



Rules for the Approval of the Degree in Social Work

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Contents

| | Page |
|-----------------------------------------------------|------|
| Part I | |
| Introduction | 2 |
| 1. Authority | 2 |
| 2. Training for social work | 3 |
| 3. Interpretation | 3 |
| 4. Publication of the Rules | 5 |
| | |
| Part II | |
| Rules for the Degree in Social Work | 6 |
| 5. Content and provision of the Degree | 6 |
| 6. Approval | 7 |
| 7. External Examination | 12 |
| 8. Provision of information to the Council | 12 |
| 9. Governance and continuous improvement | 13 |
| 10. Formal investigation and withdrawal of approval | 15 |
| 11. Appeals | 16 |
| 12. Complaints against the Council | 16 |
| 13. Public record | 16 |

Part I

Introduction

1 Authority

- 1.1 The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (hereinafter referred to as the Council) is a statutory body established on 1 October 2001 by the Health and Personal Social Services Act (Northern Ireland) 2001 (hereinafter referred to as the Act).
- 1.2 The Act requires the Council to promote high standards of conduct and practice among social care workers and high standards in their training.
- 1.3 This will be achieved through:
 - 1.3.1 The registration of social workers and social care workers.
 - 1.3.2 The development of standards of conduct and practice and issuing Codes of Practice for social care workers and their employers.
 - 1.3.3 The investigation of complaints of misconduct and where necessary suspending registration, removing individuals from the register, or altering their registration.
 - 1.3.4 The promotion of education and training for persons wishing to become social workers and social care workers.
 - 1.3.5 The approval of courses in social work.
- 1.4 The Council, in the exercise of the powers to approve courses in social work, conferred on it under Sections 10 and 13 of the Act¹ herein makes the following Rules. These Rules may be cited as the 'Rules for the Approval of Courses leading to the Degree in Social Work' and they should be read in conjunction with the "Northern Ireland Social Care Council (Registration) Rules, 2009".
- 1.5 The Rules contribute to the Council's role in promoting high standards of conduct and practice for the social care workforce. They set out arrangements for approving courses in relevant social work for persons who wish to become social workers.
- 1.6 These Rules have been made by the Council with the consent of the Department of Health, Social Services, and Public Safety. (Section 18(3) of the Act).

¹ As amended by Article 46 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Quality Improvement and Regulation) (NI) Order 2003

2 Training for social work

- 2.1 The Degree in Social Work (hereinafter referred to as the Degree) will prepare students for social work in a variety of sectors, including health and social services, the probation service, education welfare, juvenile justice, other criminal justice settings, the voluntary and private sectors, and any other sector where social workers with a social work qualification may be employed.
- 2.2 The attainment of the Degree in Social Work will be the required professional qualification for practice and will confer eligibility for registration as a social worker with the Council.
- 2.3 The Degree will be generic. The knowledge, skills and values required for competent social work practice and for the award of the Degree are set out in full in the 'Northern Ireland Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work, March 2003'².
- 2.4 The Council will approve only those courses which lead to the award of the Degree.

3 Interpretation

- 3.1 In these Rules, unless the context otherwise requires:

'The Act' means the Health and Personal Social Services Act (Northern Ireland) 2001.

'AP(E)L' means both the accreditation of prior learning and the accreditation of prior experiential learning.

'Approved Course' means a course of study leading to a Degree in Social Work for persons wishing to become social workers, which has been approved by the Council.

'Collaborative arrangements' means a formal agreement between education institutions and social work employers articulating and committing each organisation's active contribution to the planning, delivery and evaluation of the course.

'Council' means the Northern Ireland Social Care Council.

'Course Provider' means a partnership of one or more education institutions together with social work employers, which has been approved by the Council to jointly design, plan, deliver and evaluate a course leading to the award of the Degree.

'Course provision' means the delivery of a course of study leading to a Degree in Social Work offered by a Course Provider.

² The Northern Ireland Framework Specification is obtainable from the NISCC, 7th Floor, Millennium House, 19-25 Great Victoria Street, Belfast BT2 7AQ.

'Degree in Social Work' means a course of education and training in social work at honours degree level, which is approved by the Council under these Rules, for persons who wish to become social workers.

'DEL' means the Department of Employment and Learning.

'Department' means the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

'Education institution' means any university or further and higher education college intending to, or providing the Degree course in partnership with social work employers.

'External Examiner' means a person who is independent and impartial, engaged to provide informed comment on the standards set for Approved Courses and student achievement in relation to those standards.

'Fitness for purpose' means that the course provision achieves the aim of training persons to achieve the required standard of proficiency in social work.

'Governance and continuous improvement' means the framework for the quality assurance of the Degree.

'Higher Education Institution' (HEI) means a university with degree awarding powers.

'Key constituents' means social work employers and education institutions which are involved in the provision of the Degree.

'NI Degree in Social Work Partnership', (Degree Partnership) means the body set up by the Council and which is accountable to it. It represents education institutions and social work employers engaged in the provision of social work education and training. The Degree Partnership facilitates the development of regional approaches, protocols and procedures in relation to selection, practice learning, course content and other issues identified and agreed by the Degree Partnership, Course Providers and the Council.

'Northern Ireland Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work' means the document setting out what a student social worker must know, understand and be able to do to be awarded the Degree.

'Officer of the Council' means an employee of the Council or any person including a solicitor or lawyer duly authorised, to act on behalf of the Chief Executive of the Council.

'Practice learning' means the wide range of learning experiences, including direct supervised practice in a workplace, which contributes to the professional development of knowledge, skills, values and competence of a practising social worker in keeping with the requirements.

'Public' means customers of social work services and includes students, users, carers, local communities or other persons with an interest in the quality of social work training.

‘Required standard of proficiency in relevant social work’ means the standard of knowledge and skills set out in the ‘Northern Ireland Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work’.

‘Social work employer’ means any employer considered by the Council to be an employer of social workers.

‘The Register’ means the Register maintained by the Council under Section 3 of the Act, and registration will be construed accordingly.

‘Visitor’ means a person who is independent and impartial, appointed by the Council, who may make reports on the standards of course provision according to Section 13(2) (b) of the Act.

4 Publication of the Rules

- 4.1 These Rules and a list of the courses approved under the Rules will be published on the Council’s website and in such other manner as the Council sees fit.

Part II

Rules for the Degree in Social Work

5 Content and provision of the Degree

- 5.1 The Northern Ireland Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work determines the content of the Degree.
- 5.2 The Council will determine the numbers of persons who may participate in specific Degree courses in keeping with the Council's standards.
- 5.3 Course Providers will have collaborative arrangements in place that include education institutions and social work employers to manage the planning, design, delivery and evaluation of course provision.
- 5.4 There will be a Degree Partnership which will have responsibility for the development, co-ordination, implementation and monitoring of key systems such as the regional suitability interviews for admissions, practice learning allocation and management information.
- 5.5 The Degree Partnership will ensure regional approaches to the promotion, implementation and monitoring of consistent standards in course provision in line with Council's directions.
- 5.6 The Degree Partnership will have an operational role in continuous improvement of course delivery to ensure it remains "fit for purpose". The Degree Partnership shall therefore work with Course Providers, including Designated Practice Learning Providers, to put in place mechanisms to ensure that key developments in social work practice inform curriculum delivery.
- 5.7 The Degree Partnership will put in place mechanisms to ensure the formal and systematic input and feedback from service users, carers and students.
- 5.8 Members of the Degree Partnership will be appointed by the Council and will include representatives of education institutions and social work employers providing the Degree.
- 5.9 The membership of the Degree Partnership will be reviewed not less than, or at least, every five years.
- 5.10 The Degree Partnership will be accountable to the Council and report to the Council on such matters and at such intervals as the Council may require.
- 5.11 Plans for the location and mode of delivery of specific course provision must be consistent with regional agreements and take account of academic and practice learning resource requirements.
- 5.12 The Council may conduct, or make arrangements for the conduct of, examinations in connection with the Degree.
- 5.13 The Degree can only be awarded by courses that are approved by the Council.

- 5.14 The Council will from time to time publish information about the type and location of Degree courses that have been approved under these Rules.
- 5.15 The Council may review and amend these Rules from time to time with the consent of the Department. A review of the Rules will take place not less than or at least every five years.

6 Approval

- 6.1 The Council will approve a course only when it is satisfied that the course meets the Standards for Approval (see 6.10 below) which cover the following areas:
 - 6.1.1 Regional consistency.
 - 6.1.2 Collaborative arrangements.
 - 6.1.3 Management and organisation.
 - 6.1.4 Policy and planning.
 - 6.1.5 Resources and staffing.
 - 6.1.6 Student participation.
 - 6.1.7 Public participation.
 - 6.1.8 Selection and registration.
 - 6.1.9 Teaching, practice learning and assessment.
 - 6.1.10 Governance and continuous improvement.
- 6.2 In order to seek approval, a Course Provider will submit to the Council an application for the approval of the Degree in the format required by the Council.
- 6.3 A Course Provider may offer more than one course. Each course must be consistent with regional agreements and separately approved as meeting the Council's Standards for Approval.
- 6.4 The Council may from time to time vary the Standards for Approval. It will be a condition of approval that courses continue to comply with these Standards, including any changes to them.
- 6.5 Following initial approval all course provision will be subject to periodic review as part of the Council's governance arrangements for the continuous improvement of the Degree. The first formal review following approval will be within 5 years.
- 6.6 Subject to any future changes to these Rules, approval of a course will continue unless and until:
 - 6.6.1 Approval is withdrawn under these Rules as provided for by Section 10(3) (g) of the Act.
 - 6.6.2 Approval is withdrawn following either a request from the Course Provider or the Course Provider and the Degree Partnership to that effect.

- 6.7 Where approval is refused, withdrawn or given subject to additional conditions, the Course Provider may appeal in accordance with Rule 11.
- 6.8 Approval may be withdrawn following a formal investigation in accordance with Rule 10.
- 6.9 The Course Provider will notify the Council and the Degree Partnership of any proposed material change in the course provision and must not make any such change without the Council's consent in writing.
- 6.10 Course Providers seeking approval must satisfy the Council on the following Standards for Approval:

6.10.1 Regional consistency

- (i) plans for the location and mode of course delivery consistent with regional agreements and take account of academic and practice learning resource requirements.
- (ii) representation on the Degree Partnership and signed agreements to its terms of reference
- (iii) agreement to collaborate with regional approaches to the promotion, implementation and monitoring of consistent standards, policies and procedures in relation to course provision in line with Council directions.
- (iv) have procedures to facilitate any regional policies in relation to the development, co-ordination, implementation and monitoring of key operational systems such as admissions, practice learning allocation and management information which have been agreed by the Degree Partnership and the Council.
- (v) put in place systems for the communication and feedback of information between the Degree Partnership and the Course Provider.

6.10.2 Collaborative arrangements

- (i) collaborative arrangements to manage the planning, design, delivery and evaluation of course provision which reflect a balance of interests between employing agencies and education institutions
- (ii) written agreements detailing the rights and obligations of the relevant parties and signed by the accountable officer of each organisation, and which show each organisation's contribution to the planning, management and delivery of course provision
- (iii) procedures to ensure key constituents are clear about their responsibilities, both as representatives of their employer/s and for effective two way communication and feedback between their organisation/s and the course provider.

6.10.3 Management and organisation

- (i) validation of the award of the Degree from an appropriate HEI or confirmation of a franchise agreement between institutions to deliver a Degree
- (ii) financial control systems to manage and account for any funding
- (iii) information management systems to collect and analyse data in respect of students as required by the Rules
- (iv) clear line management structures, reporting and decision-making systems
- (v) management and organisation of course provision which reflect the requirements of the Council's 'Code of Practice for Employers of Social Care Workers', including the responsibility to promote the Council's 'Code of Practice for Social Care Workers' to students, users and carers and to co-operate with the Council's proceedings
- (vi) protocols to ensure co-operation with the Council's registration policies and procedures, including the responsibility to inform the Council about any misconduct by a student that might call into question the student's registration with the Council
- (vii) procedures for complaints, appeals, termination of training and whistle-blowing in line with Council requirements and any regional agreements
- (viii) arrangements for making provision for students with special learning needs.

6.10.4 Policy and planning

- (i) a plan consistent with regional agreements and showing evidence of identified need for proposed course provision including target numbers of students, viability of implementation including resources for the management and delivery of the provision
- (ii) policies and procedures that reflect a commitment to equality, human rights and anti-oppressive practice.

6.10.5 Resources and staffing

- (i) sufficient staff with qualifications and experience to manage student learning in line with the academic and practice learning requirements specified by the Council
- (ii) sufficient academic and practice learning resources to meet student learning and assessment needs
- (iii) sufficient resources to deliver all aspects of the course, including the academic and practice learning components, and meet the requirements specified by the Council.

6.10.6 Student participation

- (i) mechanisms to ensure the formal and systematic participation of students in the design, delivery and evaluation of course provision.

6.10.7 Public participation

- (i) mechanisms to ensure the formal and systematic participation of users and carers in the design, delivery and evaluation of course provision
- (ii) policy on remuneration, induction, training and support to promote active user and carer participation in course provision
- (iii) mechanisms to ensure user and carer feedback on agreed aspects of student performance
- (iv) mechanisms to allow for the formal input and feedback from other people with an interest in social work education and training.

6.10.8 Selection and registration

- (i) a selection process which uses a variety of techniques and which must include interview
- (ii) a selection process which has explicit entry criteria
- (iii) the entry criteria must include a statement requiring applicants to demonstrate that they:
 - Meet HEI admission requirements for the Degree.
 - Are suitable to be registered as a student social worker (Section 2(3) (f) and Section 3(1) (b) of the Act).
 - Have the potential to meet the required learning outcomes as set out in the Northern Ireland Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work.
 - Have basic numeracy and literacy skills equivalent to GCSE grade C in Mathematics and English.
 - Have effective oral and written communication skills.
- (iv) arrangements to confirm that students are registered with the Council before they commence the course or, in exceptional circumstances before they commence direct supervised practice.

6.10.9 Teaching, practice learning, and assessment

- (i) a course specification that demonstrates how the Northern Ireland Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work and the

Practice Learning Requirements³ for the Degree in Social Work will be delivered and assessed

- (ii) a course specification that aligns learning outcomes, learning strategies (including practice learning) and assessment methods and meets the requirements for teaching and assessment
- (iii) sufficient guided, structured and assessed academic and practice learning to enable students to attain the required learning outcomes as set out in the Northern Ireland Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work and the Requirements for Practice Learning
- (iv) assessment arrangements, including arrangements for AP(E)L, which meet the Council's requirements.
- (v) policies and procedures to ensure that responsibilities for the provision of practice learning opportunities meet the Council's requirements.

6.10.10 Governance and continuous improvement⁴

- (i) quality assurance arrangements which are consistent with the Rules and any requirements set by the Council and address both academic and practice learning components of course provision
- (ii) reporting arrangements to the Council on the annual evaluation of provision
- (iii) arrangements to appoint External Examiners that meet the criteria and requirements set by the Council.

³ The Practice Learning Requirements document is obtainable from the NISCC, 7th Floor, Millennium House, and 19-25 Great Victoria Street, Belfast BT2 7AQ.

⁴ Governance Framework for the Continuous Improvement of the Degree in Social Work is obtainable from the NISCC, 7th Floor, Millennium House, 19-25 Great Victoria Street, Belfast BT2 7AQ.

7 External Examination

- 7.1 At least two External Examiners should be appointed to an Approved Course and be able, in their expert opinion, to report on the following:
 - 7.1.1 Whether the standards for both the academic and practice learning components of the course are appropriate for the Degree.
 - 7.1.2 The standards of student performance and how they compare with those of similar programmes.
 - 7.1.3 The extent to which the processes for assessment, examination and determination of the award of the Degree are sound and have been fairly conducted.
- 7.2 Policies, procedures and criteria for the recruitment and selection of External Examiners should meet Higher Education Institution standards and the Council's requirements.
- 7.3 There should be no reciprocal external examining arrangements.
- 7.4 The respective obligations and responsibilities of the Course Provider, the Council and the External Examiners should be clear and explicit regarding:
 - 7.4.1 The issuing of contracts to, and the payment of, External Examiners.
 - 7.4.2 The External Examiners' reporting requirements.
 - 7.4.3 The provision of, and attendance at, training and briefing events.
 - 7.4.4 Where problems or concerns are identified by an External Examiner.

8 Provision of information to the Council

- 8.1 The Council will require the Degree Partnership and/or Course Providers to provide information on any aspect of course provision, including collaborative arrangements, resources, content, delivery arrangements, future plans, evaluation, statistics and any other information the Council may require and within timescales as directed by the Council.
- 8.2 An Approved Course Provider will ensure that it is at all times able to identify the status of all social work students who are or have been enrolled with it.

- 8.3 A Course Provider must be able to collect and analyse data in respect of:
- 8.3.1 Numbers of:
- (i) applications
 - (ii) places offered
 - (iii) students enrolled
 - (iv) students at each assessment point who pass or are referred, deferred, withdrawn, exited or failing
 - (v) students offered entrance with credit.
- 8.3.2 Information regarding:
- (i) equal opportunities
 - (ii) availability and quality of practice learning opportunities
 - (iii) terminations, complaints and appeals.
- 8.4 Course Providers will report on the outcomes of any evaluation or formal reviews to the Degree Partnership as required.
- 8.5 Course Providers must supply the Council annually with:
- (i) the current course handbook
 - (ii) an annual report and action plan
 - (iii) reports on the outcomes of any relevant quality assurance processes, in the education institutions or social work agencies involved in the provision of the Degree
 - (iv) External Examiner reports and reports on any actions required.

9 Governance and continuous improvement

- 9.1 The Council will satisfy itself on an ongoing basis that Approved Course Providers continue to comply with the Rules and any additional conditions of approval that may apply in accordance with section 10 (2) of the Act.
- 9.2 The Council will assess the information and documentation provided by the Course Provider under the Rules for Approval of the Degree.
- 9.3 The Council will undertake the first formal review of an Approved Course within 5 years of approval. Subsequent reviews will take place at intervals of not more than 5 years.
- 9.4 An earlier review may be undertaken by the Council if indicated by the Course Provider's annual report or other sources of information made available to the Council.
- 9.5 The Council will quality assure any aspect of course provision at regular intervals, including academic and practice learning according to requirements set by the Council and any other relevant quality standards determined by the Council.

- 9.6 All elements of course provision must be quality assured annually and quality assurance processes will involve the public and teaching staff.
- 9.7 The Course Provider will invite the Council to participate in all relevant education institution quality reviews and any other relevant quality reviews relating to any aspect of course provision and will provide the Council with reports on the outcomes of such reviews and reports and on the outcomes of action plans where these are required.
- 9.8 The Course Provider will satisfy the Council that reports on the outcomes of any quality assurance activity by the Council will be used to inform any relevant quality reviews in institutions or organisations contributing to course provision.
- 9.9 In consultation and collaboration with the Council the Degree Partnership will contribute to the review and development of the relevance and continuing validity of course provision at regular intervals. The Degree Partnership, in exercising its operational role in continuous improvement of course delivery, will contribute to the review and development of course provision together with key stakeholders.
- 9.10 The Council may appoint visitors to visit any place or institution where learning for the Degree is, or is proposed to be provided.
- 9.11 A visitor appointed by the Council to visit places or institutions where learning for the Degree is delivered may be required to prepare reports on the nature and quality of the instruction or assessment to be given and the facilities provided or to be provided at any place or institution visited.
- 9.12 The Council may pay visitors a fee, allowances and expenses as determined by the Council.
- 9.13 The Council will visit the Course Provider not less than once per year to monitor and feed back on the strengths of course provision and areas for improvement.
- 9.14 Course Providers will take action on identified areas for improvement and co-operate with the Council and the Degree Partnership to maintain and improve standards of course provision.
- 9.15 If any quality review process, including the Council's own, indicates that a Course Provider is not meeting the Rules, the Retaining Approval Process will be initiated.
- 9.16 Retaining Approval Process
- 9.16.1 the Course Provider in consultation with the Council will draw up an action plan and timescales, outlining how and when the identified deficits will be remedied
- 9.16.2 if the Course Provider fails to deliver on the action plan and within the timescales agreed, the Council will initiate a formal investigation.

10 Formal investigation and withdrawal of approval

- 10.1 The primary aims of a formal investigation will be to establish:
 - 10.1.1 whether a Course Provider is operating within the Rules and any conditions of approval set by the Council; and
 - 10.1.2 if the Course Provider has the capacity to make the necessary improvements to address identified deficits within specified timescales.
- 10.2 A formal investigation may be initiated when:
 - 10.2.1 a Course Provider has not complied with an action plan resulting from a Retaining Approval Process or a review, or has refused or is unable to do so within a specific timescale acceptable to the Council; or
 - 10.2.2 the Retaining Approval Process has been undertaken on more than one occasion resulting in findings that the Course Provider has failed to comply with the Rules or any conditions of approval; or
 - 10.2.3 a complaint or allegation of failure to comply with the Rules is so serious as to throw into immediate doubt the continued suitability of the course.
- 10.3 The Council will establish an Inspection Team to carry out a formal investigation. It will have a minimum of two people, of whom one will be an officer of the Council who will chair the Team and one will be a member of the Council. Any person deemed to have specialist knowledge of the issues involved may be invited to be a member of the Inspection Team but no person will be involved who is connected with the Course Provider.
- 10.4 The Course Provider will be informed by the Council in writing of the decision to hold a formal investigation, including a date for the commencement of the investigation.
- 10.5 A timetable and process will be established by the Council, which will take into account any reasonable requests by the Course Provider. The Council will reserve the right to extend the process if it becomes clear in the course of the formal investigation that further information is required.
- 10.6 The Council will present the outcomes of the formal investigation, including its recommendations, in a report to the Course Provider within a reasonable timescale.
- 10.7 Withdrawal of approval will be the final sanction.

11 Appeals

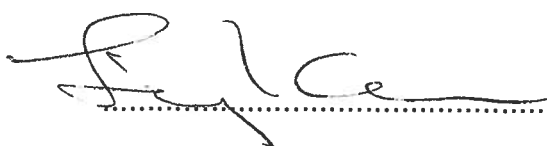
- 11.1 The Council will operate an appeals process whereby a Course Provider may appeal to the Council against a decision made in respect of approval, monitoring, review or formal investigation, or withdrawal of approval.
- 11.2 A Course Provider may appeal against a decision of the Council on the following grounds:
- 11.2.1 The Council did not take into account material information which was made known to it at the time of the decision; or
 - 11.2.2 New information which could not have been made available at the time of the decision and which materially affects the outcome has since become available; or
 - 11.2.3 The Council did not observe its own procedures and this failure materially affected the decision.

12 Complaints against the Council

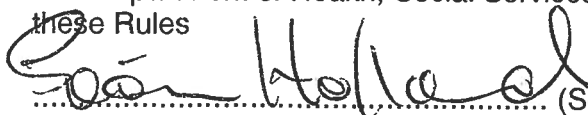
- 12.1 The Council has a complaints procedure, which may be used by any customer of the Council's services at any time. Copies of this procedure are available from the Council's Head of Corporate Services.

13 Public Record

- 13.1 The Council is committed to operating systems that are open and transparent to all. Once approval has been granted to a Course Provider, the approval documentation will become a public record. The Council will produce an annual report of its governance and continuous improvement activities. This will include publication of data relating to recruitment, progression and awards and will be a matter of public record.

 (Chair) Date ..16/1/2012

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety hereby consents to these Rules

 (Senior Officer, DHSSPS)

Dated this-sixteen day of January two thousand and twelve