NORTHERN IRELAND SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL

QUALITY 2020 ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

APRIL 2022 – MARCH 2023

CONTENTS

Page

FOREWORD BY PATRICIA HIGGINS, CHIEF EXECUTIVE

I am pleased to present the Northern Ireland Social Care Council's (Social Care Council) Annual Quality 2020 Report for 2022/23. This is the tenth Report produced by the Social Care Council in response to the Quality 2020 Strategy which was produced by the Department of Health (DoH) in 2012.

The Social Care Council is the regulatory body for the social care workforce in Northern Ireland and is responsible for promoting high quality standards of workforce training and practice.

This was the third year of delivering business during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Social Care Council, like many organisations and employers, continued to work remotely and started to plan for a phased return to the office environment, with a view to delivering some of its business in a hybrid way. We were able to transition into our new agile working approach in January this year – while retaining the benefits and learning over the last 3 years, including hybrid working – in particular for our engagement activity. We are now operating in a more normalised society although we are conscious that COVID (and its variants) is still in the community. We moved premises in February this year after 21 years in Millennium House in Belfast – to a more modern and flexible working environment in James House at the Gasworks in Belfast. We also celebrated our 21st anniversary during the year, an important milestone for the Social Care Council.

Now more than ever, delivering quality services, quality initiatives and quality change is important. The Social Care Council has adapted well to supporting the sector and being creative in the manner in which it engages - from online resources, ECHO virtual sessions, and some hybrid working. These benefits have transformed our reach across the sector and provide support and resources in a way which suits that sector best.

During the year we refreshed our online registration system, including an upgrade to our Registration and Regulation ICT system, to make it more accessible to employers and new applicants, and updated our extensive range of Learning Zone resources, including an upgrade to our Registration and Regulation ICT system. We actively supported the Department of Health (DoH) in a number of campaigns including delivering communications campaigns for the Reform of Adult Social Care. We invested significant time in developing campaigns to raise awareness of the valuable contribution social workers and social care workers make to our community and our economy. The social work advertising campaign in

the Autumn challenged people to 'Think Social Work' and the social care campaign has shone a light on the positive difference made by social care workers every day to the lives of people and in our communities. We provided support to practitioners, researchers and service commissioners to encourage stakeholders to engage with their work. Social Care Council staff and Participation Partnership members have played a key role in the UK wide review of social care, providing feedback to focus groups and supporting engagement events for the UK Impact project for social care.

Quality remains one of our corner stones of delivering high quality services to all and is now well embedded across the organisation.

We set out the various ways in which we have delivered quality improvement in our business throughout this Report which are detailed under the following headings –

- Transforming the Culture;
- Strengthening the Workforce;
- Measuring the Improvement;
- Raising the Standards;
- Integrating with Care.

As in previous years' Annual Quality Reports, we have also added an action plan for 2023/24 building on our learning to date and the environment in which we currently operate.

We welcome feedback on this Report and our services generally, to help us ensure we are doing the right things in the right way to provide high quality services to all our customers and stakeholders.

PATRICIA HIGGINS
CHIEF EXECUTIVE,
NORTHERN IRELAND SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL

Our Vision - Improved standards in social work and social care

Our Values

There are four key values which underpin our culture that set a foundation for how we work with those around us.

Respect

Integrity

Partnership

Excellence

We promote Respect
We are trusted by the sector to support good social work and social care practice. We respect the rights, dignity and inherent worth of individuals.

We work with Integrity
We work with integrity and are mindful of our responsibilities and hold ourselves and others to account. We are open, honest and respectful with all our stakeholders.

We believe in Partnership
We are a people focused organisation that is committed to doing what is right. Through genuine partnership, we work to ensure what we do makes a difference.

We strive for Excellence
We take a professional approach in putting standards at the heart of social work and social care. We proactively support the development of the social care workforce and we proactively support the development of our staff.

Our Purpose - To protect the public and safeguard service users through the regulation and development of the social work and social care workforce

INTRODUCTION

When Quality 2020 was published by the then Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in 2011, it set out a ten-year strategy with the guiding principle to protect and improve the quality of services delivered in health and social care. Significant progress has been made since then which is evidenced through each of our annual progress reports. We continued to make progress with our Quality 2020 programme during 2022/23 and this is explained in this year's Q2020 Annual Report.

The ten-year strategy identified five strategic themes against which organisations, including the Social Care Council, could monitor progress and set achievable targets. These are –

- Transforming the Culture;
- Strengthening the Workforce;
- Measuring the Improvement;
- Raising the Standards;
- Integrating with Care.

The extent to which the Social Care Council has delivered against each of these themes is detailed throughout this Annual Report.

The Social Care Council is a non-Departmental Public Body sponsored by the Department of Health (DoH). It is the regulatory body for the social care workforce in Northern Ireland. Its role is to regulate and register social workers, social care workers and those studying for the Degree in Social Work. It also supports professional development across the workforce.

The Social Care Council's vision is to *'Improve Standards in Social Care'*

To achieve this the Social Care Council delivers its work programme aligned to five strategic themes –

- *Standards* – Putting Standards at the heart of social work and social care practice and education and training;
- *Regulation* – Regulate the Workforce and Social Work Education and Training;
- *Workforce Development* – Develop the Social Work and Social Care Workforce;
- *Systems Leadership* – Promote a Systems Leadership Approach across the Social Care Sector; and
- *Communications and Engagement* – Communicate, Connect and Engage.

During the year, the Social Care Council carried out a public consultation to develop a new four-year Strategic Plan – this is explained further in this report.

The Social Care Council also has a strategic objective to support its corporate function which is to *'ensure it has the right infrastructure and leadership in place across its people, resources, governance, quality and systems'*.

The Social Care Council's core values are embedded in its work practices and culture. The four core values are –

- *Respect – we promote respect*
    We are trusted by the sector to support good social work and social care practice. We respect the rights, dignity and inherent worth of individuals.

- *Integrity – we work with integrity*
    We work with integrity and are mindful of our responsibilities and hold ourselves and others to account. We are open, honest and respectful with all our stakeholders.

- *Partnership – we believe in partnership*
    We are a people focused organisation that is committed to doing what is right. Through genuine partnership, we work to ensure what we do makes a difference.

- *Excellence – we strive for excellence*
    We take a professional approach in putting standards at the heart of social work and social care. We proactively support the development of the social care workforce and we proactively support the development of our staff.

Registered Workforce

The Social Care Council is responsible for the registration and regulation of the social care workforce in Northern Ireland. There were 44,461 people registered with the Social Care Council at the end of March 2023.

COVID-19 Pandemic – Update

Supporting our staff

The Social Care Council started working remotely from home in March 2020 and over the last three years has adjusted and transitioned its working arrangements in line with government advice. During 2022/23, the Social Care Council worked collaboratively with all staff to develop an agile working solution that supported the business and all staff to maximise the delivery of high quality work and the flexibility afforded through agile working. The organisation carried out a number of pilot schemes to test its approach and through feedback, evaluation and a review of business performance was in a position to launch its Agile Working Policy in January 2023, following approval by the Board.

The Social Care Council continued to keep COVID on its radar – and retained the strategic risk on its risk register – working alongside staff to ensure they remained safe. The organisation was shortlisted at the Global IIP Awards for Best Flexible Policy – and the approach it took to creating an empowering and enabling dynamic for staff to have the maturity to balance office and agile working. This included redefining the purpose of office premises – which moved from being just a place to work – to a new connecting, collaborating and enabling environment.

This change in working practice occurred at the same time, as the organisation moved premises after 21 years at Millennium House. The new premises at James House (at the Gasworks in Belfast City Centre) provided an opportunity to re-design and co-design an office space that afforded multiple types of use – from traditional desks, to pods, break out areas, confidential space, meeting rooms, quiet zones, innovative zones and collaborative space. This was a unique concept which required staff working closely together and supporting one another through this transition. By the end March 2023, the organisation had normalised its business – but with the added benefit of the lessons learnt – including the benefits of hybrid and online working. To support this the organisation installed new modern technology in all of its spaces to support hybrid and online working.

It was also in a position to stand down its Command and Control Team and close the strategic risk on the risk register. The organisation is however mindful of the presence of COVID (and its variants) in the community and the need to be vigilant – and to remain in a position to respond swiftly to any changes that may impact on lives or working practices. This includes supporting and encouraging staff to avail of vaccines as offered including the Winter Flu jab.

Supporting the Sector

The Social Care Council has continued to deliver an ambitious programme of work to support the sector in the quality of care provided to so many during the pandemic. And has offered an array of supports and resources online in support of the social work and social care sector.

In the first half of 2022-23, our focus remained on developing our digital communications to compensate for the restrictions placed on our capacity to deliver on face-to-face engagement. As the number of online events increased, the team developed presentations

and promotional materials to attract participants and to support event delivery. The team delivered a series of campaigns across the digital platforms to support projects and initiatives on behalf of the Social Care Council and partner organisations using email marketing, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and our website. Recognising that the workforce was under pressure during the pandemic, campaigns were co-ordinated to ensure key messages were delivered to the target groups in proportionate volumes and at optimum times. We took time to develop quality artwork, images and videos that would attract and engage our stakeholders with the Social Care Council brand and message. This integrated approach has been particularly effective when using Email campaigns together with social media (especially Twitter).

Development of the 2022-23 social care campaign continued, including progressing revisit videos from the 2021-22 social care studies participants, and a photography project to complement the campaign.

The Social Care Council website www.niscc.info was updated regularly to provide news and links to resources for our stakeholders. On average 30,000 people visit the website every month. The website, Learning Zone and Online Registration Portal all offer Browsealoud software, supporting 8-10k people with tools for translation, visual aids and audio assistance.

PROGRESS AGAINST OUR 2022/23 ACTION PLAN

Every year we set out a range of actions in support of our Quality 2020 agenda. Last year we set out three key actions of which two were completed. Of these three actions were completed. The remaining two outstanding actions will be carried into 2021/22 and 2022/23 respectively, as set out in the table below. (A new action Plan for 23/24 can be found on page 27 of this Report).

	ACTIVITY	*HOW AND WHEN*	*PROGRESS*
1	We will review the effectiveness of our Socrates Improvement Board against its Terms of Reference.	**By March 2023** – we will carry out a self-assessment against the Terms of Reference.	**Completed.** We reconvened the Socrates Improvement Board and refreshed its scope and Terms of Reference. The Socrates Improvement Board is now in a good position to support the organisation's ICT development over the next 3 years.
2	We will start a review on how quality is embedded in the organisation (with a view to reporting on this in the following business year).	**By March 2023** – we will create a hub of all evidence of quality improvement and initiatives and test for any gaps or missed opportunities.	**Ongoing.** This work was spread over two business years. The review of the Intranet has commenced including the creation of a hub. We are currently reviewing how we support this development work through our partner organisations including ITS.
3	We will report on the work of the Data Quality Assurance Group.	**By March 2023** – we will have a programme to deliver improved data quality.	**Completed.** We established a Data Quality Group which is representative of all of the functions in the organisation. The Group has commenced its programme of work and this work now has a framework to help improve our data quality in all business areas.

TRANSFORMING THE CULTURE

Q2020 states: "We will make achieving high quality the top priority at all levels in health and social care. We will promote and encourage partnerships between staff, patients, clients and carers to support decision making."

This means creating a new and dynamic culture that is even more willing to embrace change, innovation and new thinking that can contribute to a safer and more effective service. It will require strong leadership, widespread involvement and partnership-working by everyone.

TRANSFORMING THE CULTURE IN THE SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL

The Social Care Council delivers its services to the social care workforce (social workers, social care workers, and those studying for the Degree in Social Work) with the aim of ensuring people have a safe and high quality experience when using social work and social care services. In addition, the Social Care Council works with and supports a range of partners and stakeholders, including employers in the statutory, voluntary and private sectors, universities and colleges, commissioners, regulators and service users and carers.

In striving for excellence the Social Care Council ensures quality improvement is at the heart of its business. For this reason, the Social Care Council's quality agenda sits across multiple levels of business operations which are explained below.

Leadership

The Social Care Council has two Directorates: Registration and Corporate Services, and Regulation and Standards. The Directors along with the Chief Executive comprise the Social Care Council's Senior Leadership Team (SLT). ***An organisational structure for the Social Care Council is attached at Annex A.***

The Registration and Corporate Services Directorate is responsible for the registration of the social work and social care workforce, and a number of corporate service functions including Database Development, Finance, HR, Procurement, Administration, and Regulatory Committee Management.

The Regulation and Standards Directorate is responsible for the regulation of the social work and social care workforce including setting the Standards of Conduct and Practice for the workforce, setting the standards for and regulating social work education and training, and ensuring appropriate qualifications and training frameworks with relevant content and resources are in place to support the continuous development of both the social work and social care workforce. The Directorate is also responsible for investigating allegations relating to a registered worker's fitness to practise.

The Social Care Council accounts for its performance against quality standards in monthly Business Performance Reports to the SLT and to the Social Care Council's Board in quarterly Business Performance Reports. Both reports focus on achievement of outcomes and identify areas for improvement, enabling SLT and/or the Board to scrutinise assurances,

support innovation and make policy decisions. The Social Care Council also has an Evaluation Framework in place which details how it ensures the outcomes and impacts detailed in its Corporate and Business Plans are measured and analysed.

The Board, in providing strategic direction for the Social Care Council, has been actively committed to supporting quality improvement both within the Social Care Council and in its outward engagement, setting ambitious objectives that include an influencing role for the Social Care Council at a system leadership level across Health and Social Care. This positioning provides opportunity to influence and contribute to quality and improvement at a whole system level.

Securing Involvement

The Social Care Council has continued to ensure that it plans, delivers and assesses its business with a focus on high quality and improvement based on feedback, involvement and participation at all levels – including from registrants, service users and carers, staff and other stakeholders.

Examples of securing involvement in relation to staff during 2022/23 included –

- Senior Leadership Team (SLT) meetings with all staff to discuss a range of business matters. This included monthly Townhall meetings with all staff – these took place online and from February 2023 took place in person. These meetings also enabled the SLT to engage with all staff in terms of performance, quality and KPI indicators and preparations for the roll-out of the Agile Working Policy.

- All staff were engaged in the development of the new Strategic Plan for 2023/24 to 2026/27 (and the first annual Business Plan to support the new Strategic Plan). This included events to bring all staff together to inform the new Strategic Plan, sessions with the Board and the Participation Partnership and our other Partnerships (Registrants Forum, Leaders in Social Care Partnership and Professional in Practise Partnership).

- The Chief Executive and Senior Leadership Team held meetings with staff to congratulate individuals' and teams' efforts. This was supplemented with emails to all staff and teams noting key team achievements and milestones. SLT also met with teams to discuss how they were adapting and planning for agile working – and the move of premises to James House.

- Monthly team meetings take place across all teams in the Social Care Council where all team members can discuss projects which went well and those which have been a challenge. Monthly team meetings are in place across every team with information being cascaded between teams and also to the Operational Leadership Team (OLT) which comprises the heads of each function and with the SLT.

The Social Care Council has a 'no blame' culture and as part of this, continual learning and training around near miss and data breaches are discussed with relevant staff, procedures

amended and improved if possible and learning taken forward from these issues. In addition, all managers encourage an open and honest dialogue with their teams to ensure staff feel they can raise issues. Securing involvement of staff is recognised as a critical element of creating a learning and improvement culture. This has highlighted the importance of listening and empowering people to lead and be part of real change.

Values, Behaviours and Culture

The HSC Cultural Assessment Survey reported a very strong culture within the organisation – with strength in leadership and partnership working. The findings of the survey were shared with all staff with a view of continuing to do what we do well. We also used a number of pulse surveys during the year to ensure we kept the culture relevant and that it reflected the change in working from a home rather than office environment. These surveys also demonstrated a strong supportive culture across and between teams. This work continues to form part of all conversations, ensuring our values are part of our everyday thinking and approach to work, team relationships and partnership working.

Engagement

The Social Care Council has a strong track record of engaging with its workforce but also in terms of engaging its registrants, stakeholders, service users and carers, and employers. Due to the changes in COVID transmission and Government advice, we were able to blend online, in person and hybrid engagement in our portfolio during the year. This included the way in which we delivered our Lunchtime seminars. We wanted to ensure we kept what worked well. During the pandemic we were able to facilitate a lot more people at our seminars and other events so it was important we balanced this against a move to face to face events. We will continue to keep this under review to ensure we maximise attendance and that all attendees have an enriched experience.

During the year an average of 150 people attended our Lunchtime Seminars to share learning and best practice around: CPD & Professional Growth, Cost of Living Crisis & Social Work, Family Voices in Decision Making, Working in partnership with the LGBTQIA+ population. 91% of participants reported positive experience on the quality of the presentations and discussions. Social Work Educators & Practice Assessors were brought together at the 'Digital in the Social Work Degree' workshop on developing digital capacity within social work and social work education.

The Social Care ECHO network also hosted regularly monthly online events for Care at Home Managers and Supervisors in presentations, discussions and updates on emerging practice and issues affecting social care services. The Midway ECHO participant survey reported strongly positive views that the project objectives to cascade learning, share best practice and provide peer support were being met. Social Care Managers Forums were also held in Belfast and Omagh, bringing together managers across the sector to update them on the new resources available to support them in meeting their responsibilities for registered staff.

Partnership Working

The Social Care Council has four partnerships in place which supports its business. These are –

- Participation Partnership
- Registrants' Forum
- Leaders in Social Care Partnership
- Professional in Practice Partnership

Participation Partnership

One of the ways in which the Social Care Council oversees its engagement with service users and carers is through its Participation Partnership which is chaired by a Board Member and co-chaired by two members (people who use services or carers), and comprises a number of people who use services and carers with a wide experience of the social care system in Northern Ireland. The Participation Partnership oversees the quality and quantity of engagement and challenges the way in which the Social Care Council designs and delivers its business, ensuring it is people focused and impactful.

The Participation Partnership, has been instrumental during the year in overseeing the quality and quantity of engagement by the Social Care Council, including –

- Working with the Social Care Council to develop its Strategic Plan for 2023-27;
- Participation in the Impact Assembly on the future of adult social care across the UK – online and in-person events and engaging with the project team tasked to deliver £15 million funding to various adult social care projects throughout the UK through evidence-based delivery models
- Presenting at Social Care Council Lunchtime Seminars.
- Engaging with social care workers and employers to learn more about their views on qualifications and a career structure for social care.
- Presenting at the European Social Services conference along with colleagues shortlisted as awards finalists for their co-production project.
- Making a video presentation for the 2022 PiP Awards ceremony to demonstrate the benefits of meaningful engagement with service users.
- Delivery of the 'In Our Shoes' campaign to raise awareness of the role carried out by the members and encourage more people to get involved with the Participation Partnership. 'In Your Shoes' was promoted through the Social Care Council digital platforms. The members also delivered two online events to share their work with newcomers.

<u>Registrants' Forum</u>

The Social Care Council's register at the end of March 2023 included almost 45,000 registrants across Northern Ireland. The Social Care Council engages with its registrants using a range of methods and opportunities that include; direct email; provision of information and support on the website, learning and development resources on the Learning Zone, in Lunchtime Seminars and at through the Social Care ECHO network, as well as in person events targeted for particular groupings. In June 2022 the Council's Board initiated a review the Registrants Forum that had been in place for a number of years as it had limited impact or influence on the wide range of engagement activity that takes place on an on-going basis. The review is complete and a proposal for new and improved arrangements will be presented to the Council's Board in October 2023.

<u>Leaders in Social Care Partnership</u>

The Leaders in Social Care Partnership consists of providers of social care services from the statutory, private and community and voluntary sectors, with a focus on supporting the transformation and development of the social care workforce in Northern Ireland. The Partnership is actively involved in work to support the DoH Reform of Adult Social Care, including work to develop career pathways for social care workers; promoting the role and value of social care; and building a data and intelligence framework for social care. The Partnership is closely connected into the DoH newly formed Social Care Collaborative Forum.

<u>Professional in Practice Partnership</u>

The Social Care Council supports a Professional in Practice Partnership which is chaired by a Board Member and comprises employers and Higher Education Institutions who are key to successfully supporting the delivery of the Professional in Practice framework for social workers.   This enables the Social Care Council to ensure that the arrangements for supporting the professional practice of social workers remain fit for purpose and meaningful for those who extend their development using this route.

Each of these Partnerships provides a structured means through which the Social Care Council can engage successfully with its stakeholders and review the quality of the service it provides. During 2022/23 each of these Partnerships have, where relevant, informed the work of the Social Care Council, provided feedback on draft policies and plans, informed the culture of the Social Care Council (particularly in relation to communications and the language used to engage with the social care workforce, service users and carers), and contributed to a more effective service through the challenge and assurance function they provide.

STRENGTHENING THE WORKFORCE

Q2020 states: "We will provide the right education, training and support to deliver high quality service. We will develop leadership skills at all levels and empower staff to take decisions and make changes."

The people who work in health and social care (including volunteers and carers) are its greatest asset. It is vital therefore that every effort is made to equip them with the skills and knowledge they will require, building on existing and emerging HR strategies, to deliver the highest quality.

STRENGTHENING THE WORKFORCE IN THE SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL

The Social Care Council has a staffing complement of 63 staff at end March 2023. Of these 51 people were employed on permanent contracts, 6 worked part-time, 7 people were employed on temporary/fixed term contracts and 5 were engaged temporarily as agency workers. 13% of contracted staff work part-time or a form of compressed hours. All staff opted into the organisation's Agile Working Policy. Staff are engaged across the following areas -

- Administrative Staff – often providing front line services;
- Managers – including team leaders and heads of function;
- Professional Advisers – professionally qualified social workers;
- Directors – who form part of the Social Care Council's SLT.

Social Care Council staff work using a variety of working patterns including full-time, part-time, job-share and compressed hours. They can also avail of flexi time, special leave (including carers leave), career breaks and unpaid leave. Staff are assigned across two Directorates as demonstrated below –

The Communications and Engagement Team, report directly to the Chief Executive, to ensure communications and engagement is at the heart of every aspect of delivering quality services across the Social Care Council.

Appraising, Learning and Developing

The Social Care Council promotes a learning culture across all aspects of the organisation, including empowering individuals to take control of their own development and career management. In support of this all staff are required to have a set of SMART[1] objectives in place which reflect an individual's/team's contribution to the Social Care Council's Corporate/Strategic Plan, Business Plan, Operational Plan and Key Performance Indicators and Standards.

All staff operate an appraisal called 'Quarterly Check-Ins' which take place four times a year. They provide a collaborative approach to review and enable the individual and their manager to focus on the conversation rather than the paperwork against a simple framework which is designed around the individual organisational footprint. The system was designed on the back of feedback from staff that the current system was paper heavy, and was sometimes a 'tick box' exercise with many staff seeing the appraisal as something that was done to them rather than with them. The new system was rolled out this year and there is very positive feedback for the system. We reviewed the system during the year and found that it was working well - with better conversations between individuals and their managers. We also set up a system to ensure all newly appointed staff and newly appointed managers are trained in the system and understand their role, and what is expected of the staff member and their manager.

In 2022/23, 100% of staff had an annual performance appraisal and a learning and development plan agreed by end June 2023.

Learning and Development Plans for all staff in the Social Care Council are reviewed to identify team training needs, essential and developmental needs, and professional learning. This work is carried out by the Social Care Council's Operational Leadership Team (OLT) which comprises each of the Head of Functions across all of the business areas in the Social Care Council (Fitness to Practise, Workforce Development, Corporate, Committee, Communications, Registration, and Database teams). OLT review the individual, team and organisational training needs and identify where these can be delivered in partnership with the HSC Leadership Centre, who the Social Care Council have a Service Level Agreement with.

During the year the organisation started to develop a Leadership Programme for all managers based on the Michael West book 'Compassionate Leadership'. This is a unique co-designed and co-delivered programme which will commence in the new business year and run for 10 months. The organisation also invested in training two members of staff as Coaches – and have made access to coaching available to all staff.

---

[1] SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound

Investors in People (IIP)

The Social Care Council achieved IIP Gold accreditation status in March 2021 under the new 6th Generation IIP model. This was a significant achievement and is part of the organisation's ongoing improvement agenda in the way it invests in its workforce.

INVESTORS IN PE◯PLE®

We invest in people Gold

The Social Care Council was also the first public sector organisation to be awarded Gold in IIP Health and Wellbeing. This was a remarkable achievement and reflected the work the organisation undertakes to look after its workforce and create a healthy, sustainable and supportive environment for all.

Recognising Good Performance

The Social Care Council appreciates the importance of taking time to recognise and acknowledge good performance whether that is on an individual basis, as a team, or for the organisation as a whole. Feedback from IIP Reports indicate that managers in the Social Care Council are well equipped and skilled on giving direct feedback, in a positive and constructive way, while also acknowledging excellent work that stands out whether as a result of an individual/teams commitment, or as a result of the challenge the work presented in the first instance.

This type of feedback manifests itself on a day to day basis, through one to one meetings and through mid-year and end-year performance appraisal reviews. At the same time, the Senior Leadership Team and the Board take the time to email and/or meet staff to personally acknowledge the success of a team/teams and of the organisation.

Providing an interactive culture which provides time for staff to connect in this way is also underpinned by the SLT's commitment to supporting the Social Care Council's Health and Wellbeing Committee. The Health and Wellbeing Committee organised a number of functions throughout the year both online and in person (once it was safe to do so). Teams had an opportunity to interact, including with teams whom they might not normally have an opportunity to engage with on a day to day basis.

In addition to these 'staff events', the Health and Wellbeing Committee also takes an active role in organising and supporting a number of charities throughout the year, including some online challenges to keep teams connected, healthy and motivated.

Values and Behaviours

The Social Care Council's Corporate Plan identified four corporate values for the organisation –

- *Excellence* – we are committed to excellence in everything we do;

- *Respect* – we respect the rights, dignity and inherent worth of individuals;

- *Integrity* – we are honest and work in an open and transparent way;

- *Partnership* – we are a listening and learning organisation. Working in partnership to ensure what we do makes a difference.

As indicated earlier, the Social Care Council is also working on developing a list of behaviours that underpin these values.

The Social Care Council is using a number of opportunities to embed and promote its values, including ensuring they are reflected in policies and strategies, and in recruitment and job descriptions.

Senior Leadership Commitment to Quality

Ensuring a quality agenda and culture exists, and can be evidenced throughout the Social Care Council, starts at the top level of the organisation and is led by the senior leadership structure.

The Social Care Council's Senior Leadership Team ensure quality and evidence of quality (business reports, feedback reports, evaluation) is part of their regular agenda. At the same time, and to cascade this approach, the SLT put in place an Operational Leadership Team (OLT) which comprises the heads of function from each of the areas across the organisation (Fitness to Practise, Workforce Development, Corporate, Committee, Communications, Registration and Database). OLT meet monthly and report to SLT; not only on the day to day business (delivery, outcomes, risks), but also issues in relation to quality, service improvement, culture, and learning and development.

As part of this work, OLT required all staff to complete the e-learning module on Q2020 Attributes Framework level 1, which was achieved. The module now also forms part of the induction programme for all new staff appointed to the Social Care Council.

MEASURING THE IMPROVEMENT

Q2020 states: "We will improve outcome measurement and report on progress for safety effectiveness and the patient/client experience. We will promote the use of accredited improvement techniques and ensure that there is sufficient capacity and capability within the HSC to use them effectively."

The delivery of continuous improvement lies at the heart of any system that aspires to excellence, particularly in the rapidly changing world of health and social care. In order to confirm that improvement is taking place we will need more reliable and accurate means to measure, value and report on quality improvement and outcomes.

MEASURING THE IMPROVEMENT IN THE SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL

The Social Care Council understands the need to have robust and reliable information to hand to help inform whether it is doing things well – or well enough. To support this the Social Care Council has a number of reporting and feedback mechanisms in place which include –

- Annual business objectives which are reported to the Board/SLT on a quarterly basis;
- Monthly business reporting to SLT;
- Key Performance Indicators and Quality Standards;
- Internal Audit Reviews and compliance reports;
- Data Quality Reports;
- Surveys, reviews and evaluations;
- Customer Feedback Reports;
- Complaints Management and Learning Reports;
- Robust Registration database and reporting.

Staff at all levels are encouraged to challenge processes that are no longer effective. As an example, a number of registration procedures have been improved such as enabling registrants to advise the Social Care Council of changes of contact details and employment over the phone, rather than asking registrants to put their request in writing. This has improved the customer service experience for registrants who can get certain issues resolved quickly in a way that best suits them.

Teams also meet on a monthly basis to review their own performance and suggest ways in which work can be streamlined and improved to the direct benefit of those people we provide a service to.

All of these arrangements do not however operate in isolation; instead they are open to challenge, review and compliance assurance. This includes reviews by Internal Audit to provide relevant assurance, and oversight by the Social Care Council's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.

Quality Improvement in Service Delivery

During 2022/23, the Social Care Council delivered the following –

- A review of online e-learning resources to make these readily available to the workforce;
- Development of new Learning Zone resources;
- A review of the online Registration system to improve the employer's experience;
- The establishment of an internal Data Quality Assurance Group to review the quality of data and develop an action plan to address any gaps;

- A campaign to promote awareness of why registration matters.
- A campaign to promote social care – Social Care Matters.

A Database and Intelligence Officer was recruited to provide analysis of the information held by the organisation and also to identify gaps in the information we hold about our registrants. Further work was undertaken to scope the development of information published through PowerBi dashboards. Analysis was undertaken to review the Fitness to Practise Referrals received in 2021-22. This report compares referrals across job roles, sectors and by registrant demographics and will be finalised in Summer 2023. We will continue to invest in our capacity and capability to analyse and report on our workforce information. A report on the Social Care Register is also planned for Autumn 2023.

The Social Care Council worked with representatives from the HSC Trusts, Digital Health and Care NI, Probation Board, Business Services Organisation and the Department of Health to scope out an option to map social care workforce data to assist with workforce planning. The Data Intelligence workstream for social work held the first in a series of workshops in March 2023 which focused on user needs and data sources.

Complaints Management

It is important for any organisation to provide a clear mechanism for dispute resolution, particularly if an individual is concerned about the service they have received, how they were treated by a member of staff or the systems/processes which are in place in the Social Care Council's business.

The Social Care Council encourages its staff that wherever possible, complaints or disputes are managed locally and at source where an immediate resolution can resolve concerns, and reduce the stress or anxiety caused to the individual. The Social Care Council also

recognises that, at times, having a mechanism (through the organisation's Complaints Policy) provides a means through which a complaint can be independently reviewed and investigated. The Complaints Policy encourages individuals to raise their complaint with the Social Care Council's Complaints Manager, if the matter cannot be resolved at a local and informal level, and if the individual still remains unsatisfied with their response they may elevate their complaint to the Director of Registration and Corporate Services, and ultimately the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman. The purpose of all of this is to ensure that the Social Care Council listens and responds to concerns, and where necessary puts improvements in place, regardless of whether these are on a small or larger scale.

The Policy is currently under review and these changes will be taken forward in the new business year.

RAISING THE STANDARDS

Q2020 states: "We will establish a framework of a clear evidence-based standards and best practice guidance. We will establish dynamic partnerships between service users, commissioners and providers to develop, monitor and review."

The service requires a coherent framework of robust and meaningful standards against which performance can be assessed. These already exist in some parts, but much more needs to be done, particularly involving service users, carers and families in the development, monitoring and reviewing of standards.

RAISING THE STANDARDS IN THE SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL

The Social Care Council promotes its Standards of Conduct and Practice including a suite of Easy Read versions. During the year we supported the sector in embedding the Standards in particular as the workforce responded to the unprecedented demands and challenges of the pandemic.

The Standards of Conduct and Practice explain the standards expected of the social care workforce in Northern Ireland. They set out very clearly what is expected in terms of an individual worker's conduct i.e. values, attitudes and behaviour as well as standards for their Practice which outline the knowledge and skills required for competent practice.

Only a very small percentage of registrants breach the Standards expected and where this happens the FtP team have a range of measures available proportionate to the event which occurred.

During the year we delivered the following -

- Information sessions with groups of registrants in their work and home settings.
- Telephone contacts and virtual meetings with teams and management boards to ensure employers and managers were able to support their workers in maintaining the Standards.
- Presentations and discussions with employers, managers and governance leads in the HSC Trusts to promote the Standard of Acceptance and to share learning from Fitness to Practise cases and referrals to ensure that appropriate Fitness to Practise concerns arising during the pandemic were reported and addressed in a timely manner.
- Information, videos and seminars about registration and Standards shared via social media and e-zines.
- Presentation to the Chief Executive's Forum – 'Partnership in Practice: How the NI Social Care Council collaborated effectively to deliver during the pandemic'
- Participating in the Social Work England Decision Making Group – to share knowledge of regulation and standards
- Social Care ECHO virtual sessions hosted every month for social care managers and supervisors to connect, support and share best practice.
- 'Making the Right Decision' online learning resource was demonstrated to

> encourage employers and registrants to use this as guidance on applying the standards in work-based scenarios.
> - Online learning resources were promoted throughout the year. These include case studies, presentations and discussions on the Standards and maintaining registration.

Engagement with Standards through the Learning Zone online resources each month:

- 1000 views of the Standards of Conduct and Practice
- 140 views of the Induction Standards
- 130 views of Values and Behaviours of Person-Centred Practice
- 100 views of Making the Right Decision

From all of this activity and our engagement on the Standards we were able to determine that:

- Registrants and employers are willing to engage in opportunities to learn about using the standards in daily practice; and

- Registrants and employers have varying levels of understanding about applying the Standards, therefore ongoing communication about the Standards is needed to embed the Standards in the workplace.

The engagement team delivered presentations at workplace events to share information about the Social Care Council, registration, standards, learning and development with social care workers and managers. Sessions were also delivered to students due to graduate from the Degree in Social Work to introduce the Assessed Year in Employment standards. The PiP Framework information was shared in workplaces as part of induction and CPD for social workers.

The Social Care Council Learning Zone was redeveloped during 2022-23 and the new platform was launched in October 2023. Engagement with the Learning Zone has remained strong, with 4.5-5k users engaged every month and 1170k people using the platform since it was first launched. The top 3 pages accessed on the site were PRTL, Why Learning Zone and PiP. Standards of Conduct and Practice, Dysphagia Awareness, AYE, Careers in Social Work and Making the Right Decisions attracted the most page views across all platforms. The Social Care Council has been invited to present in a Thematic Panel Discussion on Enhancing workforce engagement with technology at the European Social Services Conference in June 2023. Development work continues in the review of the Child Development resources, updates to the Healthcare Library materials and developing a Reflective Practice resource for social care workers.

Professional in Practice Framework

The Social Care Council's Professional in Practice (PiP) Framework continues to make a positive impact on the professional development of social workers. Engagement with the framework enables social workers to gain professional recognition for their learning and development that improves the quality of their practice.

167 social workers received PiP Awards at the September 2022 online ceremony. The 2023 Awards are scheduled to make a welcome return as an in-person event in June, with an estimated 180 candidates due to receive awards. Recommendations from the review of PiP Credit Accumulation Route was approved by the PiP Partnership in 2022-23. Small working groups are being established to involve key stakeholders with this redesign which aims to increase social workers engagement with this learning and development route.

Best Practice for the Board

Over the last number of years, the Board has carried out an annual Board Self-Assessment to benchmark its performance and governance against best practice and provide assurance that it is conducting its business in accordance with best practice.

The Board carried out its annual self-assessment during 2022/23 to assess to what extent it was efficient in delivering high quality services. As a result of this the Board developed an action plan to raise its standards where it was deemed necessary.

As a result of this process, the Board are able to review the extent to which they are raising standards in their own work to the benefit of the organisation and its stakeholders as a whole.

The Board also commenced a skills audit during the year.

Regulation and Registration System

Development work to upgrade the registration database was completed in 2022-23 and migration to the upgraded platform is planned for May 2023. Work is also underway to develop a mobile application to assist registrants in managing their registration details, paying fees etc. These investments in service improvements are expected to support further improvements in workflow for registration processing in 2023-24. The upgrade to the system enables better quality data and information flow to support the social work and social care sector including business intelligence for the organisation.

INTEGRATING THE CARE

Q2020 states: "We will develop integrated pathways of care for individuals. We will make better use of multidisciplinary team working and shared opportunities for learning and development in the HSC and with external providers."

Northern Ireland offers excellent opportunities to provide fully integrated services because of the organisational structure that combines health and social care and the relatively small population that it serves. However, integrated care should cross all sectoral and professional boundaries to benefit patients, clients and families.

INTEGRATING THE CARE IN THE SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL

The Social Care Council is an organisation of the health and social care sector in Northern Ireland. While provided with a specific remit regarding the regulation and registration of the social care workforce, it carries out its functions in close working partnerships with others in the health and social care sector in Northern Ireland.

The Social Care Council is represented on all relevant groups and committees and is active in contributing to and driving forward the agenda to the benefit of the social care workforce. It also integrates its work at a direct level with employers, Trusts, universities, the voluntary and community sectors, and service users and carers.

Systems Leadership Agenda

During the year, the Social Care Council continued to work to support and inform the systems leadership agenda across the HSC and beyond.

The Board of the Social Care Council identified a key ambition for the organisation to inform leadership at all levels across Health and Social Care. The Social Care Council continues to work to both contribute and influence the development and transformation of the system as well as being a connector for many parts of the system that do not always have a prominent position.

The Social Care Council brings together key interests from across the social care sector to discuss strategic issues and identify opportunities for shared working to improve recruitment and retention, development, profile and positioning of the workforce.

During the year the Social Care Council had a focus on supporting and strengthening social care leadership networks. The Leaders in Social Care Partnership developed a detailed programme of work based on collaboration and outcomes. It brings together 30 senior social care leaders from the statutory, independent and 3rd sectors to establish a strategic framework for the transformation and development of the social care workforce in Northern Ireland that will ensure the sustainability of a skilled, competent and fit for purpose workforce.

The Social Work Leadership Network has been established under the auspices of the DoH Social Work Strategy and comprises leaders from the statutory, voluntary, education and justice sectors. The Network is focussed raising the profile of social work in all sectors, working towards a collaborative approach to developing the social work workforce into the future. The Social Care Council has also continued to support the 3rd Sector social work leadership group, ensuring the voice of the 3rd sector is included in strategic discussions about the future of social work.

In recognising the value of collective leadership across the Health and Social Care system, as well within the regulatory system, we worked with a range of networks of people who collaborate on development and improvement. Our work to connect social work and social care leaders is helping to shape social work and social care as health and social care transformation moves forward. Now, more than ever, insight from sector leaders is needed to inform strategic workforce planning and development. In January 2023, NICON and the Social Care Council jointly hosted a Rapid Action Workshop to identify possible solutions to the blockages in hospital discharge. Attendees included representatives from HSC Trusts, Independent Sector social care providers, Department of Health, Public Health Agency, and digital and system design organisations. A number of actions were agreed and arising out of the workshop the DoH undertook to work with the Social Care Council and NICON to establish a Social Care Collaborative Forum to deliver reform, address service pressures, promote co-ordinated activity and collaboration, and provide strategic oversight, direction and governance. The first meeting of the forum is scheduled for April, followed by sessions in May and June. Membership of the Forum is cross-sector and includes HSC Trusts, Independent sector umbrella bodies, DoH, PHA, SPPG, RQIA, NICON, the Social Care Council and service users and carers. The Social Care Council Chief Executive has been asked to co-Chair the Forum along with the Deputy Secretary, Social Care Policy (DoH).

Through our strategic Partnerships we continued to support the development of leadership capacity and positioning in social work and social care. The Social Care Council hosted a workshop with social work leaders to explore the implementation of the Social Work Leadership Framework. The framework was developed by the DoH and has been given to the Social Care Council to lead its implementation. We are working in collaboration with the 5 HSC Trusts, and the Centre for Effective Services to develop an implementation plan.

Social Care Council staff have participated in a number of workshops led by the Children's Services Review. Senior staff have met with the DoH to discuss the options for children's services arising out of the review. The Social Care Council also supported a piece of research led by BASW into the core roles and tasks undertaken by children's social workers. The research was undertaken at the request of Professor Ray Jones who was interested on social workers' views of their core roles and tasks and what tasks could be considered in the context of a skills mix approach to children's services. In collaboration with the Education Authority, we hosted a workshop on social work in schools. The workshop included representatives from schools, the Education Authority, Department of Education and BASW.
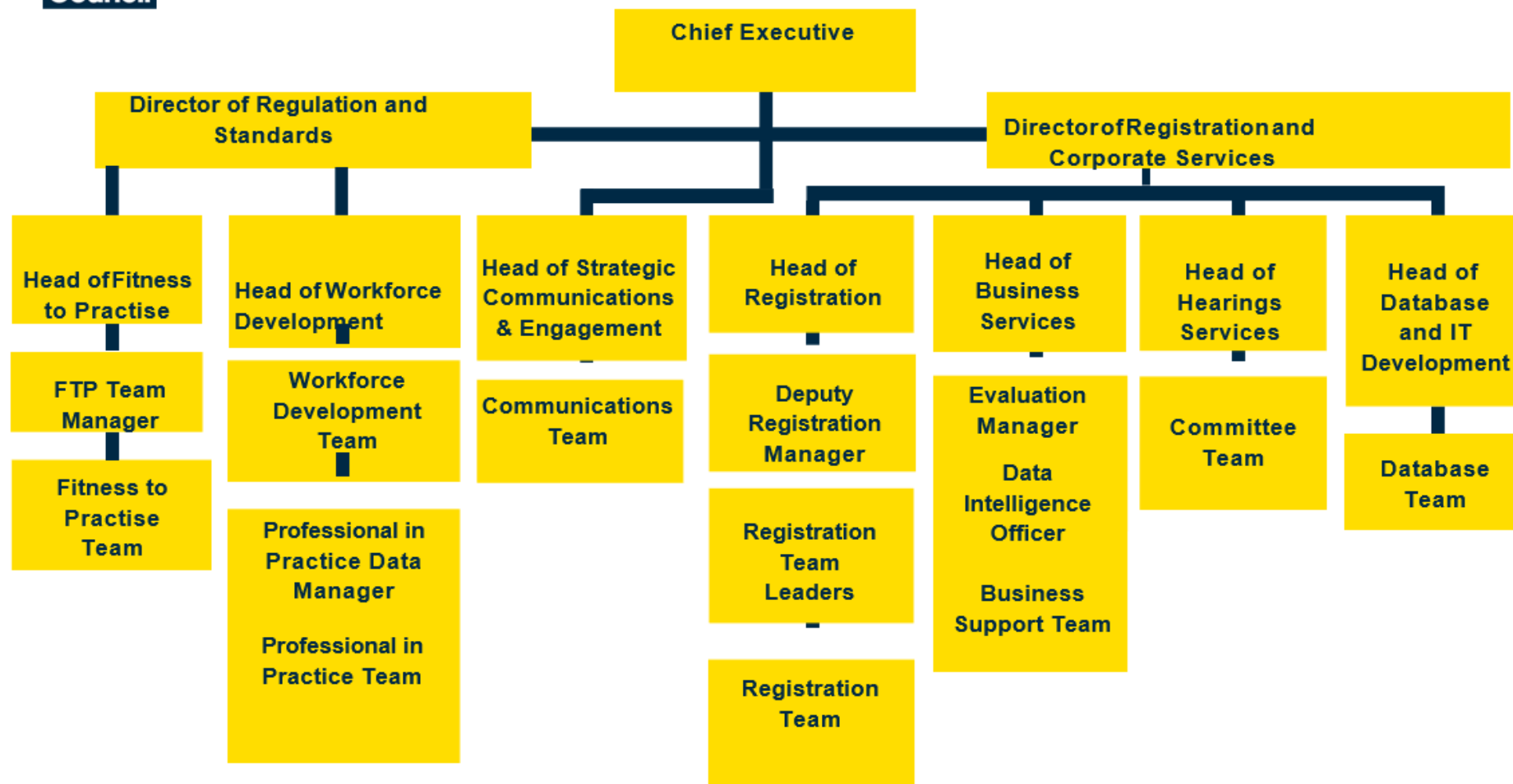
SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL QUALITY 2020

ACTION PLAN 2023/24

To inform the Social Care Council's continued improvement in relation to embedding quality, demonstrating quality and measuring quality outcomes, it has identified the following areas for delivering during 2023/24 –

	ACTIVITY	*HOW AND WHEN*
1	We will start a review on how quality is embedded in the organisation (with a view to reporting on this in the following business year).	**By March 2024** – we will create a hub of all evidence of quality improvement and initiatives and test for any gaps or missed opportunities.
2	We will carry out a Quality Improvement initiative in a key area of business	**By March 2024** – we will have improved quality in our business with a model that can be used for future QI projects.
3	We will improve our complaints management within the organisation so that we can gather better and more informed data from complaints and other forms of feedback.	**By March 2024** – we will have good data to help us improve our services and processes.

Organisation Structure 2023-24

Northern Ireland Social Care Council

Chief Executive

Director of Regulation and Standards

Director of Registration and Corporate Services

- **Head of Fitness to Practise**
  - FTP Team Manager
  - Fitness to Practise Team

- **Head of Workforce Development**
  - Workforce Development Team
  - Professional in Practice Data Manager
  - Professional in Practice Team

- **Head of Strategic Communications & Engagement**
  - Communications Team

- **Head of Registration**
  - Deputy Registration Manager
  - Registration Team Leaders
  - Registration Team

- **Head of Business Services**
  - Evaluation Manager
  - Data Intelligence Officer
  - Business Support Team

- **Head of Hearings Services**
  - Committee Team

- **Head of Database and IT Development**
  - Database Team

29

Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

CE	Chief Executive
DoH	Department of Health
HSC	Health and Social Care
HR	Human Resources
IIP	Investors in People
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
OLT	Operational Leadership Team
PIP	Professional in Practice
PPI	Personal and Public Involvement
QI	Quality Improvement
SLT	Senior Leadership Team