient and effective regulation.

## **Equality and fairness**

We recognise that fee changes could affect some groups more than others, including part-time workers, self-funders, newly qualified workers, internationally qualified workers, workers with caring responsibilities, and disabled registrants.

We have completed a full Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA), published alongside this consultation, and we want to hear your views

on any impacts it may have missed. The consultation specifically seeks views on how to mitigate these impacts.

Tax relief is also available: eligible taxpayers can claim back 20% of their registration fee through HM Revenue and Customs.

## What do we want to hear from you?

We want your views on whether the proposed fee levels are fair and proportionate, how changes should be phased, what payment options would help, and whether any groups would be disproportionately affected.

There are 15 questions in the full consultation document covering these topics.

## How to have your say

The consultation runs for **eight weeks**, opening on **14 September 2026** and closing on **9 November 2026**.

Responses are preferred to be submitted using the [online survey](#).

If you need an alternative format or wish to discuss the proposals before responding, please contact us:

- **Email:** [businesssupport@niscc.hscni.net](mailto:businesssupport@niscc.hscni.net)
- **Phone:** 028 9536 2600
- **Website:** [www.niscc.info](http://www.niscc.info)

A consultation analysis report will be published on our website after the consultation closes.

Responses may be subject to Freedom of Information requests and will be retained for three years before being destroyed. Personal data will be handled in line with *UK GDPR* and the *Data Protection Act 2018*.

Further information including the full **Consultation document**, **Equality Impact Assessment** and **FAQ** can be found at:  
[www.niscc.info/consultations](http://www.niscc.info/consultations).



## Want to connect with us? Here's how

You can stay up to date on all our news and events by visiting the Social Care Council's website,



or you can follow us across our social channels.

