

Circular HSS (OSS) AYE 2/2015

**ASSESSED¹ YEAR² IN EMPLOYMENT (AYE)
OF NEWLY QUALIFIED SOCIAL WORKERS (NQSW)³:
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AYE POLICY FROM 9 November 2015**

INTRODUCTION

1. The Degree in Social Work was introduced as the threshold qualification for Social Work in Northern Ireland in September 2004. This was part of an overall package of agreed reforms which also included the AYE, whereby all NQSWs are required to undertake an assessed year in employment, in a social work post. The AYE is a condition of registration for NQSWs with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC).
2. The AYE is designed to support the NQSW make the transition from being a social work student to a practising social worker and to develop and strengthen their professional confidence and competence. The NQSW employee will be expected to have achieved a level of competence, decision-making and autonomy within employment by the end of their first year in practice consistent with the standards for a qualified social worker and as outlined by the Revised Guidance for Registrants and their Employers NISCC Guidance (May 2014).
3. The NQSW will be subject to the same employment processes and procedures as any other employee, permanent or temporary, within the employing organisation.

POLICY

4. The policy on AYE for NQSWs in employment was first introduced in April 2006 (Circular: HSS (SSI) AYE 1/2005) and was replaced by Circular: HSS (OSS) AYE 3/2010. Circular: HSS (OSS) AYE 3/2010 is now replaced by this Circular: HSS (OSS) AYE 2/2015.

¹ **Assessed** = The term "assessed" in this context refers to the performance appraisal process within the employing organisation, which is undertaken throughout the prescribed AYE period for the NQSW.

² **Year** = In this context, each NQSW should complete 198 working days (7.5 hours = 1 working day) in social work practice. This equates to a full calendar year in employment and may be undertaken either as a continuous year or as incremental periods of employment over a longer period, but which allows the NQSW to complete in full the AYE requirements. Annual leave, statutory holiday entitlement and professional development days are not included in the 198 days.

³ **NQSWs** = Degree in Social Work graduates newly employed in a social work post.

5. All Health and Social Care Trusts (HSC Trusts) will have arrangements in place to support NQSWs comply with the NISCC registration requirements and guidance for the AYE NISCC Guidance (May 2014).

PURPOSE OF THE POLICY

6. The purpose of the policy is:
 - (a) to enable NQSWs make the transition from being a student to being a professionally accountable social worker in employment and to develop their knowledge, skills and capacity to function as a registered social worker without condition;
 - (b) to ensure NQSWs receive appropriate induction and professional support, including professional supervision, in their first year in employment;
 - (c) to allow NQSWs opportunities to demonstrate sustained and effective social work practice in the workplace;
 - (d) to require employers to verify, against required standards, that a NQSW can practice in the workplace as a professionally accountable social worker and to endorse their fitness to practise and their eligibility to be registered without the AYE condition with the NISCC; and
 - (e) to provide assurance to the public that by the end of the AYE, NQSWs are safe to practice as competent, responsible and professionally accountable practitioners.

IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

7. Employers' arrangements for the management, support and supervision of NQSWs should be in line with this Circular and current employment processes for all employees joining the HSC workforce. The NISCC Guidance (May 2014) provides guidance on:
 - requirements for a suitable social work post for an AYE Registrant;
 - standards that all social work employers must meet to ensure consistency of experience for all NQSWs during their AYE;
 - the assessment of competence against the required standards of practice; and
 - NISCC quality assurance arrangements for ensuring regional standardisation in terms of employer appraisal of NQSW's performance.
8. The NISCC Guidance should be read in conjunction with this Circular. The NISCC Guidance (May 2014) and associated standards will be used to monitor implementation of the policy and the consistency of arrangements across the HSC Trusts.

REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS FOR NEW SOCIAL WORK GRADUATES

9. All NQSWs must register with the NISCC on the social work part of the register prior to employment in a social work post. At all times registration must be current.

RECRUITMENT

10. Employers should advertise social work vacancies in the normal way. Social work graduates and social work students about to complete their Social Work Degree and who meet the requirements of job specifications will be eligible to apply. All such appointments must be to posts which provide the NQSWs the opportunity to be assessed against required standards of social work practice. The requirements for a suitable post are specified in the NISCC Guidance (May 2014). The NQSW should be clearly identified as such in the employing organisation's Human Resources information system in order that individuals can be tracked through to successful completion.

SUPERVISION AND INDUCTION

11. As with all new employees, NQSWs should receive appropriate induction to the organisation. In the course of the AYE, NQSWs should receive the specified professional supervision and support outlined in the NISCC Guidance (May 2014). Professional supervision must be provided by a qualified, registered social worker and in line with agreed Departmental Policy. The NISCC Guidance (May 2014) sets out the minimum requirements for professional supervision and induction.

WORK ALLOCATION

12. Allocation of work will need to allow NQSWs to engage in the full range of professional social work activity expected of a practising social worker. The work allocated should allow the NQSW to consolidate professional skills and knowledge gained on the Degree and extend their knowledge and skills to being able to work more confidently, independently and accountably. These skills and knowledge are reflected in the required standards identified in the NISCC Guidance (May 2014).
13. Work allocation should be sufficiently challenging so that the NQSW can demonstrate, at the end of their AYE, that they are able to practice safely, competently, confidently and responsibly and at an appropriate level of professional independence as would be expected of a social worker within a framework of professional governance and accountability.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

14. All NQSWs should be offered opportunities for professional learning and development and be afforded sufficient time to avail of these. NQSWs must undertake a minimum of 10 post-registration training and learning development days⁴, which are a condition of registration. These learning opportunities should focus on facilitating the ongoing development and expansion of the knowledge and skills base required of a qualified social worker and appropriate to the individual's job role within the employing organisation. The learning acquired over the AYE period should contribute to the NQSW's readiness to achieve recognition within the Professional in Practice Framework⁵.

PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

15. Employers must be satisfied that NQSWs are performing at a level that allows for confirmation that they are able to practise as safe, competent and responsible social workers and therefore suitable for continued registration and employment as social workers. This is achieved through the assessment and appraisal process which is ongoing throughout the period of employment as an NQSW. The NQSW's line manager, or where the line manager is not a social worker, the social worker who provides professional supervision (AYE supervisor) to the NQSW must assess his/her performance throughout the employment period. This applies to NQSWs in continuous employment as well as to those in shorter periods of employment. Where it relates to shorter periods of employment, the AYE supervisor must provide a written reference and **Form Ref AYE4** NISCC Guidance (May 2014) evidencing achievements during each specific period of employment and clearly stating competences which still remain outstanding. Each period of short term employment must aggregate to the equivalent of a full calendar year.
16. The final performance appraisal for AYE purposes must take place and the final overall achievement recorded on the relevant NISCC proforma to facilitate the re-registration process. Where the line manager is not a qualified social worker, the final performance appraisal must be signed off by the AYE supervisor in agreement with the line manager and the authorised signatory from the organisation.
17. If there are concerns about the suitability of a NQSW, this should be addressed with the employee concerned using the normal HR performance management processes and as with any employee, an action plan should be put in place to address deficits in performance. If the NQSW does not show the requisite improvement, organisational HR processes should be followed as they would for any other employee within the organisation.

⁴ Development days are time spent on induction, training or other work related development activities such as shadowing, reading, research, AYE support and development groups. These activities should relate to the individual's PDP.

⁵ Following successful completion of the AYE a condition will be placed in their registration requiring them to complete a minimum of two requirements of the Specific Award in the PiP framework. This must be achieved by the time of their first three year renewal with NISCC.

PAY & CONDITIONS

18. All new NQSWs in HSC Trusts will be placed on the agreed Agenda for Change band for NQSWs. Pay progression will be dependent on a satisfactory outcome of AYE final performance appraisal and registration without the AYE condition on the social work part of the NISCC register. Pay and conditions will remain unchanged for any period of extension of the AYE and associated NISCC registration “with condition” status for the NQSW.

GOVERNANCE AND REGIONAL CONSISTENCY

HSC Trust Employer Responsibilities

19. For standardisation purposes, each Trust will ensure that 25% of performance appraisals of NQSWs being appraised in any reporting year are randomly sampled. Records of this process should be maintained and made available on request
20. Line managers' or AYE supervisors' assessments of NQSWs for performance appraisal purposes are an essential component of the process during this period and should be supported by employers.
21. As part of the quality assurance and monitoring arrangements, Trusts should seek feedback from NQSWs, line managers and professional supervisors as to the experience and effectiveness of AYE arrangements. An overview of this feedback should be included in the HSC Trusts' annual reports on the implementation of the AYE policy to the HSC Board as part of the Delegated Statutory Function (DSF) reporting arrangements and reports should be submitted to the Director of Social Care and Children.

Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) Responsibilities

22. The HSCB should maintain professional oversight and scrutiny of AYE arrangements based on HSC Trust annual reports to:
 - ensure compliance with this Circular and associated standards;
 - recommend improvements in the arrangements; and
 - promote regional consistency across HSC Trusts.

A summary and analysis of the implementation of AYE regionally should be included in the HSCB annual DSF overview report detailing HSC Trusts compliance with the AYE Policy and recommendations for improvement and this report should be submitted to the Chief Social Work Officer in the DHSSPS by an agreed date.

Where appropriate the HSC Board in collaboration with the Trusts will agree action plans to improve and develop AYE arrangements.

NISCC Responsibilities

23. NISCC will wish to satisfy itself of the quality of NQSW evidence used by employers to assess successful completion of the AYE and to verify the suitability of the AYE registrant for registration status as a social worker without condition. This will be carried out by audit of a sample of AYE submissions.

Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) Responsibilities

24. RQIA will, as appropriate, monitor compliance with the employer responsibility for this function through inspection and service regulation.

DHSSPS Responsibilities

25. The DHSSPS will monitor compliance of the implementation of the AYE policy through professional scrutiny of the HSCB overview report and will, as appropriate, make recommendations to improve compliance and strengthen regional consistency. From time to time the DHSSPS will review this policy and Circular to ensure it remains relevant and fit for purpose.

NON COMPLETION

Extension of Registration

26. NISCC will need to be informed in good time of any request for extension of the initial registration "with condition" on the social work part of the register.
27. NISCC will consider any applications for an extension for those who have failed to complete for any reason. NQSWs who fail to complete will need to apply to NISCC for an extension of their current registration status. Any such application by a NQSW should be accompanied by the employer endorsement with a recommendation as to when the performance appraisal will be undertaken (and hence the likely proposed length of the period of extension).
28. Opportunities for further appraisal are subject to continuing registration with NISCC. NQSWs who, for exceptional reasons, are not available for final performance appraisal at the appropriate stage of their employment should be offered an alternative opportunity for appraisal by their employer, subject to continuing registration with NISCC.

NQSWs IN OTHER SECTORS

29. In order to support NQSWs in the Criminal Justice, Education and Voluntary sectors, employers in these sectors will need to ensure appropriate systems are in place to support AYE staff to comply with the NISCC registration requirements.

NQSWs FROM OUTSIDE NI

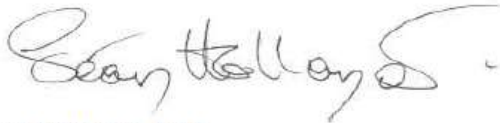
30. NQSWs who qualified outside Northern Ireland (NI) must meet NISCC requirements for registration including the AYE if employed and practising as social workers in any sector in Northern Ireland. Social workers from outside NI who have completed a sustained year in social work employment with professional supervision, which can be verified through a written employer reference, will not be subject to AYE conditions of registration.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Queries on this Circular should be addressed to:

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