



Northern Ireland Social Care Council

**Regulation of Social Work
Education and Training 2014-2015**

June 2015

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June 2015

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Glossary

AYE	Assessed Year in Employment
BMC	Belfast Metropolitan College
BSO	Business Services Organisation
BSW	Bachelors in Social Work
CPAQ	Collaborative Partnership at Queen's
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DHSSPS	Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
DPLPs	Designated Practice Learning Providers
EO	Equal Opportunity
FE	Further Education
HEIs	Higher Education Institutes
HNC/HND	Higher National Certificate/Diploma
HSCB	Health & Social Care Board
IAR	Individual Assessment Route
IPD	Initial Professional Development
NI	Northern Ireland
NI PQ	Northern Ireland Post Qualifying
NIDSWP	Northern Ireland Degree in Social Work Partnership
NISCC	Northern Ireland Social Care Council
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
PAP	Practice Assessment Panel
PfPL	Preparation for Practice Learning Module
PG Dip/Cert/MSc	Post Graduate Diploma/Certificate/Masters
PLAC	Practice Learning Centres
PLADD	Practice Learning and Allocations Degree Delivering Committee
PLO	Practice Learning Opportunities
PLSc	Practice Learning Centres
POCVA	Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults
PQ	Post Qualifying
PiP	Professional in Practice
PSS	Personal Social Services
QA	Quality Assurance
QFC	Qualification Credits Framework
QUB	Queen's University, Belfast
RGR	Relevant Graduate Route
RPLS	Regional Practice Learning Strategy
RQIA	Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority
SWC	South West College
TSWCG	Training Social Workers Consultative Group
UGR	Under Graduate Route
UK	United Kingdom
UU	Ulster University
VOCALS	Voluntary Organisation Communication and Learning Service
WHSC	Western Health & Social Care Trust

Executive Summary

Our Model

At qualifying level NISCC sets the specification for the Degree in Social Work and approves the academic providers and the designated practice learning providers (DPLPs). NISCC also approves the Northern Ireland Social Work Degree Partnership (NIDSWP) to co-ordinate regional arrangements for the delivery of the Degree.

At post qualifying level NISCC sets the specification for the Professional in Practice Framework and is the awarding body for a range of professional awards within the framework. NISCC approves education and training programmes to deliver part or full awards and provides an individual assessment route (IAR). In 2014/15 NISCC has undertaken an extensive programme of work to transform the framework from an education and training framework to a more comprehensive structure that recognises continued professional development (CPD).

Our Approach

NISCC regulates social work education and training to ensure social workers are trained and supported in their professional development to the highest standards. This will assure the public that social workers are properly qualified and have the right knowledge and skills and values to work with service users and their carers.

Regulation therefore requires both a qualitative and a quantitative approach. It is important for us to know and understanding what is happening in social work education and training and it is equally important for us to understand why something is happening and whether it is making a difference to the desired outcome.

NISCC has access to wide range of data from the Degree in Social Work and from the PiP Framework. This data is used to inform our regulatory monitoring and reporting activity. In order to understand more about the quality of what is taking place we also undertake a range of activities that help us to directly engage with the people developing, delivering or receiving the education and training.

Our Activity

As the regulator of social work education and training, NISCC has clear standards in place for the approval and quality assurance of programmes of education and training at both qualifying and post qualifying levels. This includes the Degree in Social Work, NIDSWP, Designated Practice Learning Providers (DPLP's) and Post Qualifying Provision.

This report provides an overview of the quality assurance activity undertaken across the NISCC education and training function within the business year 2013/14 and the outcomes of this activity.

The quality assurance approach included:

- annual monitoring returns
- External Examiner reports
- collation and analysis of statistical data including equal opportunity data
- approval and re-approval of provision
- standardisation activity across programmes and routes
- review reports
- site visits,
- attendance at Programme Management Boards where appropriate

Our Outcomes

This report outlines in some detail the quality assurance of outcomes from: delivery of the Degree in Social Work; the provision of Practice Learning Opportunities; and the delivery of the Professional in Practice Framework. These outcomes reflect a comprehensive body of work across qualifying and post qualifying social work that demonstrates investment and commitment to learning and development. NISCC is therefore satisfied that:

1. The Degree in Social Work is delivered to a high standard and prepares students to practise as newly qualified social workers across a diverse range of sectors and settings. The Degree providers continue to work in collaboration with employers and service users and carers to deliver excellent programmes that produces high calibre graduates. The 5 year review, completed in 2013/14 provides in-depth evidence for this.
2. The NIDSWP continues to operate effectively and efficiently in managing the regional arrangements for the delivery of the Degree and is well placed to lead or take forward the development and improvement plan resulting from the review.
3. The Designated Practice Learning Providers continue to provide good quality Practice Learning Opportunities, thus ensuring that student social workers are ready to enter the workforce on completion of the Degree.
4. The development of the PiP Framework to recognise all CPD activity along with the retention of the professional awards and associated routes to achievement puts post qualifying learning and development in a position of strength.
5. The Framework continues to provide a wide range of high quality programmes that are responsive to changing workforce needs. The role of the service user and carer is developing and having greater influence. The flexibility of the Individual Assessment Route for assessment recognises the diverse range of contexts for social work learning and development and the need for assessment that is responsive to practice contexts.
6. The Individual Assessment Route and the Approved Programme Route provide a wide range of high quality learning and development opportunities that produce good outcomes leading to achievement of part or full Professional Awards. These Awards act as a quality benchmark that provides assurance to employers and service users and carers about the standards of practice and service delivery that can be expected from social workers.

Our Future Actions

NISCC is reviewing its quality assurance model to incorporate outcomes based accountability which will focus on measuring and improving performance, to be introduced for the 2015/16 monitoring period.

Workshops will be facilitated with each of the stakeholder groups to disseminate findings from the quality assurance process, to share best practice and agree areas for improvement.

Areas for review and development will be risk based, proportionate and directly linked to making a difference and having a positive impact on the quality of the experience and outcomes for student and qualified social workers undertaking education and training.

Priorities for the 2015/16 monitoring period will be agreed, circulated and reporting requirements identified.

The planned move towards an emphasis on evaluation of impact and outcomes based reporting and a continuous improvement model will ensure that social work education and training at both qualifying and post qualifying levels is robustly managed, developed and delivered, and will assure Council and the public that social workers are properly training and supported in their development across the career spectrum.

Regulation of Education and Training in Social Work 2014-2015

Introduction

The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) is responsible as the regulator of social work education and training, for setting standards for qualifying and post qualifying education and training of social workers. This responsibility extends to ensuring that standards are met and that social workers are equipped with the appropriate knowledge, skills and values to enable them to deliver services which meet the need of service users, their carers and the public in general.

NISCC ensures that there is sufficient and high quality provision across the social work education and training continuum through rigorous quality assurance arrangements¹ which include a comprehensive annual monitoring system aimed at ensuring continuing compliance with the identified standards. The NISCC Quality Assurance Framework sets out the key principles and procedures for the approval, annual monitoring, review and inspection of social work education and training. NISCC seeks to be assured that the Degree in Social Work, practice learning, and post qualifying training programmes meet the needs of a diverse workforce in terms of preparing students' for readiness to practise and supporting social workers' continuous professional development. Quality Assurance arrangements are outlined in a range of associated documents² and inform the basis for on-going regulation activity.

This report provides an overview of the regulation activity undertaken across the NISCC education and training function within the business year 2014/15 and the outcomes of this activity. It outlines key messages arising from the assurance process and identifies areas for further development to support on-going quality improvement.

Review of Model of Regulation

A review of NISCC quality assurance processes was completed in 2014/15 to ensure that best practice models are being applied. The underpinning standards used by NISCC recognise the need for continuous improvement, consistency, transparency and efficiency. The multi stage process allows for self-assessment against set criteria. The process of 5 year re-approval and annual monitoring of approved provision ensures on-going scrutiny. Recommendations have been made to streamline processes and information gathered, to avoid unnecessary duplication of information. The revised model of quality assurance will improve how we quality assure the Degree in Social Work and the Approved Programme Route and Individual Assessment Route within the Professional in Practice Framework.

¹ Quality Assurance Framework for Education and Training Regulated by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council, NISCC, January 2012

² Approval, Monitoring, Review and Inspection Arrangements for Degree in Social Work Courses, NISCC January 2012

Approval, Monitoring, Review and Inspection Arrangements for Designated Practice Learning Providers offering Practice Learning Opportunities for BSc(Hons)SW and BSW Students, NISCC, January 2012

Approval, Monitoring, Re-Approval and Inspection Arrangements for Post Qualifying Education and Training Programmes, NISCC, January 2012

Information gathered through quality assurance will become more out-come focussed in future quality assurance activity.

Development of an Outcomes Based Accountability model for measuring and reporting on outcomes and impact of education and training at both qualifying and post qualifying levels will help to move towards a more defined targeting of outcomes as quality measures.

Development of Professional in Practice Framework

Of particular note this year is the development and launch of Professional in Practice – The Continuous Professional Development Framework for Social Work. The Framework has been developed to incorporate the professional awards of the NI PQ Framework and to recognise and give credit for all CPD activity in social work through a credit accumulation process. The PiP Framework provides the opportunity for a comprehensive and all inclusive approach to CPD in social work. Social work education and training is strengthened considerably with this development, by providing a comprehensive continuum from the Degree in Social Work with a Designated Practice Learning Scheme, through the Assessed Year in Employment and onwards to the PiP Framework with credit accumulation for on-going CPD and NISCC certificated Professional Awards. This continuum allows for 100% of the workforce to benchmark their learning and development against professional standards. The Professional in Practice Partnership has responsibility for the delivery of the framework in employment and education contexts. The impact of the new structures and processes will be monitored and reported in the coming year.

Quality Assurance Activity 2014 – 2015

This report provides an overview of the quality assurance activity undertaken across the continuum of social work education and training, and reports on the outcomes of this activity. It outlines key messages arising from the assurance process and identifies areas for further development to support on-going quality improvement.

The Degree in Social Work

Quality Assurance of the Degree in Social Work

NISCC's aim is to ensure that social work education and training in Northern Ireland is at the forefront of excellence. The following sections provide an overview of NISCC's assurance of the outputs from Degree provision, arrangements for its delivery and areas for development.

A 5 yearly review of the Degree ³ published in June 2014, provides in-depth reporting and analysis and therefore forms part of the evidence base for quality assurance. The outcome of the review demonstrated that the Degree in Social Work continues to meet the requirements of the NISCC Rules for Approval. Consistent key messages both from the review and other information sources are that the Degree in Social Work courses in Northern Ireland deliver to a high standard.

The review provided the opportunity to consider developmental and improvement matters. The recommendations from the review reflect a focus on refinement, responding to changing contexts and future proofing. An Implementation Plan has been developed with a year on year Action Plan agreed with NISWDP. This is being managed by a Steering Group led by NISCC. The work is planned to be completed by December 2017.

Course Provision for Delivery of Degree in Social Work

There are 260 places available on Degree in Social Work courses across 4 learning sites in Northern Ireland: Queen's University Belfast (QUB); Ulster University at Magee (UU); South West College (SWC); and Belfast Metropolitan College, (BMC) with an Undergraduate Route (UGR) on both a full and part-time basis and a Relevant Graduate Route (RGR).

There was a ratio of 8 applications to 1 place for the September, 2014 entry. 85% of students enrolled on the Degree were women. Over the last 10 years an average of 16% of men entered social work training, reinforcing the largely female profile of the workforce. 61% of students enrolled in the 2014 cohort were aged between 21-34 years. Information collated identifies the country of origin of students enrolled on the Degree rather than ethnic background. For the 2014 intake, 96% of students on the Degree were from within NI and 4% were from the Republic of Ireland.

Collaborative Partnerships

Each of the Degree providers has a stakeholder collaborative partnership: Collaborative Partnership at QUB (CPAQ); and UU/FE Collaborative Management Board (UU/FE CMB); to address course delivery. Each partnership has a Service User and Carer group to coordinate input into teaching and evaluation of course delivery. A NISCC Professional Adviser provides support and advice to the partnerships and reviews the annual accountability reports.

³ Report on the 5 Yearly Periodic Review of the Degree in Social Work, NISCC, June, 2014

Recommended Areas for Development – Outcomes from 2013-14 Annual Monitoring

As part of last year's monitoring process the following actions were identified and progress is outlined below:

Actions

1. Continue to work with NISCC and the NIDSWP in recruiting males, (and ethnic minorities), to the BSW courses.

Update: A range of approaches have been used by both universities and colleges to increase applications from underrepresented groups. This has included visits to schools, including male members of staff, talks at university open days have been delivered by male staff members, promotional materials include male social work students. The number of male student remains around 16% of the student body. Numbers of ethnic minorities remain low.

2. Ensure that the part-time route is consolidated and that advertising for the 2014 intake is maximised.

Update: Advertising was extended to a range of local newspapers. Numbers of applicants increased. QUB confirmed 3 out of a possible 8 places and were permitted by DHSSPS to convert the others to 4 full time places. UU confirmed 8 out of 8 places for their September 2014 intake.

3. QUB/CPAQ to implement and review the arrangements for module reconfiguration and continue to work on proposed new modules in response to external developments including the 'Ten Year Strategy for Social Work' and 'Transforming Your Care'

Update: The revised Preparation for Practice module was introduced across all routes. Sociology for Social Work has been reviewed and a new module addressing the Life Course has been confirmed for September 2015.

4. Continue to build upon and consolidate service user and carer involvement in the Degree.

Update: QUB are undertaking research funded by the Public Health Agency to consider the impact of service user and carer involvement. UU have continued to develop service user and care involvement. Service users and carers contributed to and reviewed the revalidation document and attended the revalidation panel. The revalidated Degree has introduced two service user modules, recognizing the importance of this work.

5. To continue to work with the NIDSWP to resolve issues with the assessment and resit of the Preparation for Practice Learning (PFPL) module.

Update: All issues resolved and the revised PFPL module has been introduced throughout all the social work courses, the emphasis is on formative assessment.

Outcomes from Annual Monitoring 2014-15

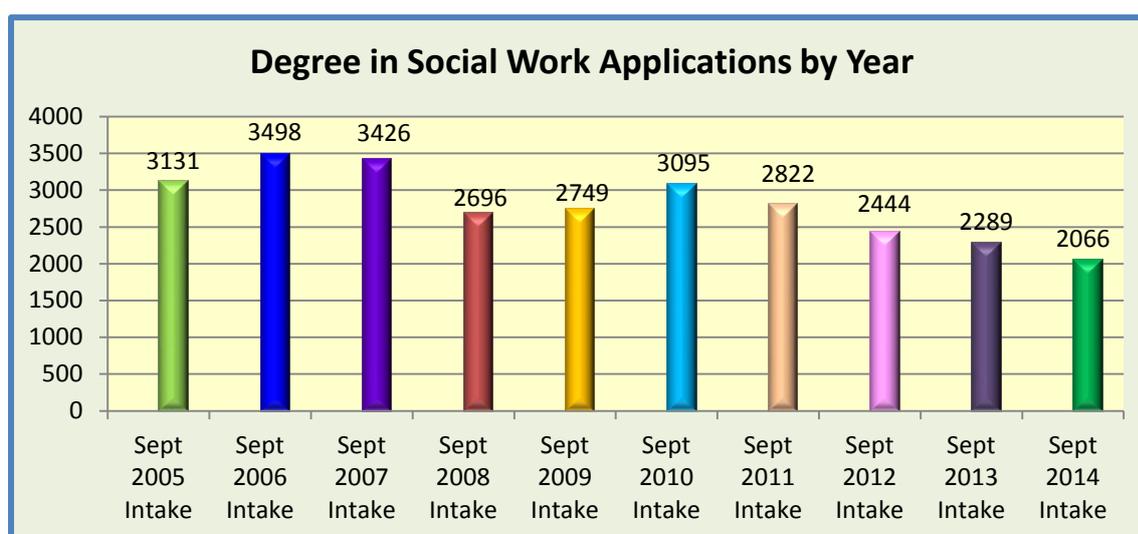
1. Review of the Degree in Social Work - Implementation Plan and Action Plan

The recommendations arising from the 5 Year Review of the Degree are contained in Appendix 1. A primary focus of work this year with the NIDSWP and Degree providers was to develop an Implementation plan and associated action plan to progress the recommendations. Joint NISCC and NIDSWP information sessions on the plan were delivered to key stakeholders which ensured collaboration from the outset. Individual meetings with each Course Director have ensured the areas allocated to the universities will be progressed. The process of working with all stakeholders to agree the content and a time scale for the plan, along with streamlining other key drivers has been welcomed by the all stakeholders.

2. Admissions

Applications for the September, 2015 intake are slightly lower at UU/FE whereas QUB remains the same. Social work is still one of the most popular courses at both universities with 8 applicants for every place. However the numbers of applications have decreased, at UU applications have dropped by 900 in the past 9 years. QUB have held steady. There has been a substantial decrease in applications to the part time course since its introduction. There are concerns that a possible withdrawal of the Student Incentive Scheme, (£4000 per annum, non means tested) will impact on applications. The DHSSPS are working with the two course providers to consider the impact on the current and future student profile if discontinued. There is a view that if the Student Incentive Scheme is withdrawn that applications will drop from mature students and those with caring and family commitments.

The DHSSPS have confirmed there are currently no plans to reduce student numbers. There is acceptance that the pattern of jobs has changed with currently few permanent jobs available to social work graduates. Information taken from the NISCC Register indicates that 21% of social workers are aged over 55 years, some of whom may retire in the next five years, which would provide opportunities for employment.



3. Implementation of Revised Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work, NISCC, DHSSPS 2014

This framework, which outlines the content of the degree, was updated over the past year. It will be introduced into the curriculum in September 2015. To support the implementation of the new framework, NISCC has supported workshops, and provided guidance. The universities have updated all documentation and reviewed all modules to meet the framework specification. The revised framework will contribute to ensuring the degree is current and fit for purpose. A partnership approach to this exercise has ensured all stakeholders are engaged and ready for implementation in September 2015.

Curriculum Update as outlined above both universities have reviewed their curriculum in line with the revised framework specification.

UU completed a revalidation of the Degree in Social Work in March, 2015, across all routes. All content was reviewed and updated during this process and the Re-Validation Panel approved the revised degree for a further 5 years. Membership of the panel included representation from NISCC. New modules have been introduced, strengthening teaching on the life cycle and developing research skills. Other development areas include the introduction of Master Classes for students to develop skills in areas such as working with reluctant service users, service users who have addiction problems and those who have complex needs across the life span.

QUBs Periodic Review and Enhancement Process, (re-validation) due this year was postponed due to possible restructuring in the school because of reductions in funding. A revision of the Practice Assessment Panel and the introduction of an electronic marking scheme have brought improvements for students.

4. Service User / Carer Involvement

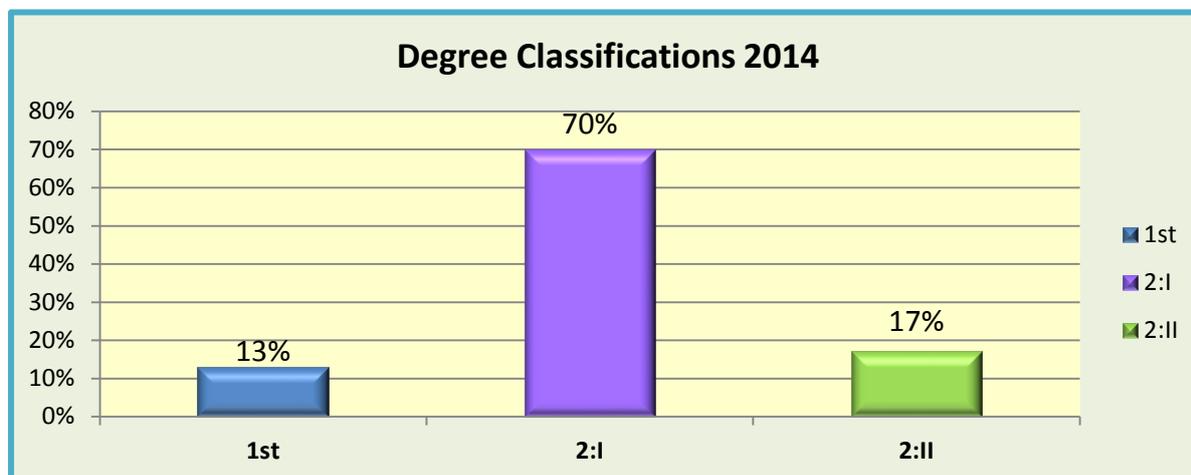
The 5 year review acknowledged that there are many examples of good practice taking place across the course providers. QUB have been commissioned by the Public Health Agency to research the outcome of service user / carer involvement, including within the Degree. Building on achievements to date it was agreed the course providers along with the NIDSWP should develop a regional strategy which focuses on widening engagement and outline plans for sustainability of this engagement. This work has begun with reporting due in March, 2016. The on-going development of this area is crucial to ensure a degree that is responsive to service user and carer need.

5. Part-time Route

The part time route was established to widen access to the Degree. It has been difficult to attract applicants, various promotional schemes have been introduced but applications continue to fall. Most of the students come from within the workforce, generally in social care. A review of this route is underway and will be completed over the next year with a report available in June, 2016. The first students will graduate from this route in July, 2015. It is important to have a range of routes to widen participation, however other approaches will need to be considered to provide more flexibility and a shorter qualification time.

6. Degree in Social Work Outcomes

In June, 2014, 70% of social work graduates achieved a 2:1 degree classification with 13% obtaining a 1st class Honours degree, highlighting the fact that the academic calibre of graduates in NI is high.



Quality Assurance Outcomes and Areas for Continuous Improvement

NISCC's quality assurance of the Degree in Social Work this year drew information from: the annual monitoring process; the 5 year review carried out by NISCC, coupled with the 5 year revalidation at the University of Ulster; and the universities annual assurance procedures. NISCC can confirm that the Degree programmes delivered by QUB and UU have met NISCC standards for course provision during 2014/15.

Areas Identified for Development and Improvement

The 5 Year Review of the Degree undertaken in 2014 forms the basis of continuous improvement activity for next year. The actions required are contained in the Implementation Plan and associated action plan.

Actions

1. To complete the Action Plan agreed for year 1 and work on the plan for year 2-linked to the Review of the Degree in Social Work.
2. Work with NISCC to review quality assurance arrangements for the Degree in Social Work.

NI Degree in Social Work Partnership

The NIDSWP is appointed by and accountable to NISCC to facilitate regional arrangements for selection, practice learning, course content and other agreed issues. This promotes regional consistency and best use of resources. NIDSWP delivers its business through a

number of committees; this ensures high quality course provision is delivered on a regional basis. A NISCC Professional Adviser provides support and advice to the partnership and reviews the annual accountability and financial reports. The Partnership continues to work within its annual budget allocation and internal and external audits were completed as required. NISCC received satisfactory Accountability Reports that meet the required standards for 2014/2015.

Recommended Areas for Development – Outcomes from 2013 -14 Annual Monitoring

As part of last year’s monitoring process the following actions were identified and progress is outlined below:

Actions	
1. Work towards developing alternative arrangements to enable applicants to complete an ‘assignment’ under examination condition rather than a Personal Statement.	Update: This remains under review- an evidence base provided by QUB indicated this would not be a more efficient model to use. Admissions processes are being reviewed following the Review of the Degree.
2. Following the review of the Preparation for Practice Learning Module work towards the implementation of the arrangements for the revised module.	Update: The revised Preparation for Practice Learning Module has been introduced with all course providers. This incorporates formative assessment and with increased feedback has been of benefit to the students. This module has to be passed before a student can go on a PLO.
3. Continue to work with NISCC in implementing the Regional Strategy for Practice Learning, including auditing continued compliance with targets.	Update: This strategy has made a major contribution to continued development of practice learning. The partnership approach that has been adopted in NI with employers and universities working together has ensured the implementation of the Strategy. All the targets have been met and the Regional Strategy is concluded. This has contributed to a rise in standards of PLO with all social work students undertaking at least one PLO in a children and families setting. Targets met include all students at final PLO being allocated a PLO with a social work practitioner on site and a 100% of students will have completed a children and families PLO. This is important preparation for preparing to work as a social worker and to seek employment.
4. Review of the Practice Learning Allocations system.	Update: The current system works well and the collaborative model is a key strength.
5. Continue to work on the action plan for Service User and Carer involvement.	Update: This links to one of the recommendations from the Review of the Degree. A sub group has been established to lead on a Regional Service User and Carer Strategy for the Degree. It will report in March, 2016.

Outcomes from Annual Monitoring 2014-15

Regional Practice Learning Database

A regional practice learning database has been developed arising out of a recommendation in the Practice Learning strategy. The operational management of the data base sits with the NIDSWP. The database will be able to provide an overview of information on PLOs and practice teaching. It can also provide detailed reports for individual employers. It is hoped that the database will be able to be used to streamline the allocations process.

Part time Route

The part time route was established with the aim of widening diversity. Concern has been expressed in relation to the entrance criteria for the route and whether or not the experience requirement is excessive. The current student profile does not indicate achievement in the widening of diversity, students are mainly working in social care posts and studying part time. A report has been compiled on this route by a sub group established by the NIDSWP. This report is being updated this year and will be available for March, 2016.

Service User and Carer Participation

There has been progress in all aspects of this work across the NIDSWP. This includes, service user and carer involvement in the Annual Admissions Review, developing an alternative mechanism for shortlisting for interview and in the PFPL review. A carer makes a valuable contribution to the Admissions Committee. A Regional Strategy as recommended in the Review of the Degree in Social Work is required to confirm a way forward, and NIDSWP will take this forward with a view to publishing a report by March, 2016.

Quality Assurance Outcome and Areas for Continuous Improvement

NISCC confirms that that the NIDSWP is delivering on its agreed strategic objectives as outlined in its 2013/14 business plan. A review of the Partnerships Action Plan was undertaken and demonstrates progress in all areas. NISCC is therefore satisfied that the NIDSWP is effective and meeting the required standards

Areas for Development and Improvement 2015– 2016

Actions

- 1 In partnership with NISCC manage the Implementation/Action Plan for the Review of the Degree in Social Work.
- 2 Take forward the work on – review of part-time route; consolidation of the regional practice learning data-base; monitoring of the allocations process for PLOs; development of a regional strategy for service user and carer involvement.

Practice Learning

Quality Assurance of Practice Learning

The NISCC Quality Assurance Framework sets out the key principles and procedures for the approval, annual monitoring, review and inspection of social work education and training. An associated document ⁴ outlines the quality assurance arrangements in place for Designated Practice Learning Providers (DPLPs). These include approval, annual monitoring reporting process by DPLPs, and reviews.

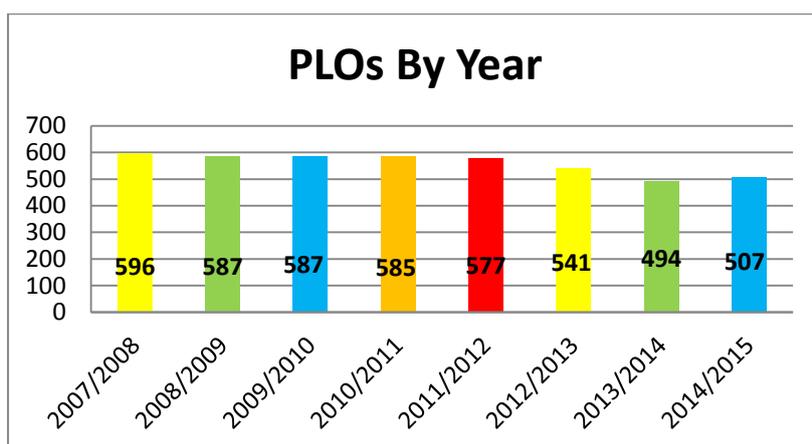
All partners involved in providing the Degree are individually (as organisations) and collectively (as course providers) responsible for the quality and effectiveness of such experiences. Quality Assurance does not focus solely on the education providers but also includes monitoring of those agencies which provide practice learning opportunities.

Context of Practice Learning

The aim of professional social work training is to produce social workers who are safe, competent and effective practitioners.

Practice Learning forms a major component of a student social worker's training with approximately 50% of the time in training being spent in direct practice experience. Students complete two periods of assessed practice: the first period is known as a level 2 Practice Learning Opportunity (PLO), 85 days and the second period is level 3, PLO 100 days. Practice Learning includes a period of supervised, assessed practice in the workplace drawing on real-life experiences.

The number of PLOs offered regionally is illustrated below:



⁴ Approval, Monitoring, Review and Inspection Arrangements for Designated Practice Learning Providers offering Practice Learning Opportunities for BSc(Hons)SW and BSW Students, NISCC, January 2012.

Designated Practice Learning Provider Scheme

The Practice Learning Requirements 2003 (revised 2011, NISCC), outline the requirements and underlining principles of practice learning. The Standards for Practice Learning for the Degree in Social Work were issued in March 2006 (revised 2009). The key purpose of the standards is to ensure that every social work student is assured of access to practice learning opportunities that are appropriately resourced, planned and managed. These opportunities enable students to meet the specified learning outcomes for the Degree and achieve the required standard of proficiency in social work practice.

The Practice Learning Standards are used by NISCC to quality assure provision by higher education institutions, employer partners and Designated Practice Learning Providers (DPLP's). Along with a regional approach to placement allocation, they provide a framework for quality and consistency in practice learning provision.

There are currently 25 DPLPs. These include the five Health and Social Care Trusts, Criminal Justice organisations, Education and Library Boards, and three Practice Learning Centres (funded by the NISCC/DHSSPS) and organisations in the non-statutory sector. The Designated Practice Learning Provider Scheme is unique to Northern Ireland and our approach has been reflected in the comments made by Croisdale-Appleby.⁵ In his report he states, "There is widespread concern amongst employers and educationalists over the quality and availability of appropriate practice placements(in England)...the preferred arrangements for placements is experience in statutory and non-statutory settings with two different service user groups....support must be dependent upon a much more rigorous inspection methodology by the regulator." This reflects the current system in NI.

Recommended Areas for Development – Outcomes from 2013 -14 Annual Monitoring

As part of last year's monitoring process the following actions were identified and progress is outlined below:

Actions

- 1.To continue to work towards the targets in the Regional Strategy for Practice Learning with a focus on providing more PLO's in the west of the province

Update: There is a high degree of compliance with the targets for the RSPL with a 100% of students undertaking one of their PLOs in a children's and families setting. DPLP's are providing the number of PLOs required. This has been eased by the reduction in numbers to the Degree in Social Work in September 2011 from 300 to 260. The voluntary sector are working towards developing more PLOs in the west, refreshing and developing new sites. Additional sites in the NW include PLOs with VOYPIC and Women's Aid.

- 2.To work towards more availability of PLO's in adult services.

Update: In principle every student should have a PLO in Adult Services. A small number of students have had to undertake two children and families PLOs because of restructuring in Adult Services. The statutory sector is seeking to build capacity

⁵ Revisioning Social Work Education – An Independent Report, David Croisdale-Appleby, February 2014

that has been lost with the introduction of integrated teams. The voluntary sector has developed new sites in the areas of addictions, homelessness, mental health and older people. This is an on-going process that requires regular review.

3. To develop the service user and carer involvement in the provision of PLOs

Update: Service user and carer feedback is sought on at least three occasions during the PLO. Further developments will be outlined in the Regional Strategy for Service User and Carer involvement, due in March 2016.

Practice Learning Centres

The three Practice Learning Centres (PLC's), developed to ensure a steady supply of quality PLO's in the non-statutory sector, are Extern, Bryson Care and Bryson Care West. The centres are contracted annually by NISCC to provide an agreed number of PLO's along with a range of supports and development work within their sector. These centres are acknowledged as centres of excellence. In the last year Bryson Care and Bryson Care West have presented their relationship model of practice learning, locally, nationally and internationally. Jessica Kinsley, publisher, have contracted with the Bryson Centres, supported by UU to develop a book on practice learning. Extern established international links with practice learning and have provided PLOs to Florida State University, School of Social Work. Extern also provided high quality practice learning experiences for international students applying to register with NISCC who require compensation measures in relation to practice learning. A student from Eastern Europe who recently completed a compensation PLO obtained a social work post with the agency. These examples are a reflection of the excellent standard of provision in the Practice Learning Centres. This is also a sector where more social work graduates are obtaining posts when qualifying, and a range of excellent PLOs helps to prepare students for future job opportunities.

VOCALS – Voluntary Organisations Communication and Learning Service

From 2008, Extern has been contracted annually by NISCC to support practice learning in the non-statutory sector. The contract is monitored and audited by NISCC. The main focus of their work is the allocation and coordination of PLO's in the voluntary sector, representation of the sector at relevant committees and communicating relevant information about practice learning throughout the sector. They have focused on managing the reduction in sites, consolidating existing sites and developing new sites to rotate sites keeping them fresh and avoiding burn out. VOCALS co-ordinated 72 PLOs for 2014/15, reduced from 81 in the previous year. Reductions in the numbers of places are impacting the system and have reduced demand. Demand should hold steady around 72 per annum and the focus is on refreshing availability and ensuring PLOs offered are relevant and meet the needs of students and employers.

Quality Assurance of DPLP's

DPLP's, including the 3 Practice Learning Centres, are subject to Annual Monitoring Requirements and submit an Annual Report to NISCC. The format of the report is reviewed annually to ensure it is relevant and current. This has been supplemented from time to time by site visits to consult on an identified key issue and offers the Professional Adviser the

opportunity to meet staff, students and service users in agencies to discuss any issues in relation to practice learning.

As the DPLPs contributed to the Review of the Degree, site visits were not undertaken this year. An annual monitoring report was returned to NISCC with the focus primarily on qualitative information as quantitative information is sought from the NIDSWP. The focus in the last year was on opportunities in the DPLPs relating to community work, group work and group care, identifying strengths, gaps and areas for development. With the introduction of the Revised Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work from September 2015, it will not be a requirement for student social workers to undertake group work and group care experiences, instead they will be undertaking methods of intervention that are most relevant to the service user which may include group work /group care. A focus on community development approaches continues to be important for all students as it reflects current policy directives such as Transforming Your Care.

All of the DPLPs confirmed extensive learning opportunities in community development. There were a range of excellent examples of this being stitched into PLOs from the induction stage where community awareness and social consciousness are developed. Students are offered very real examples of integrated practice such as engaging in enablement programmes and following this through to community based organisations that offer support after the service user completes the programme. Larger voluntary organisations shared examples of partnership with smaller agencies such as the Council for the Homeless to facilitate the extension of knowledge and skills.

Assurance Outcome and Areas for Continuous Improvement

The NISCC requirements for practice learning have supported an increase in standards, and the Regional Strategy for Practice Learning has brought continued improvement with practice learning targets being met.⁶ The requirement for one PLO to be undertaken in work with children and families; the requirement that all practice teachers have completed or are working towards a Professional in Practice qualification in practice learning; and the requirement that all practice learning providers are approved and regulated by NISCC, have culminated in the standard of practice learning being commendably high. However, this does not permit complacency and key areas for on-going refinement are identified in the Review of the Degree and are incorporated in the Implementation Plan.

All DPLP's were confirmed as meeting the NISCC standards for the on-going delivery of Practice Learning Opportunities.

Areas for Development and Improvement 2015-2016

Actions

1. Recommendations regarding practice learning arising out of the Review of the Degree are to be progressed through the Implementation Plan.
2. Review of quality assurance to be completed and revised system introduced for DPLPs

⁶ NIDSWP: A Regional Strategy for Practice Learning Provision in NI 2010-2015 PLO activity against strategic targets 2014/2015

The Professional in Practice Framework

Quality Assurance of the Professional in Practice Framework

NISCC's aim is to provide a framework for continuous professional development in social work that recognises all learning and development. NISCC is the awarding body for a range of professional awards provided within the framework and is responsible for ensuring that approved education and training provision is fit for purpose and meets the needs of key stakeholders including social workers and their employers.

During 2014/15 NISCC completed a programme of work to transform the NI PQ Framework and in October 2014 announced the development of a new framework: Professional in Practice, The CPD Framework for Social Work in NI (PiP). This new framework provides the existing range of professional awards as well as providing recognition through a credit based system for on-going professional development. The PiP Framework was launched on 1st June 2015. The quality assurance arrangements that are currently in place will therefore require review and update to support the new framework.

The PiP Framework comprises of a range of professional standards against which practice competence can be formally assessed, leading to a certificated professional award. This framework includes 3 professional awards: Consolidation Award in Social Work; Specialist Award in Social Work; and Leadership and Strategic Award in Social Work.

The PiP Awards are accessed via two routes: either by undertaking a programme of training that has been approved by NISCC as meeting the standards required (Approved Programme Route); or by submitting a piece of work for assessment on an individual basis (Individual Assessment Route). Many social workers use a mix of both routes to achieve full awards.

Enrolment and Progression in PiP Framework

Arrangements for enrolment in and progression through the PiP Framework towards achievement of Professional Requirements (PiP Requirements) and full PiP Awards remain effective. Focus has been given in 2014/15 to improving recording and reporting systems for data on activity and outcomes within the PiP Framework. The improvements include the ability to link such activity and outcomes to workforce data. This area of development is important for workforce planning in respect of learning and development for social workers. A programme of training and guidance has been delivered for key stakeholders and will continue as required within the coming year. Education and training providers who feed information into the system will be expected to fully implement the system in 2015/16. The outcome will be enhanced workforce data that will include a profile of PiP achievement. Socrates (the registration database) will support the Professional in Practice Framework thus allowing for NISCC and its stakeholders to analyse engagement in professional development across the social work workforce which will in turn inform planning for targeting priority groups.

Enrolment and achievement activity within the PIP Framework builds on existing data each year and is in addition to previous achievement within the UK PQ Framework, the current Framework's predecessor. A proportion of the current social work workforce therefore will already have achievement within the UK PQ Framework as well as progression and achievement within the PiP Framework. The aim of widening the scope of the PIP Framework to encompass all CPD is to increase the proportion of the workforce engaged in professional development that can be benchmarked against quality standards.

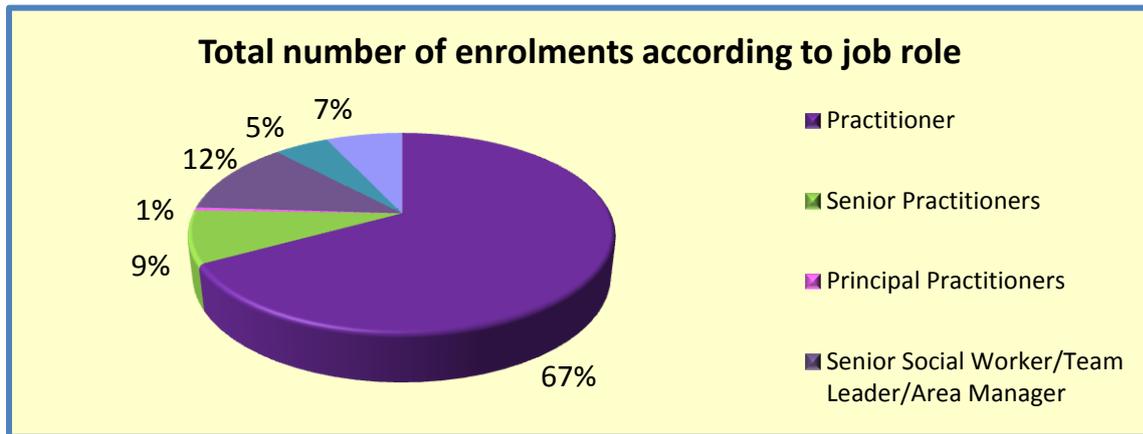
Enrolments in the Framework continue to come from across the spectrum of social work settings including Health and Social Care Trusts, the Justice Sector, Education Sector and the Voluntary Sector. The majority of enrolments come from the HSC Trusts which are the largest group of employers of social workers in Northern Ireland.

Enrolment in PIP Framework 2014-2015:

- Enrolment in the PiP Framework lasts for 3 years and is then maintained on an annual basis
- 270 social workers have enrolled in 2014 - 2015
- A total of 1611 social workers are currently enrolled pursuing 2074 awards, reflecting approximately 35% of the social work registered workforce, this is a 5% increase on 2012-2013 and a further 5% increase in 2013-2014 figures
- 82% of candidates are female, reflecting the profile of the social work workforce

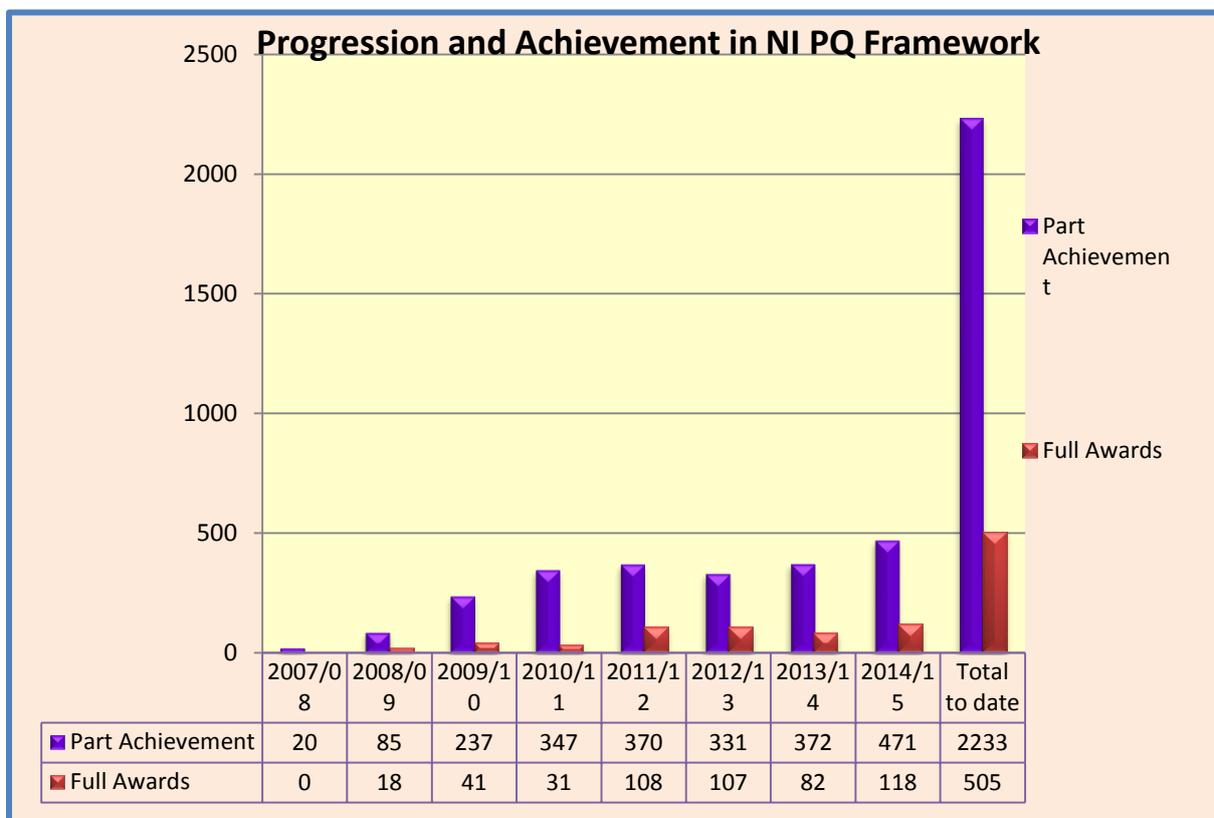
The fact that 35% of the workforce is actively engaged in formal professional development that includes an element of assessment of knowledge, skills and values, provides a strong baseline figure from which to track the introduction and impact of the CPD elements of the Professional in Practice Framework. Data is also showing a significant increase year on year in candidates enrolled in the PIP Framework of 5% per year since 2012.

Job Role



12% of social workers undertaking learning and development in the professional framework are at Manager grade, including first line managers – senior social workers/team leaders. This staff group is consistently identified as being critical for ensuring safe and effective evidenced based practice and therefore professional development is vital to supporting quality management. It will be important to monitor the CPD activity of first line managers in *Professional in Practice*.

Progression towards and achievement of Professional Qualifications



Progression within the PiP Framework is reflected by the incremental achievement of *Requirements* which leads to the achievement of a professional qualification. The table above shows the number of social workers who are working towards or have attained professional qualifications. 2014-2015 figures indicate an upward rise. This partly reflects activity from newly qualified social workers from 2011 onwards, who are required to achieve at least 2 Requirements of the Consolidation Award within their first 3 year period of registration. It is therefore anticipated that the trend will follow an upward projector for the coming year as this policy rolls out.

The attainment of full awards dropped back in 2013/14 whilst part achievement continued to grow, this may have reflected a move towards better use of the modularised structure of the framework and its provision. However in 2014/15 there has been an increase in both part achievement and full awards. It will be important to monitor this trend in the coming years to consider whether the more valued outcome is completion of relevant modules or full programmes and if so what impact that may have on practice.

Individual Assessment Route

The Individual Assessment Route (IAR) is designed to offer accessible and flexible arrangements for assessment on an individual basis in order to gain recognition within the PiP Framework.

The IAR is co-ordinated by NISCC executive staff and delivered in partnership through the PiP Assessment Panel. The Panel is chaired by a member of the NISCC PiP Partnership Committee and comprises a range of approved assessors from across the spectrum of Partnership members. The Panel membership also includes an external assessor who has responsibilities as part of NISCC's quality assurance requirements, including reviewing all referred and moderated submissions and a sample of successful submissions.

The range of methods of assessment includes:

- Portfolio of Narrative, Reflection, Evaluation and Evidence
- Assignment
- Verbal Presentation
- Direct Observation
- Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)
- Schedule for Recognition of Learning from In-Service Training

From its inception, the IAR has continued to evolve and develop to meet the changing needs of social workers across a range of sectors and settings. Currently two assessment points are offered on an annual basis in March and October with the facility to offer additional points in specific circumstances. The assessment process takes approximately 2 months from the point of submission to the approval of the assessment outcome by the PiP Assessment Panel and the issuing of results.

As with provision across the PiP framework quality assurance is integral to the Individual Assessment Route. Quality Assurance measures include the following:

- Standardisation events for all assessors
- Training for newly appointed assessors
- Processes for allocation of submissions to ensure equity and fairness
- Processes for the assessment of submissions including second assessment and moderation
- Guidance materials, policies, procedures for assessment including marking criteria
- Audit and analysis of results with necessary follow up action
- External Assessor scrutiny of referred submissions and a sample of competent submissions
- External Assessor report and attendance at Assessment Panel
- Reporting to PiP Partnership and to Council

Outcomes from Assessment Activity 2014-15

In 2014/15 89 social workers submitted work for assessment through the IAR. This brings the total number of submissions to the IAR from the launch of the Framework in 2007 to 302. The submissions in 2014/15 were across all awards and involved all submission types. A full breakdown of submissions is outlined below:

SUBMISSIONS and OUTCOMES April 2014 – March 2015

Award	Submission Type	Competent	Partial Competent	Requiring Further Work	Total
Specific	APL	1		1	2
	Assignment	16	1	5	22
	In Service Schedule	12	1	1	14
	Portfolio	8			8
	Verbal				0
	Direct Observation	5			5
Specialist	APL	13		1	14
	Assignment	4		1	5
	In Service Schedule	5		1	6
	Portfolio	3	1		4
	Verbal	2			2
	Direct Observation	1			1
Leadership and Strategic	APL	2			2
	Assignment	1			1
	Verbal				
	Portfolio	2			2
	In Service Schedule	1			1
Total Submissions		76	3	10	89

Review of decision request

There were no requests for a review of assessment decisions or outcomes within this reporting period.

Quality Assurance activity in 2014/15 included:

- External Assessor attendance at one Assessment Panel decision making meeting
- Written reports on each of the submission points
- One training event for new assessors
- Two standardisation events
- On-going work on a new quality assurance framework which will include QA of IAR within the broader PiP framework
- New assessor training

Outcomes for Annual Monitoring 2014 - 2015

Uptake of the IAR rose from 59 submissions in 2013/14 to 89 submission in 2014/15. The range of submissions reflect most of the assessment routes being used, with a 75% rise in portfolio submissions and a 77% rise in assignment submissions on last year's figures. The most notable increase was in use of the In Service Training Schedule which saw an increase of 79%. It should be noted that whilst in percentage terms the figures look very significant, the numbers remain small for some of the increases indicated.

Most of the growth has been at Specific Award level with a rise in submissions from 33 in 2013/14 to 51 in 2014/15 which was 60% of the overall increase. The requirement for social workers post AYE to achieve 2 PiP Requirements in order to maintain registration seems to be providing an impetus in terms of encouraging submissions to this route alongside the Initial Professional Development Programme within the Approved Programme Route.

The increase in submissions by the 3 methods outlined indicates that candidates are taking advantage of the flexibility in routes and are increasingly developing their skills in using extant training, and development and practice evidence to convert their knowledge and skills into assignments and portfolio submissions. It could be said that the significant increase in the use of the In Service Training Schedule at all levels demonstrates an almost cultural shift in thinking towards the principles of the PiP Framework and can provide a foundation or preparation for credit accumulation by encouraging candidates to focus on the impact of their learning and development.

There has been a 40% increase in referral rates (i.e. assessed as having not met the standard and referred for further work) over the past year with 50% of those being focused on assignment submissions at Specific Award level. Some of the feedback from assessors would indicate that perhaps there was some blurring of boundaries in relation to "assignment" writing and that which was required for other submission methods such as portfolios. Feedback also highlighted gaps in relating theory to practice. Again, it should be noted that the 40% increase equated to a very small actual number of submissions. Given the increase in submission rates overall, the rise in referrals could be seen to be commensurate with this.

Standardisation events in 2014/15 focused on the areas of Accredited Prior Learning (APL) and Assessor Feedback respectively. The 2014 event included discussion on the distinction between Accredited Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) and Accredited Prior Certificated Learning (APCL). Assessors were able to reinforce their understanding of the two different submission forms and how they might communicate that information to candidates and line managers. The parameters around APL submissions were also discussed and clarified, bringing greater consistency to the process overall. This is a popular submission method and it was important that assessors are confident in their support for candidates choosing this route. The session also focused on interpretation of the PiP Requirements and matching those to evidence provided via APL. This was an extremely valuable exercise which allowed assessors to agree how various Requirements might be met through this submission method. Summary points from the session were agreed and circulated ensuring that common messages and agreed parameters were consistent.

The second standardisation workshop is planned for 10th June 2015. The topic chosen for this event is Assessor Feedback. Following comments from the External Assessor at the March Assessment Panel regarding inconsistencies in degree of detail and quality of feedback, it was thought that this should be the focus of the next workshop. It is intended that exercises in the workshop will be centred on sufficiency of feedback and the language used in terms of its usefulness for resubmission purposes.

Professor Graham Ixer was appointed as the new External Assessor to the PiP Assessment Panel in September 2014. Professor Ixer is currently Head of Social Work at the University of Winchester and has considerable experience in post qualifying social work education across the UK. He also has previous links with Northern Ireland and NISCC in particular, having contributed to the development of the first Codes of Practice and also having had involvement in the closure of the UK PQ Framework through his role as Head of Policy with the General Social Care Council for England.

Following appointment, Professor Ixer provided feedback on a selection of submissions at the October 2014 assessment point and attended the March 2015 panel and has prepared a written report on the outcomes.

Professor Ixer identified that assessment processes were "robust and fair" and commented that the range of submission methods provides "diversity in assessment." He also provided some helpful direction in terms of improving consistency in assessor feedback. As outlined above and as a result of the comments received from the External Assessor, assessor feedback has been chosen as the discussion topic for the next standardisation meeting.

The Direct Observation format for submission has been added to the range of methods available at Strategic and Leadership level. This brings the Leadership and Strategic Award in line with the other 2 awards in terms of diversity in submission methods. It is anticipated that valuable opportunities can be used to form the basis of submissions via this route. Many such opportunities present themselves across a range of leadership and management activities and candidates should benefit from being able to have them observed for assessment purposes.

Work has been on-going to revise the IAR Handbook. Both the Assessor Guidance and Candidate Guidance have been combined into one handbook. Further work has to be done to align the content with other PiP documentation. In line with this initiative, quick links to specific sections of information have been provided on the website. Information on areas such as word count and APL is frequently sought and both candidates and line managers should now be able to access this more easily.

There remains a continued focus on encouraging increased submissions including:

- Support for employers to consider best usage of the IAR in meeting employer needs
- Support for individuals pursuing self-directed learning
- Promotion of the In Service Training Schedule with In-Service Programmes, including specific adaptations to meet the needs of different programmes

The range of work currently being undertaken as part of the introduction of PiP has a priority of supporting increased engagement in the IAR. This is important in terms of maximising accessibility to information, support, assessment and recognition of achievement within the PiP Framework. It will be important to keep rates of engagement with this route under review in the context of on-going development of the framework.

Areas identified for Development and Improvement 2015-2016

Reflecting the developmental nature of the IAR there are a number of actions identified that will enhance the quality and effectiveness of this route. Progress and impact will be monitored and reviewed in the 2015 - 2016 quality assurance process.

Actions
<p>1. Launch of Professional in Practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of an action plan for the further development and promotion of IAR as an integral part of the implementation of PiP
<p>2. Review of Guidance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued review of IAR documentation linked to the NISCC website and aligned with PiP requirements
<p>3. Standardisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renewed focus on standardisation of processes and systems related to assessment; roles and responsibilities; support resources and information

Approved Programme Route

Context

Programmes approved within the NI PQ Framework offer a range of modules to meet the needs of social workers and in some instances, related disciplines, in respect of particular areas of practice or service delivery.

There are currently 28 programmes comprising 114 modules approved across the 3 PiP Awards. All programmes are approved for a five year period in the first instance, subject to satisfactory annual monitoring. Programmes are re-approved on a five yearly basis.

The range and type of provider remains static with the majority of provision coming from the Universities, the HSC Leadership Centre and partnerships with employers. There are a small number of specialist providers including British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF), Child and Adolescent Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy Northern Ireland (CAPPNI) and Reminiscence Network. These specialist programmes are important in the overall context of ensuring that high quality provision is accessible to social workers in specialist settings.

Recommended Areas for Development – Outcomes from 2013-14 Annual Monitoring

Actions

1. Facilitate a workshop for programme providers to feedback on the annual monitoring process, showcase examples of good practice and identify themes and priorities for the next annual monitoring round

Update: Annual monitoring workshops have been in place to provide feedback to programmes. It has been agreed to facilitate a workshop in 2015 which will inform programme providers of the developments with the new PIP framework and to engage in the development of an annual monitoring process that improves the quality of information from programme providers.

2. Complete a programme of work to build capacity within the NISCC's Participation Partnership to engage with Approval Panel and contribute to the approval and re-approval of programmes within the PiP Framework.

Update: A series of group-work sessions have been held with the Participation Partnership about the role and functions of the Approval Panel. A representative from the Participation Partnership will take up a place on the Approval Panel in November 2015 and a Professional Advisor will continue to support this representative to have meaningful involvement within the work of the Panel.

Approval Outcomes

The Approval Panel approved 1 new programme in November 2014. The Adult Safeguarding Programme is provided in a partnership between UU and three of the HSCTs. The Programme offers the full Specialist Award. The programme was developed to meet a gap in training provision for those social workers working with adults who have complex needs across a range of service areas. The programme offers the opportunity to enhance the competence and expertise of social workers undertaking the specialist role of investigative officer or designated officer in adult safeguarding cases and provides the required training for accreditation to undertake Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) interviews within the Northern Ireland Adult Safeguarding Partnership (NIASP) Framework. This is an important and welcome addition to the range of approved programmes as it specifically fills a previously identified gap in provision for social workers working in adult services. The modularised structure of the programme allows for each of the 4 modules to be taken as a “stand alone” module. This structure supports NISCC’s aim of maximising the potential for programmes to be flexible and accessible.

Re-approval Outcomes

In 2014/15 there were 4 programmes re-approved:

- Counselling and Therapeutic Communication - UU
- Managing Effective Practice – HSC Leadership Centre
- Restorative Practices - UU
- Research Methods - UU

All of the above programmes continue to be relevant to the professional development needs of the social work workforce. The re-approval process confirmed that these programmes are of a high quality and have developed and evolved to reflect best practice and meet the changing needs of their candidates.

Supporting Programmes to Improve Evaluation of Impact

Within 2014/15 NISCC has given a particular focus to evaluation of impact of learning and development. NISCC undertook an evaluation of two Approved Programmes and identified the potential for improved critical thinking ability of the candidates engaged on both programmes. The findings of this evaluation and the methodology used were disseminated to programme providers. A NISCC Training and Evaluation Forum (that includes Programme Providers) is now established to share good practice in relation to evaluation. Resources suggested through this forum will be developed and shared on the NISCC website.

Annual Monitoring of Approved Programmes Outcome

The annual monitoring process takes place from September to December each year and requires reporting by the programme provider on their previous year’s activity and outcomes.

A panel of Professional Advisers, chaired by the lead Adviser for the PIP Framework considered the programme returns, along with the information from the data reports and

additional information as relevant from the Officer's engagement with the programme against NISCC Standards and Requirements using a standardised proforma.

Annual Monitoring Outcomes

All of the programmes considered within the annual monitoring process were deemed to be meeting NISCC Standards and Requirements. The thematic focus in 2014 was to gather views from programme providers on the model of regulation for Training and Education specifically in relation to the annual monitoring process.

Annual Monitoring Quality Assurance activity in 2014/15 included:

- Annual Monitoring Process
- Service evaluation
- External examiner reporting

All of the programmes considered within the annual monitoring process were deemed to be meeting NISCC Standards and Requirements. There continues to be strong partnership arrangements across all the approved programmes and providers are proactively involved in developments which address issues pertinent to their specific programmes.

Gathering information for monitoring purposes takes time and has cost implications for programmes. Some programmes outlined that there is a multiplicity of monitoring arrangements across the University, NISCC and individual employers and that the burden can become onerous if not managed effectively. It is important that existing data sources become more efficient and joined up.

There was clear evidence presented from providers on how they continue to develop and improve the delivery of programmes. The areas of continuous development included an increase in service user engagement with many examples of good practice taking place across the approved programmes, increasing practical exercises, E-Learning and greater promotion of programmes across different social work sectors. The Research Methods Programme has agreed that research projects will be hosted on the University of Ulster website to support knowledge exchange.

Evaluations from candidates and their line managers presented a very positive picture of how candidates developed learning and how this had improved practice. Candidates expressed that the programme content was current and applicable across service user groups. One particular programme utilised past students in contributing to teaching sessions with a focus on applicability to practice.

All programmes had satisfactory reports from external examiners. The research methods had particular strengths worthy of note which included the range of research methods taught on the programme; the level of engagement with practice through the agency partnerships; and the capacity of candidates to apply learning to complex social issues and varied practice contexts. The external examiner outlined that students are more successfully

conceptualising their research topic beyond their own practice context and situating their project within the international research landscape. Progress is also being made to develop support mechanisms and avenues for candidate publication of research.

One programme, the Reminiscence, Life Story Work and Life Review presented a risk due to the low intake in numbers. In order to ensure viability the programme requires a minimum of 12 candidates. The 2014 intake was 10. The programme also has had a high deferral rate. There were a number of factors outlined by the programme provider relating to these risks. They included travel restrictions, funding availability for candidates, and a significant proportion of candidates reporting they were under severe pressure at work and unable to meet the module requirements. In 2014 33% of candidates requested a deferment. There was a theme this year of some candidates being particularly pressurised with work situations. Candidates reported difficulties with easement and sufficient support to complete some programmes. This resulted in an increase in some programmes of referrals and deferrals.

Responding to these risks the programmes agreed to approach a range of providers within the Voluntary and Statutory sector in order to improve the intake of candidate applications and to work towards ensuring better candidate support from employers.

Areas Identified for Development and Improvement 2015 – 2016

Within this business year, a number of areas for development have been identified to enhance the quality assurance process and enable higher levels of governance and assurance.

Actions
1. Facilitate a workshop in 2015 which will inform programme providers of the developments with the new PIP framework
2. Review of Guidance: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continued review of Approved Programme documentation linked to the NISCC website and aligned with PiP requirements.

Recommendations from the 5 Year Review of the Degree

1. Partnership Arrangements

Partnership arrangements are efficient and effective in the development, delivery and improvement of the Degree in Social Work

Recommendations

- It is recommended that Course Providers and the NIDSWP review the existing partnership arrangements to ensure effective mechanisms are used to maximise the efficient use of resources;
- SAG should review its terms of reference to ensure that its focus is on the future needs of social work education and training across the education and training continuum, at qualifying and post qualifying levels.

2. Service User & Carer Involvement

There is strong evidence of service user and carer involvement in course provision.

Recommendations

- Building on the achievements to date, Degree Course Providers along with the NIDSWP should develop a regional strategy which focuses on widening the range of service user and carer engagement, and outlines plans for sustainability.

3. Selection & Recruitment

The selection process is fit for purpose and ensures that the appropriate candidates are selected who can meet the demands of social work training

Recommendations

- Academic entry requirements to the degree should be maintained at the current level of 300 UCAS points. This should be closely monitored to ensure that the calibre of student remains high.

- NISCC and Course Providers should undertake work to develop promotional information through a range of media to target under-represented groups in social work training.
- The selection process should be reviewed by the NIDSWP and course providers to ensure that it provides adequate opportunity to test the suitability of applicants to successfully undertake training leading to a career in social work.
- The NIDSWP should undertake a piece of work to determine the feasibility of testing applicants' resilience to undertake training in social work as part of the selection process.
- The review undertaken by the NIDSWP into the part-time route should be revisited with a view to ascertaining if the original rationale and purpose for the introduction of the route remain valid and the criteria for entry, particularly the experience requirements, are appropriate.

4. The Curriculum

The curriculum content is based on the National Occupational Standards for Social Work, meets the requirements of employers and service providers, takes account of findings and lessons learned from regional and national Reviews and Inquiries and takes account of changing social work policy and practice.

Recommendations

- Course providers should ensure that the curriculum enhances students' knowledge of community development approaches and skills.
- Course providers should strengthen the curriculum to develop students' critical thinking, reflection and analytical skills.
- Course providers should place an emphasis on developing in students a strong sense of professional social work identity.
- SAG should ensure there are mechanisms in place to inform the curriculum in order that it is responsive to emerging policy and strategic developments.
- Course providers should work with NISCC to introduce the Quality 2020 Attributes Framework into the curriculum.

5. Practice Learning Opportunities

There is a sufficient supply of high quality practice learning opportunities which meet the requirements of the degree

Recommendations

- NISCC will review PLOs across Adult services to determine sufficiency, relevance and quality in order to prepare students for social work roles in integrated care settings.
- While all students must continue to receive teaching on group work, NISCC will amend the practice learning requirement for group work to ensure that group work is undertaken in practice in a context where it is a “naturally occurring” event or where social work intervention requires this approach.
- The NIDSWP and course providers should undertake a review to ascertain if it is desirable for the PDDs to be discontinued and a formal non-assessed observational placement introduced in its place. The outcome of such a review should be reported to NISCC.
- The NIDSWP should keep the PLO allocation process under review to ensure that the process does not become overly complex and burdensome.

6. Fitness to Practise

Newly qualified social workers are fit to practise and take responsibility for their own practice and on-going professional development

Recommendations

- NISCC in collaboration with key stakeholders should develop a framework which identifies levels of expected competence at different stages in a social worker’s career.
- Employers, HSCB and NISCC should keep under review the rigour and standardisation of the assessment of the AYE.

CONSOLIDATION AWARD IN SOCIAL WORK	
Programme	Details
MSc ASS Cognitive Behaviour Practice Programme	<p>4 Modules awarding PG Cert</p> <p>For staff working at levels 1 and 2 within a stepped care model – low intensity psychological interventions.</p>
MSc ASS Court Work Skills Module	<p>Inter-disciplinary module between social work and legal professionals.</p> <p>Approved for MSc Applied Studies or as a stand alone module relevant to Child Protection.</p>
MSc ASS Dual Diagnosis Programme	<p>Inter-disciplinary programme relevant to social workers working with service users that are experiencing mental health problems and substance misuse problems.</p>
<p>MSc ASS Family Therapy & Systemic Practice Programme (Foundation)</p> <p>See also at Specialist Award</p>	<p>3 Modules at Phase 1</p> <p>Approved for Phase 1 of Systemic Practice Pathway in MSc Applied Social Studies.</p> <p>AFT Approved</p>
MSc PD Initial Professional Development Programme	<p>3 Modules – 2 Core</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing Professional/ Interprofessional Practice • Professional Decision-Making in Social Work <p>and</p> <p>1 Optional chosen from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health & Learning Disability • Family & Childcare • Health, Disability & Older People • Adults with Complex Needs <p>Approved for Phase 1 of MSc Professional Development</p>
MSc PD PBNI Consolidation Pathway Programme	<p>1 Module for PBNI staff (comprises PBNI Comprehensive Induction Programme)</p>

SPECIALIST AWARD IN SOCIAL WORK

Programme	Details
MSc ASS Child Care Programme	<p>3 Modules awarding Child Care Award (inc a BAAF Module)</p> <p>Approved for Child Care Pathway of MSc Applied Social Studies + Optional Dissertation Module</p>
MSc ASS Cognitive Behaviour Therapy Programme	<p>4 Modules awarding PG Dip</p> <p>For staff working at levels 3 and above of a stepped care model. Equips staff to practice as fully Approved Cognitive Behaviour Therapists</p>
MSc ASS Critical Thinking in Social Work Module	<p>2 Modules as part of MSc Applied Social Studies</p>
<p>MSc ASS Family Therapy & Systemic Practice Programme (Intermediate)</p> <p>Also see at Consolidation Award and Leadership & Strategic Award</p>	<p>3 Modules at Phase 2</p> <p>Approved at Phase 2 of Systemic Practice Pathway in MSc Applied Social Studies</p> <p>AFT Approved</p>
MSc ASS Mental Health (Approved Social Worker) Programme	<p>3 Modules providing eligibility for appointment as an Approved Social Worker by a HSCT; Full PiP/PQ Specialist Award and Post-Graduate Diploma (120 academic credits) QUB.</p> <p>An additional 60 credits can be acquired through QUB or UU to obtain a full MSc.</p>
MSc ASS Theory & Practice of Social Research Module	<p>2 Modules as part of MSc Applied Social Studies</p>
MSc PD Approaches to Dementia Care Module	<p>1 Module as part of MSc Professional Development</p>
MSc PD Caring For the Suicidal Person	<p>1 Module as part of MSc Professional Development</p>

Module	
MSc PD Engagement and Assessment in Eating Disorders Module	1 Module as part of MSc Professional Development
MSc PD Methods of Intervention in Eating Disorders Module	1 Module as part of MSc Professional Development
MSc PD NI Practice Teaching Programme	2 Modules awarding NI Practice Teacher Award. Approved at Phase 2 of MSc Professional Development at UU
MSc PD PBNI Specialist Pathway Programme	3 modules - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialist Practice • Interprofessional Practice • Managing & Enabling Change PBNI in collaboration with UU
MSc PD Reminiscence, Life Story Work and Life Review Module	1 Module which can be taken as stand-alone or as part of MSc Professional Development Reminiscence Network NI in collaboration with UU
MSc PD Research Methods Programme	1 Module at Phase 3 Approved for Phase 3 of MSc Professional Development
MSc PD Restorative Practices Programme Also see at Leadership & Strategic Award	2 Core Modules and 1 Optional Module from choice of 6 awarding PG Cert in Restorative Practices or 4 Core Modules and 2 Optional Modules from choice of 6 awarding PG Dip in Restorative Practices
MSc PD Specialist Cognitive Therapy Programme *(temporarily withdrawn)	4 Core Modules awarding PG Dip in Specialist Cognitive Therapy
MSc PD Understandings of Dementia Module	1 Module as part of MSc Professional Development
PG Dip/MSc	4 Modules

Adult Safeguarding Programme	
PG Dip/MSc Counselling and Therapeutic Communication Programme	4 compulsory and 2 optional modules awarding PG Dip level (with option to exit at PG Cert level)
PG Dip/MSc Psychoanalytic Observational Studies Programme	6 assessed modules + 3 formative assessment modules. Includes weekly infant/young child observation sessions
See also at Leadership & Strategic Award	
Managing Effective Practice Programme	4 Modules delivered by HSC Leadership Centre Focus on personal effectiveness, managing change, service improvement

LEADERSHIP AND STRATEGIC AWARD IN SOCIAL WORK

Programme	Details
MSc ASS Child Care Programme	3 Modules awarding Child Care Award (inc a BAAF Module) Approved for Child Care Pathway of MSc Applied Social Studies + Optional Dissertation Module
MSc ASS Cognitive Behaviour Therapy Programme	4 Modules awarding PG Dip For staff working at levels 3 and above of a stepped care model. Equips staff to practice as fully Approved Cognitive Behaviour Therapists
MSc ASS Critical Thinking in Social Work Module	2 Modules as part of MSc Applied Social Studies
MSc ASS Family Therapy & Systemic Practice Programme	3 Modules at Phase 2

<p>(Intermediate)</p> <p>Also see at Consolidation Award and Leadership & Strategic Award</p>	<p>Approved at Phase 2 of Systemic Practice Pathway in MSc Applied Social Studies</p> <p>AFT Approved</p>
<p>MSc ASS Mental Health (Approved Social Worker) Programme</p>	<p>3 Modules providing eligibility for appointment as an Approved Social Worker by a HSCT; Full PiP/PQ Specialist Award and Post-Graduate Diploma (120 academic credits) QUB.</p> <p>An additional 60 credits can be acquired through QUB or UU to obtain a full MSc.</p>
<p>MSc ASS Theory & Practice of Social Research Module</p>	<p>2 Modules as part of MSc Applied Social Studies</p>
<p>MSc PD Approaches to Dementia Care Module</p>	<p>1 Module as part of MSc Professional Development</p>
<p>MSc PD Caring For the Suicidal Person Module</p>	<p>1 Module as part of MSc Professional Development</p>
<p>MSc PD Engagement and Assessment in Eating Disorders Module</p>	<p>1 Module as part of MSc Professional Development</p>
<p>MSc PD Methods of Intervention in Eating Disorders Module</p>	<p>1 Module as part of MSc Professional Development</p>
<p>MSc PD NI Practice Teaching Programme</p>	<p>2 Modules awarding NI Practice Teacher Award.</p> <p>Approved at Phase 2 of MSc Professional Development at UU</p>
<p>MSc PD PBNI Specialist Pathway Programme</p>	<p>3 modules -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialist Practice • Interprofessional Practice • Managing & Enabling Change <p>PBNI in collaboration with UU</p>
<p>MSc PD Reminiscence, Life Story Work and Life Review Module</p>	<p>1 Module which can be taken as stand-alone or as part of MSc Professional Development</p>

	Reminiscence Network NI in collaboration with UU
MSc PD Research Methods Programme	1 Module at Phase 3 Approved for Phase 3 of MSc Professional Development
MSc PD Restorative Practices Programme Also see at Leadership & Strategic Award	2 Core Modules and 1 Optional Module from choice of 6 awarding PG Cert in Restorative Practices or 4 Core Modules and 2 Optional Modules from choice of 6 awarding PG Dip in Restorative Practices
MSc PD Specialist Cognitive Therapy Programme *(temporarily withdrawn)	4 Core Modules awarding PG Dip in Specialist Cognitive Therapy
MSc PD Understandings of Dementia Module	1 Module as part of MSc Professional Development
PG Dip/MSc Adult Safeguarding Programme	4 Modules
PG Dip/MSc Counselling and Therapeutic Communication Programme	4 compulsory and 2 optional modules awarding PG Dip level (with option to exit at PG Cert level)
PG Dip/MSc Psychoanalytic Observational Studies Programme See also at Leadership & Strategic Award	6 assessed modules + 3 formative assessment modules. Includes weekly infant/young child observation sessions
Managing Effective Practice Programme	4 Modules delivered by HSC Leadership Centre Focus on personal effectiveness, managing change, service improvement