NORTHERN IRELAND SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL

QUALITY 2020 ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

APRIL 2019 – MARCH 2020

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FOREWORD BY PATRICIA HIGGINS, INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE

I am pleased to present the Northern Ireland Social Care Council's (Social Care Council) Annual Quality 2020 Report for 2019/20. This is the seventh Report produced by the Social Care Council and sets out the many achievements delivered by the Social Care Council as it seeks to ensure quality is embedded throughout all aspects of the organisation.

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

The Q2020 Strategy has been in place in a number of years and has provided us all with an opportunity to reflect on how we deliver and improve quality in all aspects of our work. We all know what quality means to us as individuals and we therefore might all have different views about what quality is – and what it is not. It is therefore important as an organisation that we agree, as an organisation, what quality means to the Social Care Council so that every one of us can measure how effective we are in delivering and improving quality.

Towards the end of 2019/20, the Social Care Council made the decision to require all staff to work remotely from home in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This decision was to ensure the safety of all staff and to comply with social distancing measures. The future for the next business year (2020/21) is unknown and normal expectations in terms of business delivery may need to be modified, however that will not prevent the organisation from delivering high quality services wherever possible.

Over the last seven years quality improvement has become embedded and as such can be more difficult to identify as a separate entity. This, however, is a natural progression as quality is not about one function or project but is about everything – it is everywhere at all times.

We have deployed learning from Quality Improvement (QI) Projects to improve our business including how registrants engage with us – and encouraging more participation through our online portal which enables registrants and their employers to access data at a time and place that suits them, rather than relying on traditional office opening hours and making phone calls which can be costly and time consuming.

We also carried out a five year review of the Degree in Social Work which provides vital information about how the Degree supports not just students but also the wider workforce to ensure those coming through the Degree have access to high quality learning and support.

We have continued to try to be realistic with our ambitions and therefore continued to be more measured and specific in our actions in relation to quality and quality improvement. We established a Socrates Improvement Board under project management principles with Terms of Reference and key staff to help us better manage and give oversight to technological advances and the development of our IT Registration and Regulation system.

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 2020/21 to help us measure and report on our improvement plan. In light of the unknown impact of the COVID-19 pandemic we have limited our actions for the coming year as we start to prepare to operate in an unknown arena and be available to respond to the needs of the sector. We plan however to get back to 'business as usual' as soon as we are practically able. It should also be recognised that this report is being produced later than normal due to the impact of the COVID pandemic however we have tried to honour retaining this report to the period for which it is reporting (April 2019 – March 2020).

I remain impressed by the individual and team commitment to improving quality in the workplace and look forward to how we keep this agenda evolving in the next number of years, and witnessing how quality improvement continues to be part of our everyday practice.

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
INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE,
NORTHERN IRELAND SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL

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. That journey is almost complete and significant progress has been made over the last eight years which is evidenced through each of our annual progress reports. We continued to make progress with our Quality 2020 programme during 2019/20 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.

COVID-19 Pandemic

In March 2020, the UK Government announced a national lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. How people lived their lives changed significantly and a number of sectors and industries were put under particular pressure to respond to the monumental challenges which faced us all. The health and social care sector faced particular pressure as the pandemic spread and sadly many lives were lost.

The Social Care Council is one of the arms-length bodies of the Department of Health, and had a role in supporting the Department and front line workers during this crisis. As the regulator of the social care workforce, the Social Care Council worked with the Department of Health to fast track applications from those who had previously left social work or social care to be able to quickly return to that sector in support of their colleagues and their communities. Registration fees were also deferred for a number of months and the Social Care Council developed a range of online learning resources to support front line workers, so that they could continue to have access to the learning they need to deliver safe, effective and quality care.

The Social Care Council's workforce commenced remote working on 19 March 2020, in response to the requirement to work from home to help keep everyone safe.

The organisation continues to work remotely from home and had to re-align its business priorities with front line services, which is why annual reports, such as this, were deferred for a number of months, while resources were diverted elsewhere.

There have been some benefits from this new way of working – with online webinars reaching a wider audience and better technology being put in place to support the delivery of the business. There have also been some disadvantages with the lack of face to face contact and communication which can more readily generate empathy and support when it is needed. The Social Care Council has been mindful of the mental health impact of remote working and the overall anxiety that is being caused by the ongoing impact of COVID. The organisation has engaged its workforce on a regular basis to keep it connected and has found a wide range of ways in which it can continue its business safely and effectively, and to a high quality.

As this report is being produced, the COVID-19 pandemic is still with us, and the Social Care Council supported the Department of Health in its campaign to encourage those working in social work and social care to avail of the vaccine.

Going forward, the organisation will wish to maximum the learning and business benefits from working remotely and also recharge its business before it resets for the future.

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

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. The social care register at end March 2020 was 44,861 people registered with the Social Care Council.

NI Social Care Register

44,861 Registrants

at 31st March 2020

Social Worker, 6,357

Social Work Student, 726
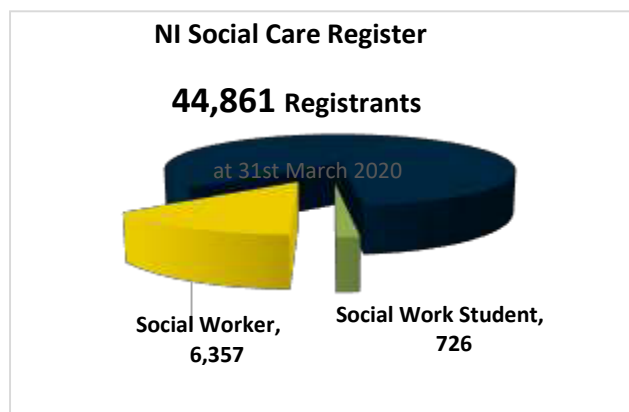
TRANSFORMING THE CULTURE

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 Northern Ireland Social Care Council (Social Care Council) primarily 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 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 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.

As part of its review of what leadership means and moving the management culture towards a leadership culture, the Senior Management Team was restyled 'Senior Leadership Team' (SLT). Embracing the ambitions of the HSC Collective Leadership Strategy (DoH, 2017) the

SLT has sought to create an interdependent and shared leadership system whereby the heads of function come together as the Operational Leadership Team (OLT) to lead and manage and report on business delivery. This approach has strengthened ownership and collective responsibility across the organisation, creating a one team identity at management level. In turn this is leading to better collaboration across teams and a strengthened dynamic culture within the organisation

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 Council and in its outward engagement, setting ambitious objectives that include an influencing role for the 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 2019/20 include –

- Senior Leadership Team (SLT) meetings with all staff to discuss a range of business matters. These took place at least every quarter with staff providing feedback on the content, style and outcomes. The events included presentations and participation with all staff – and provided a means to find out what staff's views were in relation to a range of business and other developments. For example, working together in this way staff developed a radical new approach to appraisals (called Quarterly Check-Ins) which provided a much more conversation based and engaging way to have constructive conversations, and including opportunities to discuss leadership, quality and values in addition to performance and development;

- All staff were engaged in the development of the new Business Plan for 2020/21. This included events to bring all staff together to inform the new Business Plan, joint sessions with the Board and the Participation Partnership (which comprises people who use services and their carers) and through team meetings;

- 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 efforts and milestones;

- 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;

- Registration statistics are shared openly in the office, with staff and team members working fluidly between teams and ensuring resources are continually placed where the pressure most demands it. This includes the sharing of information with all staff on a monthly basis.

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.

Looking beyond internal engagement and culture, the Social Care Council also secures the involvement of registrants and others in the course of its business and its efforts to improve quality and experience. For example, during 2019/20 the Social Care Council –

- Received reports on feedback and complaints on the Social Care Council's staff and services which were shared with the organisation's Senior Leadership Team (monthly) and with the Board including an explanation of what has been learnt/improved as a result of the feedback;

- Shared learning from audits and other relevant reports so that improvements in practices and procedures could be developed and implemented;

- Actively sought feedback from participants at each of the events/conferences/information sessions hosted by the Social Care Council. This feedback informs the delivery and planning of future events. A robust system of evaluation of this feedback is now also consolidated into how we evaluate performance and make meaningful improvements where necessary.

Values, Behaviours and Culture

As part of the Social Care Council's commitment to improve its culture for all staff, a series of workshops were held across teams and at an all staff meeting to better understand the culture we were all aiming to achieve and consider how this culture could be embedded.

This work resulted in true ownership of our values which are now included in all of our policies, procedures and internal/external material. This has enabled all staff to understand our values and what they mean to individuals, teams and the organisation.

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. Examples of this include –

Stakeholder engagement and support for social care networks Working groups, meetings and online engagement

- Social Care Roundtable Discussion – leadership piece in Agenda NI;

- Regular scanning of external media to identify gaps in communications for the social work and social care workforce;

- Patient and Client Council - Learning Disability Network;

- Leaders in Social Care Partnership – support for quarterly meetings and communications workstream;

- UK Homecare Association meeting;

- The Social Care Council Lunchtime seminars for social workers and social care workers also continued to prove popular, with a wide range of themes including 'Respectful Sharenting' and 'Three Steps to Positive Practice'. These seminars are an opportunity for our registrants to share their learning and practice with their colleagues. Videos and presentations from the seminars are available from our website for those who want to catch up. A rolling programme of dates and topics is published on the Events section of our website and shared in registrant e-zines.

The way in which the Social Care Council structures its engagement with others is through partnership arrangements which are described in the section below.

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

<u>Participation Partnership</u>

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 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 Business Plan for 2020/21;

- Social Work Awards – Members gave a significant amount of personal time to prepare for and take part in the Awards judging panels. They also took part in the presentation of Awards at the Gala Event in November 2019.

- Social Work and Homelessness Seminar – Members presented their experience of homelessness as part of the Belfast Metropolitan College seminar at the Social Care Council. The event was also featured on NVTV and promoted across social media.

- Degree in Social Work – A Board member with carer expertise as well as social work experience worked with the Social Care Council staff to review and approve the Open University submission to deliver a Social Work Degree in NI.

- "Impact of use of Language by Professionals" – the Partnership provided feedback on the document and the Forum's key role in assisting others with the use of language in Social Care Council documents was taken on board;

- The Partnership took charge of a review of glossary terms and the use of Plain English and these were shared on our website and on social media.

<u>Registrants' Forum</u>

The Social Care Council's register at the end of March 2020 included almost 45,000 registrants across Northern Ireland. To co-ordinate engagement with this group, the Social Care Council supports a Registrants' Forum, chaired by a registrant and comprising representatives from each part of the register. The Registrants' Forum provides a vehicle through which the views of registrants can be properly and adequately represented.

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

The Leaders in Social Care Partnership (previously called the Workforce Development Partnership) was reformed during the year with a focus on supporting the transformation and development of the social care workforce in Northern Ireland.

Professional in Practice Partnership

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 2019/20 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 58 staff at end March 2020, in addition to a number of staff employed through an agency and working on a sessional basis[1] –

- 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 –

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Regulation and Standards          Registration and Corporate
      Directorate                    Services Directorate
     /         \              /       |        |         \
Workforce    Fitness to   Registration  Database  Business  Regulatory
Development   Practise                 Development Support  Committee
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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.

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Chief Executive
      |
Communications and
   Engagement
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[1] Sessional staff (sometimes called bank staff) are staff who are employed for short periods of time to deliver specific pieces of work)

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[2] objectives in place which reflect an individual's/team's contribution to the Social Care Council's Corporate Plan, Business Plan, Operational Plan and Key Performance Indicators and Standards.

During the year all staff developed a new system to 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 will be rolled out during 2020/21.

In 2019/20, 96% of staff had an annual performance appraisal and a learning and development plan agreed by end April 2020.

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.

The Social Care Council implemented a number of initiatives to enhance the learning and development of its staff during 2019/20. This included –

- 5-day Collective Leadership programme;
- Young Persons Programme for those young in their career and or age;
- Change Management Programme;
- Coaching and mentoring;
- An extensive range of IT skills and development;
- E-learning module on Q2020 for all staff;
- Senior Leadership Team Briefings on a range of issues including updates on key projects, financial planning and new areas of work;
- Multi-team working on various projects to share and exchange knowledge and information and enhance the overall work experience.

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

Investors in People (IIP)

The Social Care Council achieved IIP Silver accreditation status in March 2018 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.

In addition, the Social Care Council was the first public sector organisation to be awarded IIP's Health and Wellbeing Award in recognition of its work to support and improve health and wellbeing for all staff.

As part of its IIP Programme the Social Care Council undergoes an annual review with its IIP assessor to take stock on its journey and seek direction and assistance where necessary.

To deliver the report arising from the IIP assessment, the Social Care Council established five oversight groups; each charged with reviewing key areas of work and identifying actions to improve the experience and impact of these areas. The oversight groups are reflective of all of the functions in the organisation and are – Culture, Quality, Performance, Communication and Making Connections.

The Social Care Council developed an action plan to ensure it delivers on the recommendations arising from the IIP assessment.

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.

During 2019/20, examples of this include –

- SLT emails out to staff throughout the year at key points acknowledging work of staff in delivering the roll-out of registration to the extended social care workforce, organising large social work/social care events, and reviewing the processes, systems and structures in the registration function;
- Staff events to inform the development of the new Business Plan;
- Health and wellbeing initiatives to promote health in the workplace and at home;

- Review of the Flexi Time Scheme to provide more flexibility to staff in managing their worklife balance;
- Extension of remote working to more staff – with 100% of staff at end March 2020 having the necessary equipment to work remotely.

This all inclusive approach to one to one feedback through to SLT and the Board providing feedback and acknowledging good performance is part of the Social Care Council's culture of working collectively towards a common purpose and outcome.

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 including a staff barbeque where individuals and 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, and championed the creation of a wellbeing room.

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 2019/20, the Social Care Council delivered the following –

- Established a Quality Improvement Project to support registrants to pay their fee online (see below).
- Set up a Socrates Improvement Board to harness the various IT initiatives and ensure the Registration and Regulation system is developed to suit the needs of all its users;
- Established a number of improvement oversight groups to deliver the actions arising from the IIP Report –
    - Culture Improvement Group;
    - Quality Improvement Group;
    - Performance Improvement Group;
    - Communications Improvement Group;
    - Making Connections Improvement Group.

Quality Improvement IIP Oversight Group

The work of this group is particularly focused on quality and quality improvement. During the year the Group focused on consulting with staff to agree a definition of Quality Improvement. Following engagement with all staff this was agreed as –

'Quality improvement in the Social Care Council is the continual efforts of us all to improve our processes and performance to achieve better outcomes.'

To underpin this work the Group developed a set of **principles** –

1. We will be a listening and learning organisation.
2. We will adopt a collective leadership approach to improvement.
3. We will be inclusive and ensure that all staff have equal voice.
4. We will recognise and respect each other's expertise and knowledge.
5. We will involve those closest to the issue in identifying and undertaking improvement initiatives.
6. We will follow through on ideas.
7. We will be courageous enough to 'ditch' what is not working.
8. We will ensure that our approach is rigorous, systematic and underpinned by analysis and evaluation.
9. We will be committed to the pursuit of excellence.
10. We will develop and empower our people to ensure that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to participate fully in quality improvement.
11. We will be innovative and creative in our approach.
12. We will use our resources efficiently and effectively.
13. We will work in partnership with our stakeholders.

14. We will share best practice.

The Group is continuing to work on embedding these principles into all parts of the organisation.

QI Project – Registration

The organisation identified an issue that it needed to do more to support registrants to pay their annual fee online. Paying online means that registrants can carry out this transaction at a time and location that suits them rather than phoning the Social Care Council during opening hours or calling into the Social Care Council's office. The project outcomes enabled a number of changes to how we engage with registrants and initiated a project to further develop our website and online Portal (it is expected that this further project will be delivered during 2020/21).

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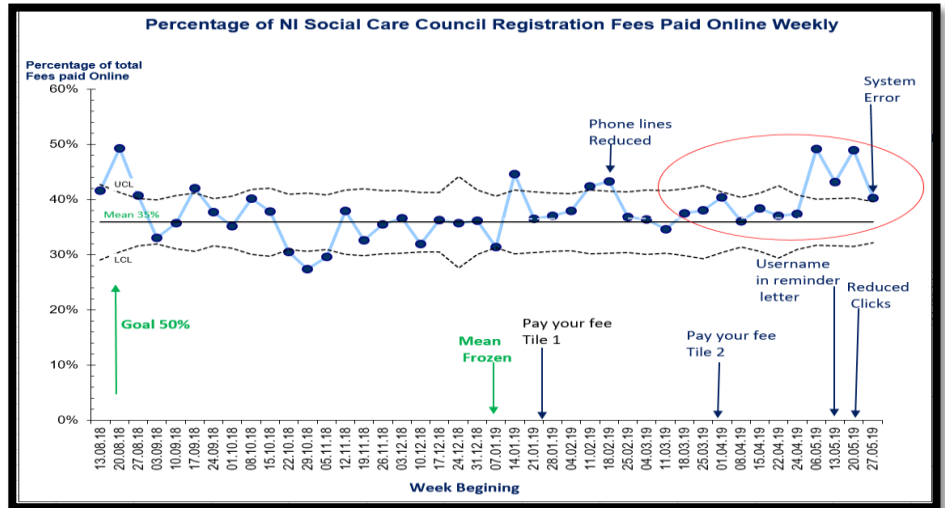
It is important for any organisation to provide a clear mechanism for dispute resolution, particularly if an individual is concerned about the service they have received, how they were treated by a member of staff or the systems/processes which are in place in the Social Care Council's business.

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.

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 and launched Easy Read versions of its Standards last year. During the year we continued to work with registrants and employers to ensure the Standards are embedded and understood across the sector. This is part of an ongoing programme of work to ensure the Standards are at the heart of social care practice thus providing a safe and high quality experience for people who uses services..

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 50 information sessions in social care settings; talking to over 1,500 registrants, managers and students about the responsibilities of professional registration. We also engaged with people who use services and their carers to raise awareness about workforce registration and how the Standards can help improve the quality of the services they receive.

- **90%** of registrants said they would use the learning in their social care practice
- **85%** of participants rated engagement sessions as 'Very Good to Excellent'
- **76%** overall improvement in participant knowledge levels reported

We also delivered an online survey for registrants and employers to track progress towards embedding the Standards in everyday practice. 1,082 social care workers and 187 managers responded to the survey. This was followed up with focus groups and interviews which involved managers, social care workers and people who use services and their carers. Feedback from all participants was strongly positive towards registering workers and requiring them to meet agreed standards.

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.

During 2019/20, PiP assessment panels confirmed 40 submissions at the Individual Assessment Panel in May 2019. The External Assessor Report confirmed consistency across all three routes for PiP submission assessments. 179 PiP Awards were achieved across the PiP programmes and routes and social workers were recognised at the June 2019 celebration event for achieving:

- 72 Consolidation Awards
- 75 Specialist Awards
- 30 Leadership and Strategic Awards

The PiP Framework has been reviewed and developed to reflect the range of learning routes open to social workers. The pilot of the PiP Work-Based Learning Route for Signs of Safety was opened in Autumn 2019. The first submissions were received for the new Doctorate level Award with three social workers successfully meeting the requirements for the PiP Advanced Scholarship Award.

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 2019/20 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.

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. As part of this the Workforce Development Partnership was reviewed and became the Leaders in Social Care Partnership with a new mandate and focus on social care leadership. The 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. Work also

continues with the Leaders in Social Work, a more established network which is collaborating on current and future needs for the profession in NI. The Social Care Council has also supported the development of a 3rd Sector social work leadership group. It also has a range of partnerships which support collaborative working and co-production to support and strengthen the social work and social care sector in Northern Ireland.

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. This year our Interim Chief Executive chaired the Leadership Network and the focus of work has been to build a communication strategy to raise the profile of social work in all sectors, and to work towards a collaborative approach to developing the social work workforce into the future.

SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL QUALITY 2020

ACTION PLAN 2020/21

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 20120/21 –

	ACTIVITY	HOW AND WHEN
1	We will ensure quality is part of the Quarterly Check in conversation with all staff	**By March 2021** This will be tested during the year through surveys and one to one feedback.
2	We will develop a new website to improve the user experience and journey online.	**By March 2021** – we will launch the new website and keep it under regular review.
3	We will develop our online Portal and the Learning Zone to encourage more registrants and employers to engage with us in this way.	**By March 2021** – we will have a new Portal and revamped Learning Zone in place.
4	We will review the effectiveness of our Socrates Improvement Board against its Terms of Reference.	**By March 2021** – we will carry out a self-assessment against the ToR.
5	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 2021** – we will create a hub of all evidence of quality improvement and initiatives and test for any gaps or missed opportunities.

Organisation Structure

at 31 March 2020

Interim Chief Executive

Interim Director of Regulation and Standards

Director of Registration and Corporate Services

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

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

Head of Strategic Communications & Engagement
- Communications Team

Registration Manager
- Registration Officer
- Registration Team Leaders
- Registration Team

Policy & Operations Manager
- Evaluation Manager
- Business Support Team

Committee Manager
- Committee Team

Database Development and Intelligence Manager
- Database Team

Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

CE	-	Chief Executive
CPD	-	Continuing Professional Development
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
PLO's	-	Practice Learning Opportunities
PPI	-	Personal and Public Involvement
QI	-	Quality Improvement
SLT	-	Senior Leadership Team