



# **Northern Ireland Social Care Council**

## **Working Together**

**Understanding the Roles and  
Boundaries of the Regulator,  
the Trade Unions and the  
Professional Body**

**June 2011**

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## Working Together – Understanding the Roles and Boundaries of the Regulator, Trade Unions and the Professional Body

The protocol is the output of joint work by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC), the Northern Ireland Association of Social Workers (NIASW), the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) and UNISON.

We would like to thank to all of those who contributed to the development of this protocol. This will be a valuable tool to assist mutual understanding between regulators, professional bodies and trade unions through clarification of their respective roles and boundaries in respect of the social care workforce.



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13 June 2011

## 1. Introduction

This paper has been drafted to assist mutual understanding between regulators, professional bodies and trade unions through clarification of their respective roles and boundaries in respect of the social care workforce. The protocol is the output of work by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC), the Northern Ireland Association of Social Workers (NIASW), the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) and UNISON.

NIPSA, UNISON and NIASW nominate members onto the NISCC's Registrants' Committee, and work with the NISCC on other related activities. The Registrants' Committee is a committee of Council, established in June 2008 under Direction from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. The purpose of the Committee is to enable the Council to consult the Committee for its views on matters relating to the conduct, practice and training of social care workers. The Registrants' Committee comprises of 10 members, representing all parts of the Register. The Membership is comprised of the following constituents:-

- Four registrants nominated by NIPSA;
- Four registrants nominated by Unison;
- One registrant nominated by NIASW;
- One registrant from the Student part of the Register.

This protocol recognises the importance of the different organisations working together with their shared concerns for, and interest in, social work and the social care workforce. However, it also recognises the importance of being clear about the distinct roles of the regulator, the Trade Unions and the Professional body, to ensure a common understanding and effective working on joint issues.

## 2. Roles

### 2.1. Arriving at the Descriptions

Each organisation recognises that there are both distinctive and overlapping roles undertaken by the Regulator (NISCC), the Trade Unions (UNISON and NIPSA) and the professional body (NIASW). Workshop attendees are noted at **Appendix One**. **Appendix Two** illustrates the various roles as a diagram, and has been produced following a workshop held in November 2009. In arriving at the role descriptions, workshop participants considered the formal and legal mandates, the expectations of others and the aspirations of the various bodies. The following paragraphs provide a narrative to support the diagram, and describe in brief the following:

- Role of the Regulator (NISCC);
- Role of Trade Unions (UNISON and NIPSA);
- Role of Professional Body (NIASW);
- Trade Unions and the Professional Body – Roles in Common;
- NISCC, Trade Unions and the Professional Body – Roles common to all three.

Relevant web site addresses are also included below, to guide readers as necessary to fuller explanation of the roles and services offered by each of the bodies.

Where appropriate, issues of particular importance, including role constraints have been highlighted at the conclusion of each section.

#### Individual Roles

### 2.2. Role of the Regulator (The Northern Ireland Social Care Council, NISCC)

#### **About NISCC**

The NISCC is the regulatory body for the Northern Ireland social care workforce. NISCC is a non-departmental public body, established to increase public protection by improving and regulating standards of training and practice for social care workers. NISCC has three main roles:

- Social Care Workforce Regulator - raising standards by registering and regulating social care workers
- Social Work Training Regulator – approving, regulating and promoting social work education and training
- Developing standards for training and qualifications for the social care workforce, including its role as part of a Sector Skills Council (Skills for Care & Development).

Further information on NISCC is available at [www.niscc.info](http://www.niscc.info)

In fulfilling its roles, the NISCC has responsibilities for:

- Protection of the public;
- Standards of Practice;
- Codes of Practice for social care workers and their employers;
- Standards of social work training at qualifying and post qualifying levels;
- Post Registration Training and Learning (PRTL);
- Requirements for Entry into the Profession;
- The Social Care Workforce Register;
- Holding registrants to account;
- Promoting entry into the profession;
- Providing information on social work and social care training.

## 2.3 Role of the Trade Unions (NIPSA and UNISON)

### **About NIPSA**

The Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) represents over 45,000 members from across the civil and public services and the voluntary sector. Members are employed in areas such as Health and Social Care Trusts, the Northern Ireland Civil Service, Non Departmental Public Bodies, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, local Councils, Education and the Community and Voluntary Sector. NIPSA members can be found in a wide variety of jobs, and all grades and professions.

Further information on NIPSA is available at [www.nipsa.org.uk](http://www.nipsa.org.uk)

### **About UNISON**

UNISON is Britain and Europe's biggest public sector union with more than 1.3 million members. UNISON members are people working in the public services, for private contractors providing public services and in the essential utilities. Members include frontline staff and managers working full or part time in Health and Social Care, local Councils, Education, Electricity, Gas and Water industries, Transport and the Voluntary Sector. UNISON represents over 40,000 workers in Northern Ireland.

Further information on UNISON is available at [www.unison.org.uk](http://www.unison.org.uk)

The distinctive roles of Trade Unions include:

- Advocacy;
- Representing individuals and groups of social workers and social care workforce;
- Advice and representation at hearings;
- Influencing policy with all (e.g. through Codes of Practice);
- Leadership;
- Pay and conditions;
- Interface with Registrants;
- Lobbying Government on social work and social care issues.

## 2.4 Role of the Professional Body

### **About BASW/NIASW**

BASW is the only professional association for Social Workers in the UK. The primary aim of BASW is to promote the best possible social work services for all people who may need them, whilst also securing the well-being of social Workers who are its members. BASW is not a Trade Union, but does offer an Advice and Representation Service for its members, as well as Professional Indemnity Insurance cover for members. NIASW is the Northern Ireland branch of BASW.

Further information is available at [www.basw.co.uk](http://www.basw.co.uk)

The distinctive roles of NIASW are as:

- Independent body – social workers speaking for social workers;
- Voice of the social work profession;
- Promoting excellence in social work practice and social policy development;
- International role in social work;
- Good practice guidance (e.g. Journal of Social Work);
- Influencing policy;
- Training standards;
- Code of Ethics;
- Lobbying Government on social work issues.

## 2.5 Trade Union/Professional Body – Role in Common

In considering the roles of the Trade Unions and the Professional Body, it became clear that alongside their distinct roles, there are a number of areas in common. These include:

- Promoting the profession as a body of professionals;
- Speaking up for the profession at times of crisis;
- Arguing for resources;
- Lobbying;
- Holding employers to account;
- Value base;
- Advice and representation;
- Member based.

**Voice of Social Work profession** - Core to the role of the Trade Unions (NIPSA and UNISON) and the professional body (NIASW) is the promotion of the profession as a body of professionals, and the duty to speak up for professionals at times of crisis. This contrasts with the role of the Council, which is unable to take up these roles as they could undermine public confidence in the independence of the Council as the Regulator.

**Influencing Policy** - Whilst the Trade Unions (UNISON and NIPSA) and the professional body (NIASW) have a remit and freedom to proactively influence policy, the NISCC is more an instrument of policy – giving effect to policy on Regulation and Education and Training. However, within its remit, NISCC have a legitimate policy influencing role e.g. influencing Education and Training policy, the requirements for Assessed Year in Employment (AYE) etc.

## 2.6 Roles Common to All – Trade Unions, Professional Body and the Regulator

Finally in considering the roles, there was consensus that in the following areas all groups have roles in common:

- Raising standards of practice;
- Highlighting concerns with regard to safe practice;
- Promoting the profession as an evidence-based practice;
- Promoting standards of practice;
- Public protection;
- Promoting Codes;
- Establishing standards; and
- Influencing Policies.

**Employers Code of Practice** – The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority have the statutory role for holding employers to account. However, NISCC formally refer matters of concern which come to their attention to the RQIA (there is an agreed Memorandum of Understanding between NISCC and RQIA). In addition, the Trade Unions and Professional Body directly raise matters with employers (or with the Department, Health and Social Care Board, or Public Health Agency) and in this way also hold employers to account. Codes of Practice for employers and registrants are fundamental in underpinning the accountability of employers.

**Communication with the workforce** - The current climate and staff perceptions (workload pressures, tightening financial pressures, and other impacts of the Comprehensive Spending Review etc) place additional importance on communication with the workforce. This role is taken forward separately and jointly. Each party has its own channels of communication and can reinforce appropriate messages through these (e.g. with respect to Codes of Practice). Joint Road Shows have already proven effective as a joint vehicle for communication.

### 3. Principles

Underpinning all of the roles are the principles of leadership and honesty. Leadership and honesty require genuine acknowledgement of difficulties, clarity about the standards expected of registrants and employers, promotion of the Codes of Conduct and Practice, and being clear about each other's role(s).

### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important that all of the roles of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) are understood, and that there is recognition of the complimentary roles of the Trade Unions (NIPSA, UNISON) and the professional body (NIASW). Each has a responsibility to communicate clearly the role and remit of the others rather than contribute to confusion. NISCC need to communicate clearly and consistently with employers and with registrants. The partnership is crucial in getting the right messages out and ensuring the voices of registrants are heard.

## Appendix One

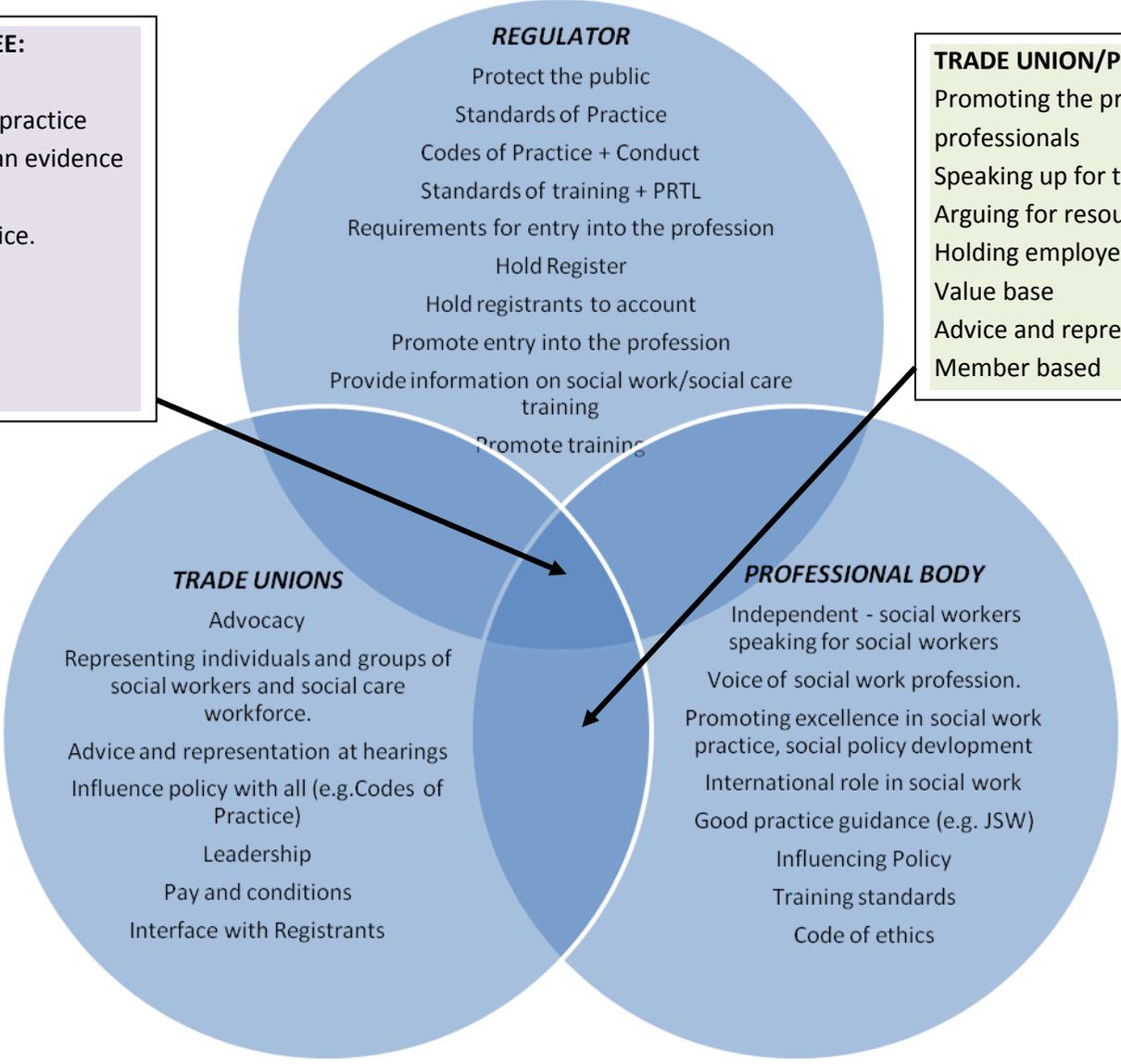
### **Attendees - Roles and Boundaries Workshop Wednesday 25 November 2009**

Dr Jeremy Harbison (Chair, NISCC)  
Brendan Johnston (Chief Executive, NISCC)  
Patricia Higgins (NISCC)  
Lily Kerr (UNISON)  
Damien Campbell (UNISON)  
Kevin McCabe (NIPSA)  
Brian Smyth (NIPSA)  
Damien Maguire (NIPSA)  
Lesley McDowell (NIASW)  
Gerry Madden (NIASW)  
Irene Hewitt (Facilitator)

**Appendix Two: Roles and Boundaries of the Regulator, Trade Union and Professional Body.**

**ROLE COMMON TO ALL THREE:**  
 Raising standards of practice  
 Highlighting concerns re safe practice  
 Promoting the profession as an evidence based practice.  
 Promoting standards of practice.  
 Public protection  
 Promoting Codes  
 Establishing standards  
 Influencing policies

**TRADE UNION/PROFESSIONAL BODY ROLE:**  
 Promoting the profession as a body of professionals  
 Speaking up for the profession at times of crisis  
 Arguing for resources. Lobbying  
 Holding employers to account  
 Value base  
 Advice and representation  
 Member based



[www.niscc.info](http://www.niscc.info)

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