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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>TITLE</strong></th>
<th>The Regulation and Development of the Social Work and Social Care Workforce 2016/17</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PURPOSE</strong></td>
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<td><strong>BUSINESS CONTEXT.</strong></td>
<td>End of Year report for Registration, Workforce Development and Fitness to Practise business activity 2016/17</td>
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<td><strong>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</strong></td>
<td>This report outlines the work undertaken during 2016/17 in the functions of Registration, Workforce Development and Fitness to Practise, and identifies issues for further work during 2017/18.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ACTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS</strong></td>
<td>None</td>
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<td><strong>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Lead Supporting Officer:</strong></td>
<td>Patricia Higgins</td>
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</table>
The Regulation and Development of the Social Work and Social Care Workforce

NISCC/P/17/04/B

April 2016 – March 2017
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>About Us</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Model of Regulation</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Context of Our Work</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registration</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications for Registration</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing Suitability for Registration</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Work Applicants from Outside of the United Kingdom</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining Registration</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessed Year in Employment – Applications and Commencement</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessed Year in Employment - Audit</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Registration Training and Learning</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Removal from the Register</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workforce Development</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Degree in Social Work</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional in Practice</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PiP Programmes</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Assessment Route</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PiP Credit Accumulation</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PiP Outcomes</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit Accumulation</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Assessment Route Submissions</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PiP Programmes</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Care</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influencing workforce strategy</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards and Learning</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile Learning</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitness to Practise</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform of Regulatory Model</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitness to Practise Activity</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral rates</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referrals by Register Part</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Source of Referral 31
Gender profile of registrants who have a concern raised about them 32
Outcome of NISCC Investigations 32
  Cases closed at Preliminary Investigation Stage 32
  Consensual Disposals 32
  Preliminary Proceedings Committees (PPCs) 33
  Interim Orders 33
Fitness to Practise Hearings 34
Appeals against Fitness to Practise Decisions 35
Information received about non-registered workers 35
Key Performance Indicators 35
Emerging Trends 35
Other Developments within 2016/17 36
  Audit 36
  Lessons learned 36
  Raising Concerns Guidance 37
  Standards for Employers of Social Workers and Social Care Workers 37
Looking Forward 38
  Registration 38
  Workforce Development 38
  Fitness to Practise 39
Appendix 1 – List of PiP Approved Programmes 40
About Us

The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) is the workforce regulator for the social work and social care workforce in Northern Ireland. NISCC has a statutory responsibility to set and regulate standards for social work and social care practice and for social work education and training. NISCC is also a Sector Skills Council – a member of the UK alliance Skills for Care and Development. We work with employers to ensure the right learning and development framework is in place - underpinned by our standards - to achieve a confident and skilled social care workforce with the right values to deliver compassionate, person-centred care.

Our Model of Regulation

Our model of regulation is dynamic and relational. It focuses on protecting the public through the development of safe and competent social work and social care practitioners. The 3 inter-related pillars of Standards – Workforce Development - Regulation all combine to support improvement in the quality of social work and social care services delivered to those in need. Underpinning all of this is Partnership – with service users, registrants, employers, education providers and government to inform standards and improve the quality of care.
The Context of Our Work

The social work and social care workforce in Northern Ireland is the largest workforce within the HSC sector in Northern Ireland. There are approximately 38,000 registrants on the Social Care Register.

Social work and social care is operating in a climate of change and transformation, following the Bengoa\(^1\) report and the Minister’s response, ‘Health and Wellbeing 2026 – Delivering Together\(^2\). Issues such as: determining the appropriate models of care for the future; having in place a workforce strategy which seeks to respond to changing service need to ensure there is a sufficient workforce with the right skills and competence to deliver safe and effective social work and social care services; having in place the right strategies to support skills development; and ensuring there are sustainable resources to deliver services – are all pressing matters which form part of the Government’s considerations in the roll out of a programme of transformation in health and social care. The Minister commissioned a review of Adult Social Care and although the report of this review is awaited, issues of funding, workforce, and models of care will undoubtedly be highlighted.

This context has informed the work of NISCC during 2016/17, as it has sought to regulate and support the workforce to deliver safe and effective social work and social care services. The following report outlines the work undertaken by NISCC during 2016/17 in Registration, Workforce Development and Fitness to Practise.

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\(^2\) Health and Wellbeing 2026 – Delivering Together, Department of Health, October 2016
Registration

Applications for Registration
Registration seeks to protect people who use social work and social care services by ensuring that those who provide those services are fit to practise.

At the end of March 2017, there were 32,390 registrants on the Register which is an overall increase of 32% on the same period last year. Social care workers represent the majority of the NISCC register at 79.6%, which equated to 25,771 social care workers. This increase was due to the registration of Domiciliary Care, Day Care and Supported Living workers in advance of the introduction of compulsory registration.

From 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017, 17,735 people applied for registration. This figure includes those applying to register for the first time (16,420) and registrants applying to renew their registration (1,315).

“We as a carer and user of Social Care Services it gives me and others reassurance to know that all Social Workers and Social Care Workers are registered with NISCC and are working to a set of standards”
To support the roll-out of Registration to Domiciliary Care, Day care and Supported Living workers we developed an on-line application process which enabled a more streamlined and efficient approach to the registration of such a large group of applicants.

We are investing in a programme of development and improvement of our registration system, which will increase the accessibility of our online services for registrants and employers and enable us to provide better workforce information. We anticipate the upgraded system will go-live in November 2017.

Assessing Suitability for Registration
During 2016/17, 466 suitability assessments were undertaken where applicants had made a declaration which called into question their suitability to be registered:
Of these, 9 applicants were referred to a Registration Committee, including 2 social workers and 7 social care workers. 6 applicants were registered, 2 applicants were refused registration, and 1 applicant’s case was adjourned.

Social Work Applicants from Outside of the United Kingdom
We receive applications from Social Workers from other countries who wish to work in the United Kingdom. We are required to assess the equivalence of their qualification and training against the Degree in Social Work before granting registration.

During 2016/17 we received 17 applications, 13 of which were registered, and one was refused as the qualification was not equivalent. On occasion we require applicants to undertake additional practice or learning in order to meet our standards – 1 applicant is undertaking these compensation measures and 2 applicants are still in progress.

At 31 March 2016 there were 64 internationally qualified social workers registered with NISCC. Approximately 19% of Internationally Qualified Social Workers (IQSWs) currently on our register, gained their social work qualification in the Republic of Ireland, with graduates from India (12%) and Poland (9%) being the next significant countries of qualification. While the number of IQSWs makes up 1% of the Social Work register, two-thirds are from European countries and therefore consideration will need to be given to the implications of Brexit.
We have been working with our IQSWs to help improve our information and guidance and develop online access to make an application. We are creating a dedicated resource section on our website for this group of registrants, providing guidance on registration requirements and information on living and working in Northern Ireland. We also hosted a workshop for UK Social Work Regulators to share information and seek to standardise our approach, and to develop arrangements to share information about qualification equivalency.

**Maintaining Registration**
All our registrants are required to maintain their registration through meeting specified conditions and learning and development requirements, renewing their registration, and paying an annual fee.

**Assessed Year in Employment – Applications and Commencement**
On successful completion of the Degree in Social Work, all newly qualified social workers are registered with a condition to complete an Assessed Year in Employment (AYE). This means that during this first year in practice the newly qualified social worker will have enhanced support and supervision to support the further development of their social work knowledge and skills.

In June 2016, there were 215 social work graduates, of these 181 registered as Social Workers. Our data shows that 115 have commenced employment in social work and begun their AYE.

The number of social workers graduating in June 2016 was a reduction of 11% from June 2015. This appears to be due to withdrawals from the social work programmes (largely temporary withdrawals) and the impact of the previously agreed reduction in the number of available places.

In the 2015/16 business year we introduced a system to gather more comprehensive data about social workers entering the AYE and to track progress through to completion. In last years end of year report we noted a positive trend with 60% of graduates commencing the AYE. This year we are seeing a downward trend with 53% of graduates commencing the AYE. Our data is also showing variable trends in the sectors recruiting newly qualified social workers this year. These trends will be kept under review.
Assessed Year in Employment - Audit

In 2016/17 we introduced an audit to ensure the AYE process and assessment is rigorous and consistent across all sectors. We audited a 10% sample (25) of registrants, from all employment sectors, who were coming to the end of their AYE, and sought information to satisfy ourselves that the quality of evidence used by employers to assess the successful completion of the AYE and to verify the registrant’s suitability for registration met our standards. The audit showed that these standards were met consistently across all sectors.

In the evidence reviewed, we were encouraged to see such explicit links being made to the Standards of Conduct and Practice for Social Workers and underpinned by reflection on relevant theory and research. There was evidence that the AYE provided newly qualified social workers with an important space to settle into a social work post, apply their learning and grow in confidence. Many of the registrants audited commented on how they needed this time to become more confident in the job.

We saw good evidence of:

- Personal Development Plans - comprehensive PDPs that were regularly reviewed.
- Training and Development Days – required amount of training undertaken and reflection provided on the learning.
- Reflective Summaries - links to the key roles; links to the NISCC Standards of Conduct and Practice; reflection using relevant theory and research; case examples included; supervision and peer support used effectively.
Post Registration Training and Learning

All registrants are required to undertake 90 hours of post registration training and learning during their period of registration to ensure their knowledge and skills remain current. We seek confirmation of this from registrants at the point of renewal through audit or by confirming achievement within the Professional in Practice Framework for Social Work or the QCF Framework for Social Care Workers. To date we have audited social workers and social care managers and we are introducing a pilot audit of social care workers in 2017/18.

During 2016/17 we audited 5% (59) of Social Workers and Social Care Managers who were due to renew. The standard of submissions from Social Workers was generally high, with clear evidence of the relevance and impact of their learning, particularly in complex areas of practice. While submissions from Social Care Managers met the standards required, we have identified that this group of registrants would benefit from further support to develop their skills of reflection. We plan to develop further guidance in this respect.

Social workers entering their first three year period of registration are required to complete part of the PiP Consolidation Award. This year, 190 registrants fell within this category, with 187 successfully meeting this requirement.

Since the introduction of this requirement in 2014, 96% of registrants have met the requirement with 40% going on to achieve the full Consolidation Award.
Removal from the Register

3,617 registrants were removed from the Register during 2016/17 for failing to maintain their registration. The most common reason registrants are removed from the register is due to not paying their annual fee on time. This year 88% of removals were related to non-payment of annual fee and employers were duly notified. This accounted for approximately 9% of the total register, with the majority being social care workers. Of those people removed for non-payment of fee, approximately 20% returned to the register within the same year. The average over the last 4 years for removals for non-payment of fees has remained the same at approximately 11%, which includes the increase in the register.

As we near completion of registration of the social care work force, we will prioritize a communications strategy with registrants and their employers, highlighting the importance of maintaining registration and the implications of a failure to do so.
Workforce Development

Social Work
People who use social work services expect social workers to be knowledgeable, skilled and ethical in their practice. High quality social work education and training ensures that social workers are equipped to support and safeguard those in need.

We set and monitor standards for the education and training of social work students as well as qualified social workers for the whole of their career.

The Degree in Social Work

We set standards for the Degree in Social Work. Social work students study 50% in university and 50% learning in practice

We have approved Queen’s University Belfast and Ulster University alongside a wide range of Designated Practice Learning Providers (DPLPs) to deliver our training for student social workers.
We also have approved the Northern Ireland Degree in Social Work Partnership (Degree Partnership) to co-ordinate regional arrangements for the delivery of the Degree and maintain regional consistency, thus ensuring that our partnership approach to learning and development is embedded from the first point of entry to the profession.

In regulating training for entry into the profession of social work we are ensuring that quality standards for the development of knowledge skills and values sit at the heart of social work practice. We provide assurance through our annual monitoring of the Degree Partnership; by considering outcomes and quality assurance reports from the Universities and their external examiners; and by considering outcomes and feedback on student experience of Practice Learning.

The state of social work education in Northern Ireland is strong and vibrant. There is robust accountability and partnership arrangements in place that enhance the quality of the student experience.

**Outcome:**

Our findings this year confirm that the Degree in Social Work continues to meet our quality standards. The Degree Partnership is efficient and effective in its co-ordination of the regional arrangements for delivery of the Degree. The Universities and H&FE Colleges deliver high quality learning experiences and the Practice Learning Providers offer a diverse and challenging range of opportunities to develop practice experience.

There are 260 training places on the Degree in Social Work. Whilst the rate of applications has been gradually reducing in recent years, reflecting an overall downward trend in applications to University, interest in social work remains buoyant with 3 applicants for every place in 2016.

256 students enrolled with the 2016 intake. Of these, 88% were women, demonstrating a continuing challenge of attracting male students. 97% were from NI with the other 3% from the Republic of Ireland, indicating that we continue to “grow our own” social workers. Whilst this works well for the labour market there is a need to ensure that social work as a profession is equipped to develop and deliver services in an increasingly culturally diverse society.
The part-time route for the Degree was withdrawn this year due to a consistently low number of applications in previous years, with people preferring full time study. The places available on this route were re-allocated to the full time routes.

Year on year a small number of places fail to be filled for a range of reasons. Every effort needs to be taken to ensure that places are filled to capacity when demand is high.

The curriculum is current and responsive to the needs of employers, covering a wide spectrum of learning required in preparing students to practice across adult and children’s services in both statutory and non-statutory settings. Feedback from external examiners on the various routes for the Degree is consistently positive across Providers and modules.

Learning in practice settings, as part of the student experience supports our aim to train social workers who are safe, competent and effective practitioners. Students complete 2 periods of assessed practice at different stages of their training, with 185 days in total. We strive to ensure there is a diverse range of high quality placements across the spectrum of social work settings.

Some of the new provision has been in response to a need for good quality placements in adult services to reflect changes in adult service provision and structure. Whilst this has been a welcome addition there is a need to closely monitor the provision and uptake in adult services given that 22 PLOs in adult services were not used this year and 68% of these were in the voluntary sector. The voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland continues to provide a diverse and dynamic
range of social work led services that support overall social work and social care provision. The provision of Practice Learning in the Voluntary Sector is supported by VOCALS, a co-ordinating body funded by NISCC to bring together large and small organisations to support learning and development for social work. This is an important role and provides assurance of quality standards for practice learning in the sector.

On a 5 yearly basis we undertake an in-depth review of the Degree in Social Work to ensure that it remains current and reflective of the needs of the profession and the practice context in which social work services are delivered. We will work in partnership with all of our key stakeholders to agree and determine the nature and focus of the next review, due to take place in 2018/2019. This will provide an opportunity for improvement and to consider best practice in learning and development as well as ensuring that the curriculum and content is up to date, relevant and responsive to the complex demands of social work practice within a context of wider strategic and policy developments in health and social care.

Professional in Practice
Qualified social workers are required as part of their registration to maintain and develop their knowledge and skills on an on-going basis. Our Professional in Practice Framework (PiP) provides a comprehensive system that allows us to support and recognise all professional development activity. We work in collaboration with the PiP Partnership as a Committee of Council to manage the operational business and agree the strategic direction for the framework. We are the awarding body for Professional Awards in Social Work.

Credit Accumulation
Approved Programmes
Individual Assessment Route
Professional Awards
During 2016/17 there were 2,448 social workers from all sectors actively engaged in undertaking formal learning and development within the PiP framework, through a range of approved programmes or by preparing for assessment on an individual basis. A further 253 social workers had logged credits for learning and development activity.

We provide Professional Awards at Consolidation, Specialist and Leadership and Strategic levels. We regulate the delivery of Professional Awards by reviewing information from a wide range of sources:

- Approval and re-approval of programmes or modules that meet our quality standards;
- Analysis of annual monitoring returns and reports from the Approved Programmes;
- Attendance at Programme Management Boards;
- Collation and analysis of statistical data on outcomes from the Programmes;
- Quality assurance of results from the IAR;
- Standardisation events and processes to ensure common standards are applied across programmes and the IAR;
- Review of External Assessor reports from the PiP Partnership, PiP Approval Panel and PiP Assessment Panel;
- Quality assurance for conferring the PiP Awards.

**Outcome:**

*Consideration of the culmination of evidence from the wide range of sources demonstrates that the PiP Framework is delivered to a high quality standard and supports the professional development of social workers across a diverse range of contexts*
We have 31 programmes/modules approved within the PiP Framework (Appendix 1). This includes two new programmes which were added to the suite of approved provision this year - The Community Development Programme and a specialist programme on a Psychoanalytical Approach for Work with Infants and Children. Approval of new programmes increases the range of provision available within the PiP Framework and provides more choice for social workers. Both of the new programmes fill a significant gap in terms of ongoing PiP provision for social workers in specialist areas of practice.

Both programmes are multidisciplinary and this reflects the benefits of shared learning experiences in supporting joint approaches to care. The shared learning approach is being developed further by introducing places for service users on some PiP Approved programmes. This innovative approach has been piloted with the Research Methods programme and has been found to have valuable and significant benefits to all course participants as well as providing a good example of co-production. It is proposed that the Community Development Programme will also seek to embrace this initiative. Whilst service users will not be eligible for PiP Awards, they can achieve academic credits via participation in the programme. Service user and carer involvement remains a central tenet of all PiP Approved Programme provision.

We monitored a total of 29 programmes/modules during 2016/17. This process provides us with an opportunity on an annual basis to quality assure the provision and ensure that social workers and their employers are satisfied with the learning experience and the outcomes. Of the 29 programmes reviewed 12 did not run this year. The reasons are varied, including lack of resource for delivery, a lack of take-up and reduced priority need within academic provision. A number of these programmes/modules are multi-disciplinary and were attracting small numbers of social workers. Two Programmes were permanently withdrawn - the Court Work Skills module and the Reminiscence, Life Story Work and Life Review module.

It is important for programme/module provision within the framework to be flexible, adaptable and responsive to changing needs and therefore changes in the range of availability are to be expected. It is however also important that as the awarding body we are aware of and understand what sits behind decisions to temporarily suspend intake or to withdraw a Programme. We will therefore in the coming months examine in more detail the profile of the approved programmes and their capacity for sustainability. We will also deliver a workshop for programme providers to examine standards and common areas of improvement or development.

Of the 17 Programmes that did run in the past year, all have continued to meet our quality standards. Many demonstrated evidence of direct links to practice development with the module content being relevant to specific practice issues. Student feedback overall was extremely positive indicating a high level of satisfaction
with the provision and reporting that the learning gained had a positive impact on their practice.

A commitment to evaluation and feedback was evident across a range of Programmes, especially in the Research Methods Programme where a system of pre and post testing has been introduced to help evaluate the effectiveness of participation in the programme. A focus on service user involvement was also evident across programmes. Once again partnership and collaboration between employers, service users and educators features strongly, partnership arrangements are clearly effective and in the Initial Professional Development Programme were described as “exemplary” by the external examiner.

**Individual Assessment Route**
The Individual Assessment Route (IAR) offers accessible and flexible arrangements for social workers to gain recognition within the PiP framework by submitting pieces of work for assessment against specified awards.

![Methods of Assessment in IAR](image)

- Assignment
- Direct Observation
- Verbal Presentation
- Reflective evaluation with portfolio of evidence
- Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)
- Schedule for In-Service Training Programmes

We have also piloted a new approach to assessment this year that has supported a range of Employer in-service or regional courses to integrate PiP assessment at the point of delivery.
This new approach has proved very successful with an additional 79 social workers gaining PiP recognition via this arrangement, some of whom are at senior management and leadership levels. Using this approach with the 2 social work Leadership programmes provided by the HSC Leadership Centre has created an influential group of senior leaders in social work who have led by example, and demonstrated to their staff the benefits of undertaking learning and development within the PiP framework.

“The link between the course and PiP requirements was very valuable in joining theories of leadership with leadership behaviours in real time situations. I think this is an effective learning process, adults learn by doing”

The evaluation of this approach will provide a basis for further conversations about how to improve the accessibility of the Framework and develop excellence in our range and methods of assessment whilst maintaining our standards.

**PiP Credit Accumulation**

We recognise that professional development takes place in a variety of contexts and people learn in a variety of ways. The credit accumulation system allows social workers to achieve and build up credits for their on-going learning and development, and to use those credits to attain formal recognition through our professional awards. The use of credits as recognition for smaller segments of learning and development is beginning to build momentum as social workers begin to see value both in terms of building towards achievement of the PiP Awards and as a means of demonstrating their PRTL. Employers also see the value of PiP credits in helping to create a culture of learning.
During 2017/18 we will commission work to consider the feasibility of more formally linking social workers achievement of PiP credits with renewal of registration. This work will be taken forward in collaboration with the PiP Partnership.

PiP Outcomes

Credit Accumulation

253 social workers logged credits in 2016/17

Using their credits, 22 Social Workers made a claim for requirements towards a PiP Award and 11 Social Workers were successful.

Individual Assessment Route Submissions

Consolidation Award – 49 Submissions – 32 Successful

Specialist Award – 20 Submissions – 14 Successful

Leadership and Strategic Award – 6 Submissions – 5 Successful

PiP Programmes

541 Social workers submitted work for assessment to achieve either a part of or a whole award, 440 were successful
Social Workers who were unsuccessful in achieving part or whole awards are required to produce further evidence to demonstrate they have met the PiP standards of competence.

Overall, there is a steady upward trend in social workers engaging in the PiP Framework and achieving successful outcomes – with an 80% achievement rate at assessment and 100% increase in the use of the credit accumulation system. The Initial Professional Development Programme at the PiP Specific Award level attracts large numbers of newly qualified social workers, all of whom have a requirement to achieve at least one third of the Specific Award in order to maintain their registration. This has proved to be an incentive for on-going learning with over 40% going on to complete the full programme and thereby the full Specific Award.

The following graph charts part achievement and full achievement of awards over the past 5 years. The increase in part achievement has been supported by the requirement placed on newly qualified social workers as referenced above.

![Graph showing part and full achievement of awards over the past 5 years](image)

**Social Care**

**Influencing workforce strategy**

During 2016/17 the key focus of our work with the Workforce Development Partnership has been a review of the challenges and opportunities facing the social care workforce, in order to contribute to the Government’s discussions on the transformation of health and social care. The Partnership held 2 workshops to identify the challenges and opportunities, and has worked with us to prepare a paper to focus on a strategic response as part of the Social Care Sector’s contribution to the reform process. The paper is nearing completion and presents an optimistic view of the way forward, suggesting that with the right strategic and collaborative approach many of the opportunities offered by this large and diverse workforce can be converted into real change for health and social care in Northern Ireland.
The Workforce Development Partnership also supported the publication of an economic review of the contribution the adult social care sector makes to the economy of Northern Ireland. Ulster University Economic Policy Centre was commissioned by NISCC in partnership with Inspire, Bryson Care and the Cedar Foundation to carry out an economic appraisal. The report was published in October 2016. This publication will be further enhanced by work commissioned by Skills for Care and Development in 2107/18 to produce a similar UK-wide economic appraisal of the adult social care sector.

In addition we have contributed to a workforce review of the domiciliary care workforce and are contributing to an HSC review of the health and social care workforce, both led by the Department of Health (DH).

**Standards and Learning**

We reviewed the suite of available social care qualifications with employers and H&FE Colleges to ascertain if they continued to meet the needs of the sector. Our review showed that the qualifications are current with a few minor adjustments required. In response to an identified workforce need we also developed a level 4 Diploma in Social Care which supports frontline managers to develop their practice and provides a bridge to the QCF level 5 qualification required for registered managers.

Through funding received from the Guidelines and Audit Implementation Network (GAIN) we have developed a guide which will assist domiciliary care managers to support domiciliary care staff to meet our Standards of Conduct and Practice. We will disseminate the guide during 2017/18 and will develop resources to further support the use of the guide.

Throughout the year we held a series of lunchtime seminars, at which practitioners presented developments or research in their field of practice. We hosted six seminars on topics ranging from studies of Children in Care, Communicating with Children about Challenging Issues, to The Use of Mobile Apps in Social Work Education & Practice. The seminars were recorded and posted on the NISCC YouTube channel to widen access to the learning. 305 people from social work and social care took part in these sessions and 246 watched recordings from the seminars on NISCC’s YouTube Channel. In feedback, participants said the opportunity to update their knowledge base in short time slots was very useful and they welcomed the ability to access the presentations online.
As a partner member of Skills for Care and Development, we participated in an audit undertaken by the Federation for Industry Sector Skills and Standards to quality assure our compliance to their Code of Practice. The Federation confirmed that we had exceeded the standards required of a Sector Skills Council and identified areas of strength and best practice.

**Mobile Learning**

We continued the development of mobile learning and this year we revised and relaunched our mobile application for the domiciliary care workforce. This work was carried out in partnership with the Dementia Together NI Team and other key stakeholders (BHSCT, Bryson Care, RQIA and SCIE) to update the Domiciliary Care Toolkit App with new guidance on specialist areas of practice including dementia, delirium and end of life care. This new information will support domiciliary care workers in their understanding of the application of our Standards of Practice within these specialist areas.

We are also developing a digital resource for Adult Residential/Nursing and Day Care Workers similar in content to the Domiciliary Care App. This project is being undertaken in partnership with a range of stakeholders and aims to support care workers in these settings.

The use of ‘Apps’ continued to grow in 2016/17, with ‘Understanding Child Development 0-6’ continuing to be the strongest performing App of the suite.

**Engagement**

**Roadshows**

During this year we delivered a programme of stakeholder communications and engagement to raise awareness about our work and deliver on Business objectives. Through briefings, presentations, workshops, E-News updates, social media stories, You Tube videos and a range of printed materials NISCC delivered effective and
meaningful engagement with key stakeholders; and used their feedback to inform and improve the services NISCC provides.

A number of Fitness to Practise and Registration Roll-out workshops were held across Northern Ireland. These events provided an overview of registration and NISCC standards - as well as supporting the workforce to maintain their registration:

- 288 registrants and managers took part in these sessions;
- Registrants found these shorter events, held close to their workplace, were more informative and accessible;
- Managers told us that local events and publicity supported them to promote registration and standards within their organisations.

**Engaging Social Care Managers**

We established a Forum for social care managers to come together to consider key policy and practice developments for their workforce. Two Social Care Managers Forum meetings were held in Carrickfergus and Omagh. These events focused on a series of conversations to help managers build networks and share their expertise:

- 160 managers joined the conversations and they all said they found the events useful;
- Participants asked for this event to be repeated a few times every year to support them as managers;
- Participants said the information provided would enable them to take a lead role in sharing NISCC’s message across their workplace;
- Participants appreciated the recognition for social care managers as professionals and the opportunity to discuss career development for them as social care managers.

We will continue to work with managers during 2017/18 to further develop the Forum using the concept of a virtual network.

We also hosted a Breakfast Seminar for over 20 Senior Executives to share the latest developments in workforce registration and regulation.
Developing Ambassadors

We continued to support career development in social care and social work through our Ambassador Scheme. This scheme is well embedded in social care and we undertook development work to engage social work Ambassadors. We held a successful launch of the Social Work Ambassador scheme on World Social Work day.

Synergy Project

Enabling our staff to understand the work our registrants do, and the important role that registration plays in supporting social workers, social care workers and service users is an important part of our staff development programme. This year we established a staff development programme called Synergy – Improving Connections with the Social Care Sector. This work was led by a member of the Workforce Development Team who engaged with a range of social care employers to develop opportunities for staff to get to know and understand the social care role and to improve their understanding of the complexity and valuable contribution of social care work. Staff visited a range of services including Kilcreggan Supported Living & Day Centre, Mindwise Day Projects and SEHSCT Domiciliary Care Management Team, and undertook observation/volunteering opportunities.

Staff said they found the experience enjoyable and very enlightening and the visits provided a good opportunity to break down barriers between NISCC and registered workers. The visit to Kilcreggan reached 555 people on Facebook and created 375 impressions and 13 engagements on Twitter.
Fitness to Practise

NISCC exists to protect the public by ensuring that social workers and social care workers practise safely and effectively in accordance with our Standards of Conduct and Practice. While the majority of social workers and social care workers undertake their work roles in accordance with the Standards, the conduct and practice of some registrants may at times fall below the required standard. This may result in a referral being made to NISCC to investigate the concerns about the registrant and decide whether any action needs to be taken in respect of their fitness to practise and ongoing registration.

Our Fitness to Practise process is designed to protect the public from those who are not fit to practise. If a social worker or social care worker’s fitness to practise is impaired, it means there are concerns about their ability to practise safely and effectively. This may mean that they should not practise at all or that they should be limited in what they are allowed to do. We will take appropriate actions to make this happen. In every case we aim to reach the outcome that best protects the public at the earliest opportunity.

Reform of Regulatory Model

Following amendments to the Health and Personal Social Services Act (NI) 2001, NISCC introduced a Fitness to Practise model of regulation in May 2016. This model offers a more proportionate and cost effective approach to regulation and brings NISCC into line with other health and social care regulators.

NISCC now have the ability to apply a wider range of sanctions, including provision to dispose of cases consensually without the need for a formal hearing. In the interests of openness and transparency and to ensure public protection, all Fitness to Practise sanctions, including consensual ones, are published on NISCC’s website.

Comprehensive training on the new model has been provided to NISCC staff and Committee members.
The types of concerns we consider are related to:

- Misconduct
- Lack of competence
- Physical or mental ill-health
- Criminal convictions or cautions
- Determinations made by a relevant regulatory body
- Inclusion on a list maintained by the Disclosure and Barring Service

**Fitness to Practise Activity**

**Referral rates**
From 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017, a total of 311 referrals were received about registrants, compared to 265 in 2015/16, representing a 15% increase. 167 cases were still in progress at 31 March 2016, making the total number of cases under investigation 478 during this reporting period.

**Referral numbers year on year 2011 – 2017**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reporting Period</th>
<th>No of Referrals</th>
<th>Total No Registrants</th>
<th>% Total Register</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011 - 2012</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>15,127</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012 - 2013</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>21,397</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 - 2014</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>22,421</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 - 2015</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>22,853</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 - 2016</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>24,478</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016 - 2017</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>32,390</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Referrals by Register Part
Referrals 1\textsuperscript{st} April 2016 – 31\textsuperscript{st} March 2017 by Register part

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Referral</th>
<th>Number of Referrals</th>
<th>% of total number of Referrals</th>
<th>% of total number on the Register at 31.03.2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Care Worker</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Work Student</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0.01%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total number of referrals in 2016/17 was 311 = approximately 1% of the total number of registrants

Source of Referral
Referrals can be received from a variety of sources, including employers, service users and members of the public, the PSNI and other regulatory bodies. Employers continue to be the main source of referrals at 75%. Service users account for 14% of referrals, largely about social workers, and often making complaints about multiple social workers.
Gender profile of registrants who have a concern raised about them
Of the 311 referrals received, 93 Registrants were male and 218 female. However, when these figures are viewed as a percentage of males and females on the Register overall, we continue to receive proportionately more referrals in relation to men than women.

Outcome of NISCC Investigations
Cases closed at Preliminary Investigation Stage
259 cases were closed at a preliminary investigation stage.

Consensual Disposals
Within the reporting period, a total of 22 cases were disposed of consensually.
The majority of cases disposed of consensually related to unsafe and poor care practice.

Preliminary Proceedings Committees (PPCs)
A total of 27 PPC’s were held. The outcomes are detailed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CLOSED WITH NO FURTHER ACTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLOSED WITH ADVICE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADJOURNED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRANSFERRED TO FITNESS TO PRACTICE COMMITTEE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRANSFERRED BACK TO COUNCIL FOR CONSIDERATION OF CONSENSUAL DISPOSAL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interim Orders
Imposing Interim Orders is an important way for us to protect the public. There are two types of Interim Order:

- Interim Conditions of Practice Orders which temporarily restrict the way in which a social worker or social care worker can practise
- Interim Suspension Orders which temporarily prevent a social worker or social care worker from practising.

Within the 2016/17 reporting period, 15 Interim Orders were imposed and one Interim Order application was not granted.
Fitness to Practise Hearings

Fitness to Practise hearings were held in respect of 20 Registrants with the following outcomes:

- 1 registrant received a warning
- 1 registrant was made subject to a Conditions of Practice Order
- 5 registrants were suspended from the Register
- 10 registrants were removed from the Register
- 1 registrant – facts were not found
- 2 cases were adjourned to be concluded within 2017/18

Of the 18 Hearings held, 3 related to the practice of social workers and 15 to the practice of social care workers. Only 2 registrants attended or were represented and both were social workers.

Fitness to Practise was found to be impaired by reason of the following gateways:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gateways</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A determination by a relevant regulatory body that the Registrant’s fitness to practise is impaired</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conviction or Caution in the UK for a Criminal Offence, or a conviction elsewhere for an offence</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion on a list maintained by the Disclosure and Barring Service</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Competence</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misconduct</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical or Mental Health</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most common reasons for removal related to abusive care practice, substance misuse or dishonesty.
Applies against Fitness to Practise Decisions
During 2016/17 two appeals were lodged with the Care Tribunal. Both were appeals against the imposition of an ISO. One appeal was struck out as it was outwith the required timescale. The other appeal was not upheld.

Information received about non-registered workers
During the reporting period we received referrals about 122 individuals. 88% of non-registered referrals came from current employers. To date, NISCC has received a total of 1,106 referrals of non-registered workers. As the roll-out of registration to the specified groups of social care workers is now in the final stages, we will review this policy.

Key Performance Indicators
We set clear key performance indicators for our fitness to practise processes which are reported to Council on a quarterly and annual basis. During the reporting period, we concluded:

- 94% of cases were closed within 15 months of opening the case exceeding our 90% target
- We closed or referred to a fitness to practise hearing 90% of cases within 7 months, exceeding our 85% target.
- We achieved 100% compliance with our target of concluding Interim Suspension Order cases within 4 weeks of referral.

Emerging Trends
We continue to see a rise in fitness to practise referrals proportionate to the total number of registrants on the NISCC Register. The majority of referrals relate to social care workers, principally those working within adult residential and nursing care. A high proportion of these referrals relate to poor care practice including non-adherence to care plans. The majority of referrals we receive about social workers relate to those employed within family and children’s services where the nature of the work is often contested. These referrals are highly complex and resource intensive and present significant challenges to us in managing service user expectations against the parameters of our regulatory role.
Since the introduction of Fitness to Practise, we have disposed of more cases consensually than we have progressed to formal hearing. This has proven to be a more proportionate means of disposal and is both more expeditious and cost effective.

With the roll-out of compulsory registration there has been a higher than usual volume of suitability assessments. With roll-out complete, this volume should reduce significantly and reflect only workforce turnover.

While the introduction of our Standard of Acceptance has provided greater clarity around referral thresholds, more work needs to be done, particularly with employers in the private and independent sectors to ensure that only those cases which require regulatory action, are referred to us.

It is interesting to note, that despite a Fitness to Practise model of regulation allowing health and competence to be considered in their own right, the majority of cases progressed to hearing (74%), fall under a misconduct category.

**Other Developments within 2016/17**

**Audit**
The fitness to practise function within NISCC was subject to internal audit in February 2017. The audit outcome was ‘substantial’ compliance. NISCC also commissioned Fieldfisher to undertake an independent audit of consensual disposals and cases closed at the preliminary investigation stage. The audit will take place in May 2017.

**Lessons learned**
During the year NISCC, in partnership with the Northern Ireland Association of Social Work (NIASW) and the Patient Client Council (PCC) commissioned QUB to undertake research into complaints made against social workers by service users. This work is well underway, with a preliminary report due in October 2017. The Fitness to Practise team will work closely with the Workforce Development Team to ensure that the lessons learned from this study are widely disseminated to the workforce. In addition training materials will be developed to support student learning in the Degree in Social Work.
Raising Concerns Guidance
In collaboration with NISCC’s Registrants Forum, NISCC produced a guidance booklet for social work and social care staff on how to raise and escalate concerns within the workplace where they are concerned about service user safety or their ability to adhere to the Standards of Conduct and Practice. The booklet, endorsed by NIPSA, UNISON and NIASW, will shortly be launched and published on NISCC’s website.

Standards for Employers of Social Workers and Social Care Workers
NISCC worked with RQIA and other key stakeholders including employers, to produce standards for employers which set out their responsibilities in relation to their regulated workforce. The standards replaced the previous Code of Practice for Employers which was first introduced in 2002. The standards will be launched in September 2017 by NISCC and RQIA and a range of dissemination events will be facilitated for employers throughout 2017/18.
Looking Forward

Drawing on the outcomes of our work this year we will focus on the following during 2017/18:

**Registration**
Supporting registrants, and in particular social care workers, to understand the value of registration and how to maintain it will be an important focus of our registration engagement activity. Ensuring the completeness and accuracy of registration data will assist in the provision of meaningful data for workforce planning purposes. Data which provides information such as the turnover of the social care workforce will be vital in not only identifying workforce need but also the resource required to maintain the Register.

Work will continue to complete the upgrade of the registration system and make best use of available technology to provide an efficient and seamless service for registrants.

**Workforce Development**

**Social Work:**
We will continue to closely monitor the outputs from the Degree and the uptake of employment by newly qualified social workers. Preparation work will commence to prepare for the 5 Year Review of the Degree which will take place in 2018/19.

The promotion and development of PiP will continue with a focus on ensuring that social workers are actively engaged in the framework as part of their continuous professional development, including an exploration of the feasibility of linking PiP credits more formally to the renewal of registration.

**Social Care:**
We will continue to work closely with the Workforce Development Partnership and Government to promote a coherent and strategic approach to the recruitment and development of the social care workforce. We will also review our CPD framework for the social care workforce, drawing on our experience of PiP and exploring creative options to provide recognition for learning.

We will continue to invest in digital learning for both social work and social care.
**Fitness to Practise**
We will engage with social care employers on the thresholds for referral and provide feedback on the cases we have dealt with. We will further embed the new model of regulation and implement the actions arising out of the audit of consensual disposal. Working with the Workforce development team, we will identify and disseminate lessons learned from fitness to practise cases demonstrating how they relate to the Standards of Conduct and Practice. Our continued work with RQIA on sharing information and findings from workforce and service regulation will serve to enhance our guidance to the workforce.
Appendix 1 – List of PiP Approved Programmes/Modules

Consolidation Award
- MSc ASS Cognitive Behaviour Practice Programme
- MSc ASS Court Work Skills Module
- MSc ASS Dual Diagnosis Programme
- MSc ASS Family Therapy & Systemic Practice Programme (Foundation)
- MSc PD Initial Professional Development Programme
- MSc PD PBNI Consolidation Pathway Programme

Specialist Award
- MSc ASS Child Care Programme
- MSc ASS Cognitive Behaviour Therapy Programme
- MSc ASS Critical Thinking in Social Work Module
- MSc ASS Theory & Practice of Social Research Module
- MSc ASS Family Therapy & Systemic Practice Programme (Intermediate)
- MSc ASS Mental Health (Approved Social Worker) Programme
- MSc PD Caring For the Suicidal Person Module
- MSc PD Engagement and Assessment in Eating Disorders Module
- MSc PD Methods of Intervention in Eating Disorders Module
- MSc PD NI Practice Teaching Programme
- MSc PD PBNI Specialist Pathway Programme
- MSc PD Research Methods Programme
- MSc PD Restorative Practices Programme
- PG Dip/MSc Adult Safeguarding Programme
- PG Dip/MSc Counselling and Therapeutic Communication Programme
- PG Dip/MA in Working with Children, Young People & Families: A Psychoanalytic Observational Approach
- Managing Effective Practice Programme
- PG Dip/MA in Work with Infants and the Early Years: A Psychoanalytic Approach (M9)
- Community Development Programme

Strategy & Leadership Award
- MSc in Applied Social Studies Dissertation Module
- MSc ASS Strategy & Leadership Programme
- MSc ASS Personal and Public Involvement (PPI) in Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland Module
- MSc ASS Systemic Psychotherapy Programme
- MSc PD Research Methods Programme
- MSc PD Restorative Practices Programme
- PG Dip/MSc Counselling & Therapeutic Communication Programme
- PG Dip/MA in Working with Children, Young People & Families: A Psychoanalytic
Observational Approach (M7)
- PG Dip Health & Social Care Management Programme
- PG Dip/MA in Work with Infants and the Early Years: A Psychoanalytic Approach (M9)