

If you have a query about the Designated Practice Learning Scheme, or if you need advice on any aspect of social work education and training in NI, contact the NISCC to speak to a Professional Adviser.

Contact us

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Information is also available from our website:
www.niscc.info

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The NISCC Designated Practice Learning Scheme

Maintaining Standards in Practice Learning Opportunities for the Honours Degree in Social Work in NI

June 2007

A scheme for organisations who wish to become NISCC Designated Practice Learning Providers for the Honours Degree in Social Work in NI.

NISCC- promoting high standards of education and training fo social work in NI

The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) is an independent public body, established in October 2001 under the Health and Personal Social Services Act (NI 2001) to help raise standards in social care.

The NISCC is responsible for:

- Setting and monitoring the standards for social work education and training, including the approval of courses in social work.
- Setting standards of conduct and practice for social workers, social care workers and social work students, by regulating and registering the workforce according to an agreed Code of Practice.

Why do we need the Designated Practice Learning Scheme?

Practice learning opportunities are a key component of the Honours Degree in Social Work. Northern Ireland has long been regarded as having high standards in social work education, training and learning. The introduction of the new Honours Degree in Social Work and increasing expectations in respect of social care governance, required a review of Practice Learning provision, to develop new standards which would enhance the delivery of services to people who use them and their carers.

The Standards for Practice Learning for the Degree in Social Work were issued by the DHSSPS (NI) in March 2006. Section three of the standards outlines best practice for organisations who wish to provide practice learning opportunities for social work students. In order to provide such opportunities, organisations must become Designated Providers and subsequently be subject to the NISCC quality assurance process. This process is outlined in full in the *Approval, Monitoring, Review and Inspection Arrangements for Designated Practice Learning Providers* (NISCC, May 2007).

How does the Scheme work?

It is important for organisations interested in applying to be part of the scheme to discuss the requirements for being designated with the NISCC. A NISCC officer will be available for these initial discussions.

Organisations who are subsequently interested in becoming designated providers must first send a *Notification of Intent* to the NISCC. They will then be sent a template for their submissions, which is based on section three of the practice learning standards. Providers are expected to match evidence against each of the relevant standards and submit the completed template to the NISCC. A NISCC officer is available for guidance on the process if required.

The submissions will be assessed by the NISCC with any one of three possible outcomes:

- Designated
- Designated with conditions
- Not Designated

Who can become a Designated Practice Learning Provider?

Any organisation, large or small, can apply for designation and their application will be assessed using the standards as a benchmark.

Organisations should not be discouraged from applying if they feel they cannot meet all of the standards immediately. An incremental and developmental approach has been taken in relation to the introduction of the practice learning standards. As a result, organisations may be designated with conditions and a NISCC officer will be available to work with potential providers towards meeting them in full.

What are 'Associate Providers'?

As well as providing practice learning opportunities directly, main providers may establish partnership arrangements with other organisations in order to supplement or complement existing provision.

Such relationships should be formalised with robust quality assurance arrangements applied to both main providers and their associates. In such an arrangement, overall responsibility for practice learning rests with the Designated Provider.

It is envisaged that students will be able to meet the majority of their practice learning needs with a designated provider and that associate providers will offer specific learning opportunities that will either enhance the student's experience or enable them to meet the full range of learning requirements as set out in *The Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work* (DHSSPS, March 2003).

The NISCC has defined "Associate Provider" as an organisation which enters into an agreement with a Designated Provider to supply part or all of a Practice Learning Opportunity with the purpose of enhancing the learning experience for the student.

Under such arrangements, the Designated Provider has an overall responsibility to quality assure the Practice Learning Opportunity, the details of which must be included in the agreement.