## Skills for care and development

| **Organisation(s):** | Skills for Care and Development<br>Northern Ireland Social Care Council |
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| **Country:** | Northern Ireland |
| **Contact:** | policy@esn-eu.org |

| **Theme:** *Choose at least one option* | ☐ Ageing & Care<br>☐ Asylum & Migration<br>☐ Young People<br>☐ Support for Children & Families<br>☐ Community Care<br>☐ Integrated Care & Support<br>☐ Co-Production<br>☐ Disability<br>☐ Housing & Homelessness<br>☐ Artificial Intelligence<br>☐ Digitalisation<br>☒ Quality Care | ☐ Labour Market Inclusion<br>☐ Social Inclusion<br>☐ Technology<br>☒ Workforce and Leadership<br>☐ Social Benefits<br>☐ EU Funding<br>☐ Social Service's Resilience<br>☐ Mental Health<br>☐ Person-Centred Care<br>☒ Research & Use of Evidence<br>☐ Management & Planning<br>☐ Other, please specify: |
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| **Principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights:** *Check the 20 principles here.* | ☒ 1. Education, training, life-long learning<br>☐ 2. Gender equality<br>☐ 3. Equal opportunities<br>☐ 4. Active support to employment<br>☒ 5. Secure and adaptable employment<br>☐ 6. Fair Wages<br>☐ 7. Transparent employment conditions<br>☐ 8. Social dialogue<br>☐ 9. Work-life balance<br>☒ 10. Healthy, safe work environment | ☐ 11. Childcare and child support<br>☐ 12. Social protection<br>☐ 13. Unemployment benefits<br>☐ 14. Minimum income<br>☐ 15. Old age income and pensions<br>☐ 16. Health care<br>☐ 17. Inclusion of people with disabilities<br>☐ 18. Long-term care<br>☐ 19. Housing and assistance to homeless<br>☐ 20. Access to essential services |

| **Current status of the practice:** | ☐ Concept and Design Phase<br>☐ Testing or pilot phase<br>☐ Temporary practice that has terminated<br>☐ Temporary practice that is ongoing and has a termination date<br>☐ Established and ongoing practice<br>☐ Scaling Up and Transformation Phase<br>☒ Other (please specify)<br><br>The social care workforce reform project is in its 5th year, with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (SCC) having used a design-thinking methodology approach which aligns with the SCC's collaborative approach to working with key stakeholders. The project has evolved with an entrance-level qualification available for social care workers as part of the |
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| | Care in Practice (CiP) Framework which was launched alongside the Department of Health's Social Care Workforce Strategy (2025-2035) in December 2024. |
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| **Summary:**<br>*Please summarise the practice in maximum 3 sentences. This will be the disclaimer of your project on our website.* | This project aims to develop a career pathway framework for and a continuous professional learning and development framework for the social care workforce aligned with SCC registration requirements. The CiP Framework was developed, including an entrance-level qualification for those employed in social care and registered with the SCC. This qualification would enable the development of a qualification-based register for social care workers. |
| **Context/ Social issues addressed**<br>*Please explain the problem you attempt to solve with your practice.* | The Health and Social Care system in Northern Ireland and the role of the social care workforce within it is complex and interrelated. Many social care workers do not have or see themselves having a career pathway. Before the SCC's reform project, there was no entrance-level qualification or continuous professional learning and development framework. During September 2024, there were 47,532 registered social care workers in Northern Ireland (NI). This is the largest workforce across Health and Social Care (HSC) in NI and represents 5% of NI's total workforce. This workforce operates across adult and child services, including care homes, home care, supported living, and day care settings.<br><br>Many social care workers do not have or see a career pathway for themselves. Previously, there was no available entrance-level qualification and there was a need for a continuous professional learning and development framework. Induction for new social care staff can be inconsistent with employers needing to get workers providing direct support as soon as possible due to recruitment and retention issues. |
| **Objectives:**<br>*Please provide **a maximum of three** objectives in bullet points.* | 1. The CiP Framework will support continuous learning and career development. It is designed to enable social care practitioners to engage in career-long learning and development using their practice experience, knowledge and skills to work across complex environments at different levels within the HSC system.<br>2. The CiP Framework will enable social care practitioners to evidence meeting standards of conduct and practice, and provides confidence in practice, knowledge and expertise. It supports social care practitioners to continue to learn, develop, and reflect throughout their careers and places them in charge of their own professional development.<br>3. The CiP Framework recognises all work-related learning and development-both formal qualifications and informal learning- and provides flexibility and transferability. |
| **Activities:**<br>*Please describe the activities put in place to achieve the objectives (maximum 300 words).* | The SSC has engaged across the social care sector and with other stakeholders to develop the infrastructure to enable a qualification-based register, continuous learning framework and career pathway. This partnership approach has assisted the development of the CiP Framework and the Level 2 Certificate in Safe and Effective Practice. The CiP Framework has been developed and was launched in December 2024 alongside the DoH's Social Care Workforce Strategy (2025-2035).<br><br>To recognise the professional identity of the social care workforce the title of the social care practitioner was introduced as part of the CiP Framework. This new title better represents and emphasises the value of this workforce. The following titles introduced acknowledge the range of practice areas:<br><br>&bull; Entrance Level Social Care Practitioner – learning and developing new skills.<br>&bull; Social Care Practitioner – developing and consolidating new skills.<br>&bull; Enhanced Social Care Practitioner – developing and enhancing skills.<br>&bull; Social Care Leader/Manager. |

| | An early step in developing a qualification-based register was to establish the entrance qualification applicable to new social care practitioners. This qualification made available in 2024 is designed to be part of a structured pathway for career development and to support progression to other qualifications. It sits within the CiP Framework and provides accredited certification about key areas of social care knowledge and practice. This provides learners with specialist knowledge and skills to enable them to work within HSC services and assists in gaining knowledge and skills in:<br><br>-Standards and values underpinning practice<br>-Understanding safeguarding<br>-Safe moving and positioning of individuals<br>-Environmental health and safety<br>-Understand safe medication practice<br>-Safe food handling and dysphagia awareness<br>-Emergency first aid<br>The Certificate was piloted in 2024 with a resulting impact report and certificate guidance.<br><br>The SCC's Social Care Workforce Reform page has been developed reflecting wider social care workforce reform in NI and the CiP Framework. |
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| **Outcomes:**<br>*Please explain what the results were/are so far and how you evaluated this.* | Feedback on social care staff's views on their needs and aspirations, the CiP Framework and the Level 2 Certificate in Safe and Effective Practice were sought using a local design agency (Big Motive). Their research consisted of two phases: Phase 1-social care workers-completed March 2023 and Phase 2-those managing social care services/staff- completed December 2023.<br><br>Feedback was also sought via the SSC's Social Care Manager's Forums. An update/feedback/ongoing discussion has occurred with the care regulator for NI-RQIA and the commissioner of the reform project, DoH.<br><br>Feedback was received as a result of the pilot of the entrance-level qualification. This pilot involved 3 pilot sites in the Greater Belfast area with learners being surveyed at the start and end and also involved surveying employers and training providers.  A Certificate Impact and Certificate Guidance document have been produced.<br><br>The CiP Framework has been endorsed by the DoH and was launched alongside its Social Care Workforce Strategy (2025-2035) in December 2024. |
| **Links to supporting documents:**<br>*e.g. website or report of the practice* | Social Care Workforce Reform - NISCC<br><br>Health Minister publishes 10-year Social Care Workforce Strategy \| Department of Health<br><br>https://skillsforcareanddevelopment.org.uk/ |
| **Comments and tips** *i.e. for people willing to use your Practice* | Social care is a major issue across all European countries and is dependent on a workforce with the appropriate skills and knowledge to provide good quality care and support. There are lesson to be learnt from the SSC's journey of regulation of the social care workforce and workforce reform in NI.  The SCC are willing to share experiences and offer advice and can be contacted via: workforcedevelopment@niscc.hscni.net |