

# **Northern Ireland Social Care Council**

## **Learning, Teaching and Assessment Requirements**

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## **Contents**

	Page
Introduction	1
Principles	1
Course Curriculum	2
Course Delivery	3
Level & Duration	4
Staffing & Learning Resources for Course Provision	4
Academic & Agency Support for students in Learning Practice	5
Assessment	6
Glossary	8

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The aim of professional social work training is to ensure that students are prepared to practise safely and effectively, and to exercise professional judgements about complex situations. In order to achieve this, the education and training of social work students needs to involve learning for and to practise.
- 1.2 The Northern Ireland Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work (the Framework) details the academic and practice learning requirements and outcomes for the honours degree in social work. While skills, knowledge and values have been specified separately in the Framework, course providers will be expected to develop a curriculum that fosters the integration of knowledge, skills and values in learning, teaching and assessment and enables students to transfer academic learning into practice situations.
- 1.3 Students will have to provide evidence that they have achieved the learning outcomes of the six key roles specified in the Framework to be awarded the Degree in Social Work. Evidence of conceptualisation, critical analysis, reflection, problem solving, integration and application of knowledge, skills and values into practice are all essential for the award of the degree, and students must be required to provide this evidence in all written work and in practice throughout the course. Assessment of academic and practice learning must therefore take account of the practice orientation of the degree in measuring professional achievement of the learning outcomes.
- 1.4 Courses leading to the award of the Degree in Social Work will be expected to incorporate the NISCC's (Council) learning, teaching and assessment requirements totally into their arrangements for course provision.<sup>1</sup>

## **2. Principles**

The following principles reflect the philosophy that all learning, teaching and assessment should involve the application of learning to practise.

### **2.1 Practice Centred Learning**

Learning, teaching and assessment of the Degree must be practice-centred and directed towards the achievement of the learning outcomes as set out in the Northern Ireland Framework Specification and the Requirements for Practice Learning.

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<sup>1</sup> Please note these Learning, Teaching and Assessment Requirements apply only to the Degree in Social Work.

## **2.2 Protection of the Public**

Proper and robust arrangements must be in place to ensure the protection of the public interest in safeguarding user and carer well-being, including procedures to address concerns about a student's professional behaviour and fitness to practise.

## **2.3 Professional Competence**

Learning, teaching and assessment arrangements must foster the integration of professional competence, ethical practice and professional responsibility and accountability.

## **2.4 Theory and Practice Integration**

Approaches to learning, teaching and assessment will be expected to support students' capacity not just in demonstrating the knowledge base and evidence base of their practice, but in understanding, organising knowledge and linking concepts; in reflecting, critically analysing and applying knowledge to practice in all assessed work.

## **2.5 Values and Ethics**

Learning, teaching and assessment methods must support students to recognise the ethical dilemmas inherent in social work and to exercise professional judgements about complex situations. Course providers must seek evidence in assessed work that students are demonstrating clear, consistent and thoughtful integration of values in practice and decision-making.

## **2.6 Reflective Practice**

Course providers must ensure their approaches to learning, teaching and assessment allow for feedback to students on their performance from a variety of perspectives, including users and carers, so they are supported to reflect on and improve their performance continuously.

## **3. Course Curriculum**

- 3.1 The Northern Ireland Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work determines the practice learning and academic content of Degree courses.
- 3.2 Courses must comply with the Rules for the Approval of the Degree in Social Work.
- 3.3 Arrangements for learning, teaching and assessment must comply with the rules and regulations governing degree courses, including QAA guidelines on best practice and any standards set by the Council.

- 3.4 Where regional agreements regarding the consistency of the course curriculum exists course providers must use these to inform learning, teaching and assessment arrangements.
- 3.5 There must be sufficient guided, structured and assessed academic and practice learning to enable students to attain the required learning outcomes as set out in the Framework Specification and the Requirements for Practice Learning.
- 3.6 There must be clear links between module outcomes and assessment: and with and between modules in establishing a progressive learning, teaching and assessment strategy.
- 3.7 Course Providers must ensure students have access to opportunities to attain an adequate level of computer literacy which will support their study and professional activity.
- 3.8 Course providers must provide students with clear information about the course, the assessment requirements and any other requirements they will have to meet in order to achieve the Degree in Social Work.

#### **4. Course Delivery**

- 4.1 Course providers must have an overall strategy and action plan for learning, teaching and assessment which reflects evidence-based educational approaches and is appropriate in terms of student profile, pace and level of study and range of subject matter.
- 4.2 Course providers must have mechanisms in place to ensure the formal and systematic participation of users and carers in course provision. This must include participation in the design, delivery and evaluation of course provision.
- 4.3 Course providers must ensure users and carers who contribute to student learning, teaching or assessment are fully briefed, supported appropriately and monitored by the course provider.
- 4.4 Course providers must have systems in place to support and monitor students' full participation in all structured learning activities, including assessed practice learning.
- 4.5 Courses must have mechanisms in place to plan, review and record student progress on a regular basis.
- 4.6 The learning, teaching and assessment methods employed must be suitable for the subject area and provide opportunities for the active and purposeful participation by students.
- 4.7 Effective systems must be in place to review learning, teaching and assessment and to implement the improvements required.

## 5. Level and Duration

- 5.1 The number of hours spent in directed learning in either academic or agency settings must be sufficient to ensure that all students meet the required level of competence for the award of the degree. The number of hours of directed learning is expected to comply with the minimum number of module effort hours recommended by QAA to achieve sufficient credits to be awarded an Honours Degree.
- 5.2 Students must normally complete a **minimum of 100 days in assessed practice learning at Level 3**, which conforms with the principles of practice learning as set out in para 1.4 of the Practice Learning Requirements for the Degree in Social Work.
- 5.3 Students will normally be expected to pass six modules (or equivalent) at each level before they can progress to the next stage.
- 5.4 In exceptional circumstances,<sup>2</sup> students who have not met Level 1 assessment requirements may with the approval of the external examiner proceed to Level 2. Normal university regulations in relation to compensation should apply in these circumstances.
- 5.5 There is no compensation for practice learning at any level or from Level 2 to Level 3.
- 5.6 Classification of the degree should reflect the practice orientation of the Honours Degree in Social Work.
- 5.7 The final honours classification will be based on a minimum of 60% at level 3
- 5.8 Students will normally be expected to complete the Degree in Social Work within 8 years from the date of granting of the first application for registration as a student by the Council.

## 6. Staffing and Learning Resources for Course Provision

- 6.1 Course providers must ensure that there is an overall strategy and action plan to secure adequate staffing and learning resources to ensure the effective management and delivery of learning, teaching and assessment across the total curriculum in both academic and practice settings.
- 6.2 Course providers must ensure there are appropriate learning, teaching and assessment resources and materials available to support students with special learning needs.

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<sup>2</sup> All students must have satisfied the assessment criteria for Preparation for Practice at Level 1 before progressing to the next level. (NISCC Practice Learning Requirements for the Degree in Social Work).

- 6.3 Course providers must ensure that staff and any user/carer who contribute to student learning, teaching or assessment have qualifications relevant to the teaching of social work and/or experience, be up-to-date in the subject area, fully briefed, supported appropriately and monitored by the course provider.
- 6.4 Course providers must comply with any Council requirements or standards in relation to preparation and accreditation of staff or other contributors involved in course provision, including practice learning.
- 6.5 All students must have access to library facilities, computers and learning accommodation, which should be appropriate for the subject area and learning, teaching and assessment methods.
- 6.6 All academic and agency staff, who are required to hold a recognised social work qualification and who are involved in course provision, must comply with the registration requirements of the Council.
- 6.7 Effective systems must be in place for individual student support, guidance and feedback for all aspects of course provision, including academic and practice learning.
- 6.8 Courses must provide students with clear information about individual support arrangements, including regularity of contact and the role and responsibilities of staff providing such support.

## **7. Academic and Agency Support for students in Practice Learning**

- 7.1 Students must have ongoing academic and agency support during practice learning to facilitate the integration of theory and practice.
- 7.2 Course providers must ensure staff are supported in contributing to practice learning, teaching and assessment in agency settings. This includes the provision of dedicated time for academic and agency staff to deliver practice learning to the Council standards.
- 7.3 Course providers must ensure adequate arrangements are in place to supervise students in agency settings in order to safeguard standards of care for service users and to support their development.
- 7.4 Course providers must have mechanisms in place to facilitate feedback from users, carers and identified others on agreed aspects of student's practice learning
- 7.5 Course providers must have mechanisms to co-ordinate and monitor the standards and consistency of practice learning and assessment arrangements.

## **8. Assessment**

- 8.1 Assessment of theory must take account of the practice orientation of the Degree in measuring professional achievement of the six key roles as set out in the Framework Specification.
- 8.2 Assessment of practice must include the assessment of the application of knowledge and theory in practice in measuring professional achievement (as above).
- 8.3 Assessment of practice must comply with the Council's Requirements for Practice Learning.
- 8.4 Course providers must use a range of diagnostic, formative and summative assessment methods, including self-assessment, which measure the achievement of the learning outcomes of the Degree and the attainment of professional competence. Consideration should be given to cross-modular or synoptic assessments to enable students to demonstrate the integration of knowledge, values, understanding and practice across academic and practice learning components of the course.
- 8.5 All assessment methods, including examinations, must be valid and reliable.
- 8.6 All course providers must have systems for the accreditation of prior learning, including certificated learning and experiential learning.
- 8.7 Systems must be in place to ensure standardisation and moderation of assessment arrangements.
- 8.8 Course providers must establish a properly constituted Assessment Board which will oversee the formal assessment of both academic and practice learning components of course provision, including taking pass or fail decisions in relation to all students, and taking decisions on the further progress of failed, referred and deferred students, subject to the agreement of external examiners.
- 8.9 For final assessment students must demonstrate that they have met all the learning outcomes as specified in the Framework Specification.
- 8.10 Decisions on whether or not students have successfully completed the course are matters for Assessment Boards, which will make recommendations through the university systems for the award of the Degree in Social Work. The Council cannot intervene in matters of academic and professional judgement properly exercised within these procedures.

- 8.11 Arrangements for external examiners must comply with the Council's requirements and rules and regulations governing degree courses, including QAA guidelines on best practice for external examination
- 8.12 Approved courses should appoint a minimum of two external examiners who have the ability to report on both the academic and practice learning components of the course.
- 8.13 Students must be assessed for their understanding, analysis and application of the NISCC Code of Practice for Social Care Workers commensurate with the level of study.
- 8.14 Students' practice learning must be directly observed in relation to the six key roles and must take place a minimum of three times at both Level 2 and Level 3 in direct supervised practice.
- 8.15 Students are required to demonstrate through formal written assessment their understanding and application of the legislation relating to social work in Northern Ireland.
- 8.16 Students must be assessed in their ability to participate in and to present evidence to decision-making forums.

## **GLOSSARY**

### **AP(E)L**

Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning. A process for giving recognition to the skills and experience gained before starting a traditional course. It normally involves collecting a portfolio of evidence and is often designed to allow an individual to gain entry to higher education without the usual entry qualifications, or to permit exemption from certain courses.

### **Bias**

Statistical sampling or testing for errors caused by systematically favouring some factors over others. Bias is understood to limit the overall validity of research.

*See also:* Halo effect, Reliability, Validity

### **Continuous assessment**

Regular evaluation of coursework done during the course, where the marks achieved count towards the final result, which may or may not include an examination.

*See also:* Formative assessment

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

### **Critical thinking**

Applying one’s own views and approaches, rather than simply accepting other people’s information, attitudes and judgments. In the UK, this is probably the most highly valued attribute that a learner can display, and is normally mentioned in criteria by which marks are awarded for coursework and examinations. In the UK, educationists normally value critical thinking over the ability to learn facts.

**‘Direct observation’** means assessment by observing practice. Observation can be participant or non-participant or by means of video or one-way screen.

### **Double marking**

The process by which a written examination is marked by a second assessor. Common procedure in the British educational system.

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

### **Formative assessment**

Assessment aimed at determining a person’s strengths and weaknesses with the objective of improving them. Generally expressed in words rather than grades, and generally not used in the final assessment.

*See also:* Continuous assessment

**‘Northern Ireland Framework Specification’** means the document setting out what a student social worker must know, understand and be able to do to be awarded the Degree.

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

**‘QAA’** means the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

### **Reflection**

The process whereby a learner takes time to consider an experience s/he has been involved in, or any new learning experience and reflect the learning.

### **Reflective practitioner**

Applies to a person who engages in the process of reflecting on her/his own practice and experience, and who is expected to learn from such reflection and change her/his practice as a result.

**‘Regional Body’** means a body set up by the Council and which is accountable to it. It represents education institutions and social work employers engaged in the provision of social work education and training. The body is responsible for regional planning, reviewing and advising on such aspects of course provision which have been agreed by the Council.

### **Reliability**

In statistics, the technique by which the same or compatible results can be obtained through different experiments or statistical tests.

*See also:* Bias, Validity

### **Summative assessment**

Assessment generally taking place at the end of a course and leading to the attribution of a grade or a mark to the learner, which will allow the learner to move to the next part of the course, or which completes the course.

*See also:* Formative assessment.

### **Synoptic Assessment**

Tests the learner’s accumulated understanding of a subject as a whole and their ability to integrate and apply their skills, knowledge and understanding in appropriate contexts.

### **Validity**

The appropriateness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of the specific inferences made from test scores. In research, if findings are to be appropriate, meaningful and useful, they need to be valid.

*See also:* Bias, Reliability