

Social Work Handbook (Northern Ireland) 2024

This item contains selected online content. It is for use alongside, not as a replacement for the module website, which is the primary study format and contains activities and resources that cannot be replicated in the printed versions.

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Introduction

This handbook provides an overview of the BA (Hons) Degree in Social Work (Northern Ireland). It contains information and guidance about curriculum, assessment, regulatory and professional standards, procedures and policies. It points you towards more detailed advice, where appropriate, and should be read alongside the relevant Module Guide, the Practice Learning Guide (Northern Ireland) and the general Open University (OU) study guidance provided via the StudentHome website, which you have access to once you have received a personal identifier (PI). StudentHome also provides access to your online teaching resources and other relevant services.

This handbook is for two groups of students who are either:

- formally sponsored and supported by their employer to complete the BA (Hons) Degree in Social Work; or
- studying K113 *Foundations for social work practice* as a 'standalone' module but are not registered for the social work degree qualification.

It will also be useful for employers, practice teachers and others who are involved with this social work programme.

The handbook is organised into seven parts:

- Part 1: an overview of the OU social work programme.
- Part 2: sources of support for your OU studies, including computing information.
- Part 3: the academic and practice curriculum.
- Part 4: the academic, regulatory and professional standards that underpin the social work degree in Northern Ireland.
- Part 5: the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) registration, which explains what to do if concerns arise about professional conduct.
- Part 6: locating OU policies.
- Part 7: the programme's management, partnerships and quality assurance.

Studying K113 *Foundations for social work practice* outside of the social work degree

Most students who study K113 *Foundations for social work practice* are registered on the social work degree, however, some students are not and may complete this as a standalone module or as part of a different qualification. You may be taking this module as a first step towards a social work career, or to achieve a certificate-level qualification to enhance your social care practice. You may be supported by your employer to study K113, or you may be studying completely independently. We are very pleased that you have chosen to study this module with the OU and hope that you will find it interesting and valuable. Most of this handbook will be relevant for you, although some sections will apply only to students registered for the social work degree. You may still find these sections of interest, if you wish to apply for the social work degree in the future.

Please be aware that successful completion of K113 does not provide automatic entry to the social work degree. If you would like to progress to the degree, you will first need to secure formal sponsorship from a designated and approved social work employer and apply for nomination onto the programme. All applicants to the social work degree in NI are required to participate in a competitive selection process which includes an interview. For further details regarding the admissions process, contact the social work team in

Northern Ireland: Ireland-social-work@open.ac.uk. It is important to note that if you are studying K113 and you are not registered on the BA (Hons) Degree in Social Work, you are not a social work student and you are completing K113 independent to the social work degree. If you are unsure which qualification you are registered on, please contact the Student Support Team via StudentHome.

If you are an employer or a 'verifier' for any student studying K113

You may be formally sponsoring a student who is already registered for the social work degree and studying K113 as part of this programme. Alternatively, you may be supporting an employee who is studying K113 independently as a standalone module. We hope that you will find this handbook useful, both to provide an overview of the social work programme and to find information about specific questions or issues that may arise. You may be particularly interested in Part 3, which explains how practice learning is provided and assessed throughout the degree.

All K113 students will have 10 days of practice experience to complete as part of their preparation for practice, which typically can be completed in their normal place of work. Some K113 students may need to complete these practice days in other settings, in order to meet the learning requirements. This Social Work Handbook will also be useful if you are an employer who is providing a short-term period of practice experience for a K113 student and acting as a 'verifier' who signs off on completion of the 10 practice days.

Further information about the role of a verifier and the 10 practice days can also be found in the Practice Learning Guide. K113 students will have access to all the relevant documents and guidance on the module website.

How to contact us

If you wish to speak to someone about any of the information contained in this handbook, there are a number of points of contact. In the first instance, you can speak with your module tutor or your practice tutor if it is in relation to the practice learning modules (K113, K216 and K315).

You can also speak to our dedicated Student Support Team who can be contacted via the Help Centre section on your StudentHome page.

Alternatively, you can contact the social work team in Northern Ireland on 02890 245025 or email Ireland-Social-Work@open.ac.uk.

OU and other relevant websites

Within The Open University

Faculty Social Work Programme	https://wels.open.ac.uk/schools/school-health-wellbeing-and-social-care/professional-programme-social-work
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Social Work Agency	https://learn2.open.ac.uk/site/sw-agency
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Social Work
Qualification
website

<http://www.open.ac.uk/courses/health-social-care/degrees/ba-social-work-northern-ireland-r61>

StudentHome
Access to
qualification
and module
websites,
study support,
library and OU
Student Asso-
ciation

<http://msds.open.ac.uk/students>
<https://learn2.open.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=207001>

Student
Support

Contact details are provided on the 'Your contacts' page on StudentHome:

<https://help.open.ac.uk/contact>

Please contact Student Support in Northern Ireland in the first instance if your query is during working hours:
02890 245025

Outside the OU

NI Degree in
Social Work
Partnership
(NIDSWP)

<https://nidswp.net>

NI Social Care
Council
(NISCC)

<https://niscc.info>

Part 1 Overview of the BA (Hons) Social Work (Northern Ireland) degree

The Open University (OU) degree offers a flexible, employment-based, supported distance learning route to social work training, which provides an alternative pathway into social work to that of other traditional universities. The OU programme is available to people who are already working in social care and who are sponsored and supported by an approved employer. As an OU social work student, you may often work alongside students from other universities in NI. It is important to remember that there may be some differences in the modules you undertake and types of assessment at the OU, and therefore you should try not to compare your social work education experiences with students from other institutions.

This social work degree comprises a range of academic modules and practice learning opportunities (placements). In order to be awarded with this social work qualification, students must complete 360 credits, which are made up of six modules and includes two placements. You will engage in a variety of assessment methods during this degree such as written assignments and exams, role plays, practice-based learning and participation in tutorials and workshops. The majority of students complete this degree in three years and continue to work within their social care employment. You must continue to be sponsored by an approved employer throughout the duration of this degree. Whilst this is a challenging professional qualification, it is also an enjoyable and stimulating degree, where you will be supported by academics, experienced practitioners and service users/carers to develop your confidence and competency to become a qualified social worker. This part of the handbook gives you an overview of the degree programme, including its main features and structure, and explains the roles of the people who are involved.

1.1 Professional and regulatory standards for the OU social work degree in Northern Ireland

The degree curriculum is underpinned by the required academic, regulatory and professional standards. The practice learning module materials are designed to apply to social work students across the UK nations – England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Each nation has its own distinct regulatory structure and differently worded frameworks, and its own regulations and professional standards which are different from those of the other nations. At certain points in your learning, you will be asked to refer to the professional and regulatory standards for Northern Ireland and to use documents and practice learning forms specific to Northern Ireland, which will be clearly labelled. You need to be mindful that you are not inadvertently using documents or forms intended for one of the other UK nations. During the course of your study with the OU, there may be times when you are taught by tutors who are based outside of NI, study alongside students from other UK nations and engage with module material that makes reference to England, Scotland and Wales. While it is important for you to study the NI context, learning about social work issues, policy and legislation from other regions will enhance your knowledge and provide breadth and depth to your learning experience.

The BA (Hons) Degree in Social Work (NI) became an approved programme by the NISCC in 2020 and is regularly monitored and validated to ensure that the 'Rules for the Approval of the Degree in Social Work' (NISCC, 2012) and 'The Standards for Practice Learning for the Degree in Social Work' (NISCC, 2020) continue to be met.

1.2 Sponsorship

In order to complete the social work degree, you will need to be formally supported by an approved social care employer (known as ‘the sponsor’). Through sponsorship, your employer will be involved in the recruitment and selection processes for the social work degree, while also supporting you if you experience difficulties while on placement or during the course of the degree. OU staff in NI work closely with sponsors to ensure a high-quality student experience and, with your consent, will share information regarding your progress on the course.

During the practice learning modules, K216 and K315, your sponsor will organise, in collaboration with the NI Degree in Social Work Partnership (NIDSWP) and a practice learning coordinator, two practice learning opportunities and provide suitably qualified practice teachers to assess your practice. This will be in accordance with the university and regulatory requirements for practice learning.

If during the course of your studies there is a change to your employment status, you must inform the OU immediately by contacting Ireland-social-work@open.ac.uk.

1.3 Structure of the OU social work degree

The social work degree sits within the School of Health, Wellbeing and Social Care, which is part of the OU’s Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS).

Figure 1 outlines the structure of the degree, which is divided into three stages.

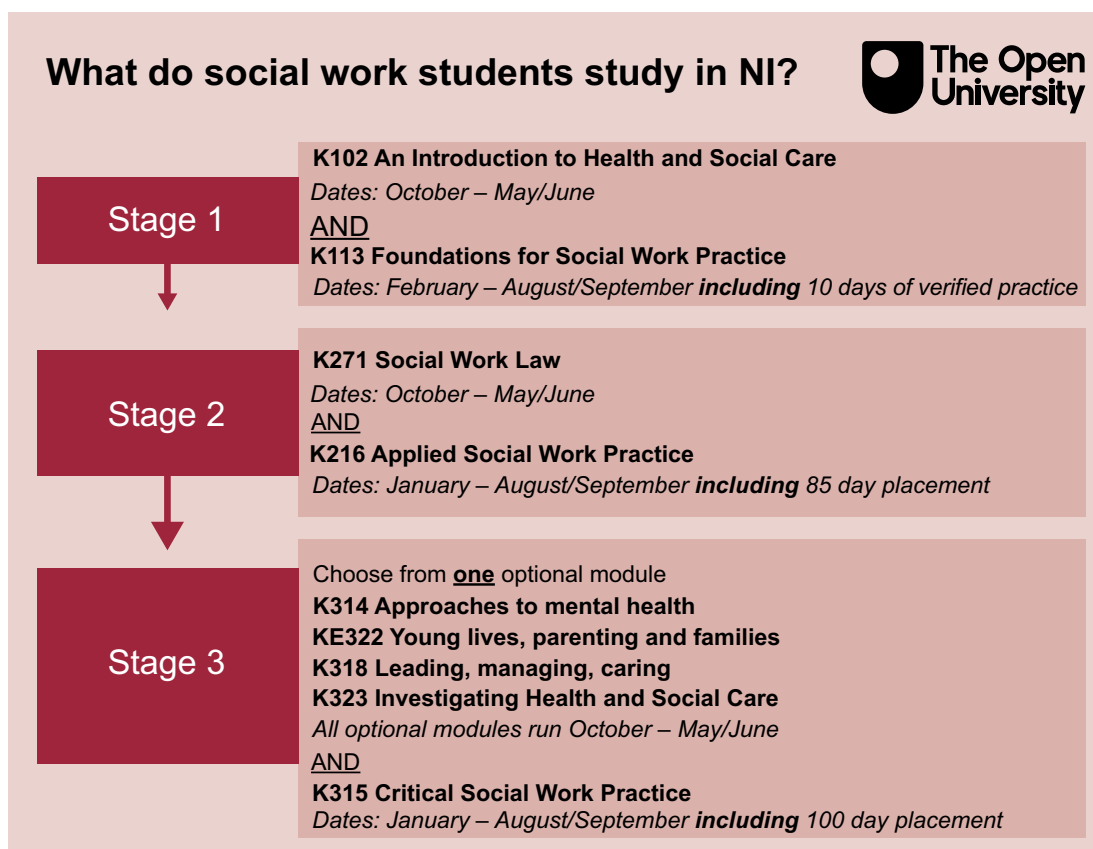


Figure 1 The modules making up the Social Work (Northern Ireland) degree

The BA (Hons) Social Work degree programme comprises 360 credits in total: 60 credits for each of the two modules at Stages 1, 2 and 3 (Figure 1). If you have claimed academic credits for qualifications gained elsewhere in lieu of K102, then you will only be studying K113 at Stage 1.

Brief descriptions of each module can be found in Part 3, and fuller details are available via the 'Choose your modules' link on StudentHome.

On some modules you will be studying alongside students who are not participating in the social work degree. This is because, with the exception of K216 and K315, all modules are open to students studying other WELS academic qualifications. We hope that this will enrich your learning, as you will be exchanging ideas with students from other professional backgrounds and students who have direct experience of using care services. There are a number of social work-specific modules (such as K113, K216 and K315), where your tutorial groups will primarily consist of NI social work students and you will be taught by NISCC-registered, qualified social work tutors.

1.4 Study leave and academic commitment

Employers, sponsors and students need to be aware that the student needs time to study and reflect on their practice. If students wish to complete the degree in 3 years, they will undertake 120 module credits per year (360 in total), and this is equivalent to studying full time at a traditional university. Although study at the OU is significantly different to traditional universities due to flexible, distance learning, employers/sponsors and the student should be aware of the academic commitment to this professional qualification.

When undertaking a 60-credit module, students should expect to engage in 16–18 hours of study a week. Within the academic year, students will typically complete two 60-credit modules (120 credits per year) and there will be a period of time when these modules are completed simultaneously. Students will therefore need to undertake approximately 32–36 hours of study a week during the overlap of modules.

The University therefore recommends that students need 36 days per academic year for private study, exams and tutorials if they are studying two modules (120 credits) each year.

Students studying one 60-credit module in an academic year may require 18 study days per year. Typically, when undertaking one module, students should be afforded one half-day study leave per week and one full day per week when engaged in two modules simultaneously.

It is expected that pro-rata provision will be negotiated for students who work part-time. The exact arrangements for study leave will depend on students' work patterns, and whether they work full or part-time, so it is important to reach an agreement with your employer at the outset. Students and the sponsor should consider the academic requirements of this programme and reach an agreement about study leave arrangements prior to commencement on this programme.

Study leave agreements are at the discretion of the employer. However, the OU strongly recommends that employers/sponsors support students to take study leave.

The Northern Ireland Social Care Council has an agreed arrangement for study leave for students when they are carrying out their practice learning opportunity on K216 and K315 and this will be discussed with the relevant practice teacher when the student begins their placement.

Students and employers should also consider how and when annual leave as per employment and contractual obligations should be taken. It is important that terms and

conditions of employment are also considered for students, but to ensure that any leave does not negatively impact practice learning and academic progress. Leave should therefore be discussed at an early stage with employers and, where appropriate, the practice teacher and OU practice tutor. Employer sponsored students on the OU SW Degree are entitled to take annual leave during their course as they hold employee status. Annual leave should be well planned across the leave year and students are encouraged to use annual leave as much as possible before and after placements (PLOs) commence in years 2 and 3 as opposed to during the placement. Where annual leave is taken during placement it is recommended that it is kept to a minimal number of days to avoid disruption to learning and course requirements.

Students may take up to a maximum of six days during the PLO period, however this needs to be agreed and recorded at the initial Practice Learning Agreement meeting.

Students should note that any annual leave taken or any unplanned absence from placement (for example due to sickness) means that placement dates will be required to be extended to ensure all students complete the required number of practice days.

If the combined total of these days extends beyond ten days then the placement may become unviable. Students should be aware that at level 2 the full 85 placement days and 100 days at level 3 must be completed. If annual leave or sick leave is taken (but does not extend ten days in total), the placement period must be extended in order to successfully complete the placement in full.

1.5 Roles of staff involved with the social work degree programme

Figure 2 shows some of the key people involved in delivering the first stage of the programme to you.

The agency coordinator/sponsor

Sponsored students on K113, K216 and K315 will have access to an agency coordinator (or a nominated agency representative/sponsor contact) who is designated by the sponsoring agency to liaise between the employer, the OU and members of the practice learning team. For K113, the agency coordinator is responsible for ensuring that there is a practice verifier in your agency. The agency coordinator also ensures the provision of suitable K216 and K315 placements alongside the Northern Ireland Degree in Social Work Partnership (NIDSWP) and the practice learning coordinator, which can meet both the programme's requirements and your learning needs. Working closely with OU staff, your agency coordinator will be responsible for ensuring that you have two different practice teachers for K216 and K315. Students also have line managers as part of their employment, who may liaise with the agency coordinator to support the management of placement. Students should ensure to maintain good communication with the agency coordinator about any relevant issues, alongside their line manager.

Students studying independently on K113 will not have an agency coordinator and are therefore responsible for finding their own practice experience and verifier.

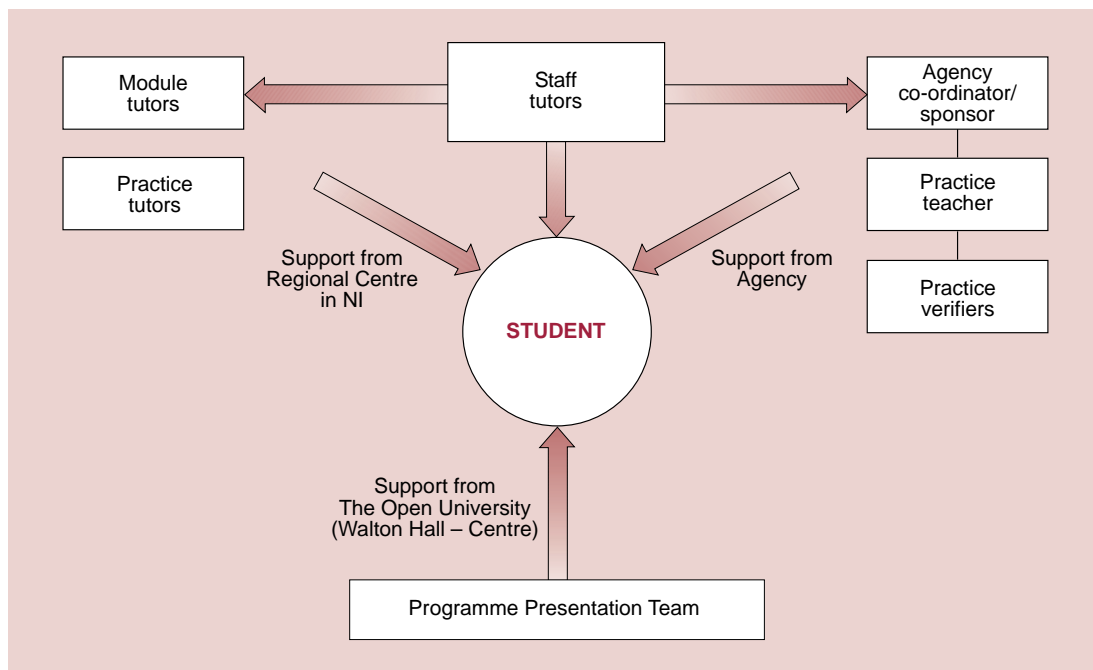


Figure 2 Key people involved in delivering the social work programme

The module tutor

You will have a tutor for each separate academic module. Tutors are Associate Lecturers who work for the OU. Your tutors will mark and assess your written work, provide feedback, deliver workshops/tutorials and facilitate online discussions. They will manage any related activities and deal with any concerns you have, by telephone or email. When you complete K216 and K315, you will undertake academic work which is taught and managed by the module tutor, however as you will also be on placement, you will have a practice tutor who supports practice learning.

The practice verifier

As a student on K113, you will need a verifier, usually a line manager or supervisor, to confirm your full participation in ten 'practice experience' days in a social care workplace. The verifier will also comment on your potential to engage safely, professionally and effectively with service users. If you are a sponsored student on K113, your agency coordinator will nominate the verifier, and you will undertake your practice experience days in your normal workplace. If you are an independent K113 student, you will be expected to identify your own verifier as part of finding your practice experience days.

The practice tutor

On K216 and K315 you will have a practice tutor (previously known as a programme tutor) who acts on behalf of the OU to ensure that all programme and regulatory requirements are met in your practice learning opportunities. The practice tutor will facilitate three practice learning meetings while you are on placement and provide advice and support to students, practice teachers, onsite supervisors and agency coordinators. The practice tutor will also be responsible for verifying the Practice Assessment Report which you upload to the university at the end of placement. This report is essentially a portfolio of

evidence to demonstrate how you have met the required learning objectives and key roles for placement learning.

The practice teacher

(Sometimes known as a 'practice educator' in other nations)

On K216 and K315 you will have a practice teacher, who will have been assigned by your sponsoring agency or by the Northern Ireland Degree in Social Work Partnership (NIDSWP). Your practice teacher ensures that the work you carry out is appropriate to meet the relevant Key Roles and National Occupational Standards for the Social Work (Northern Ireland) degree (see Part 4). Your practice teacher supervises, educates and supports you, assesses your practice and makes a recommendation about whether you have passed or failed your practice learning opportunity.

Onsite supervisor

For K216 and K315, where the practice teacher is not located in your placement agency, you may also have an onsite supervisor who will meet your day-to-day needs for support and supervision during the placement learning opportunity (PLO).

Staff tutors

These are the OU's locally based academics who manage the Social Work programme in Northern Ireland. They are the line managers for tutors (associate lecturers) and practice tutors. They are also the main contact for sponsoring agencies and may organise local meetings for employers and briefing sessions for practice teachers. The staff tutor will liaise with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) to ensure that the Northern Ireland regulatory requirements are being met and represent the OU on the NIDSWP meetings.

Professional lead in social work (NI)

The OU social work degree is available in all four regions of the UK and each nation has a Professional Lead who ensures the tuition, curriculum, assessment and academic strategy for the degree meets nation specific requirements. They also work closely with NISCC to maintain regulatory standards within the degree and they provide academic leadership for the programme.

Programme presentation team

This team comprises academic and academic-related staff across the four UK nations who write, produce and update the module materials and website and are advised by their academic colleagues in Northern Ireland. Although these staff work closely with staff tutors in Northern Ireland, students are unlikely to have much direct contact with this team: your first point of contact is your module tutor, practice tutor, NI staff tutor or your own agency coordinator.

Administrative team in Northern Ireland

There are a number of functions undertaken by OU administrative staff in Northern Ireland. The social work faculty coordinator (Northern Ireland), will be able to give advice

on the application, selection, progression and registration processes. In addition, the social work faculty coordinator has a direct administrative link with the NISCC, the professional regulatory body. The social work coordinator provides administrative support with sponsors and staff tutors for the coordination and evaluation of practice learning and the team is also supported by a faculty assistant.

1.6 Aegrotat awards

Please be aware that if circumstances lead to you receiving an aegrotat award (credits awarded to a student who is unable to complete the degree due to serious illness), you will not be eligible to apply for registration with the NISCC to become a social worker. If you have been awarded an Open Degree in which you completed some modules which are also studied on the social work degree, you will also not be eligible to apply for registration with the NISCC to become a social worker as you have not been awarded a recognised social work qualification.

Part 2 Studying with the OU

This part gives some advice on making the most of your learning on the social work degree and points you towards sources of support. It also includes information and advice about computing requirements.

2.1 Supported open learning

The Open University's unique style of distance learning is called 'supported open learning'.

- 'Open learning' means that you will be learning in your own time by reading study material, working on activities and writing assignments.
- 'Supported' means support from a tutor and from other OU staff based at the national centre in Belfast.

In addition to your independent-study time, you will have plenty of opportunities to work alongside other students, both online and face to face, in your tutorials or workshops.

If you are new to the OU or haven't studied with us for a few years, you are strongly advised to check your computer setup (see Section 2.7) and read the advice about finding your way around your online study materials in the Module Guide.

2.2 Study materials

Distance-learning study materials provide the foundation for your learning experience. Advice about computer and software requirements is given in Section 2.7. In addition to the module materials, you will have access to a wide range of programme resources, including the 'Aids to Practice' and the OU Library resources. You will be able to access these from your module website.

2.3 Studying two modules concurrently

If you are a Department of Health funded student, you are typically expected to complete the degree in three years. This means that you will be studying two modules per year and there will be a period of time when you will be completing two modules concurrently. Please be aware that studying two 60-credit modules per year is equivalent to studying full-time at a conventional university. This is a significant undertaking if you are also working or on a practice learning opportunity, so you should plan your studies carefully and in consultation with your employer or staff tutor. You should also bear in mind the escalating academic demands as you move through the degree programme. To help you manage your time, you may find it helpful to look at the online study planners for both modules. You can then organise your study time to ensure you keep up with the study materials and meet the various deadlines for assessed work.

The academic year begins in October, where you will commence the first module of that year. That module continues until approximately May/June of the following year. The second module of the academic year begins in February (however for K216 and K315, the placement element of the module begins early January) and continues until August/September. As such, there will be a number of months where you will be studying two modules at the same time.

Some students who are not funded by the Department of Health may choose to complete one module per year. This means that it may take longer than three years to complete the degree. If you need to slow the pace of your study due to personal reasons such as

maternity leave or health issues, your employer may agree to allow you to take a leave of absence/defer study or complete one module per year. If you are experiencing difficulties, it is important that you discuss this with your sponsor and an OU staff tutor, so that we can discuss your study time intentions and what support is available to you. Please note that all students are required to complete the degree within eight years of commencing the degree, as per NISCC regulations.

2.4 Supporting your study

The K113 Module Guide and module website provides information and activities to help you get started with your OU studies and develop your academic and digital literacy skills. It is recommended that you familiarise yourself with these resources. As you progress through the course, further support will be provided in other modules.

If you have a disability or an additional requirement and would like information on the support and services available, please visit 'Services for disabled students' via StudentHome or at <https://help.open.ac.uk/browse/disability>, or contact the Student Support Team in Northern Ireland.

Student support facilities can be accessed online via the 'Help Centre' link on StudentHome, where support advisers are also available to provide individual advice and guidance.

You should also consult your sponsor if you believe that you may need reasonable adjustments to be provided in your placement agency due to a disability, as recognised under the Disability Discrimination Act (1995). Prior to allocation of placements, an OU staff member will complete a 'student profile' with you. This is an opportunity to discuss any disability related needs or concerns.

2.5 Tutorial support

Your module tutors will offer individual guidance and support throughout your academic studies. If you experience difficulties with any aspect of a module, contact your tutor in the first instance, by telephone or email.

You will also have regular contact with your tutors through face-to-face tutorials, workshops and online interactions – for example, online forums or tutorials run via the OU Adobe Connect platform. K113, K216 and K315 tutorials/workshops are face-to-face and *approximately* once per month, during the course of these modules. Please note that face-to-face workshops/tutorials are held in a Belfast learning centre and may be midweek or weekend with a full day of teaching, and attendance is mandatory. If these teaching events clash with working commitments, your employer must release you from work or you may be required to reschedule your work pattern. Tutorials for other modules in the degree are held online and may be held in the evening or at weekends. Details regarding tutorial/workshop dates will be provided at the beginning of a module. **It may not be possible to provide tutorial event details any sooner than this, however module teams will endeavour to share this information with students as soon as possible.**

You are expected to take part in tutorials and workshops. For the practice learning modules (K113, K216 and K315), you are required to attend the compulsory face-to-face workshops. These are mandatory, as they form part of an essential programme of skills teaching which will support your practice learning. In K113, the face-to-face tutorials will be part of the 'Preparation for Practice', regulatory requirement for student social workers and there is a minimum 80 per cent attendance requirement in order for you to pass this module. Within the workshops you will have the opportunity to practice and develop your

skills using role plays. You will be observed and given written feedback during the workshops. You must pass this aspect of the module, as it is a threshold assessment which should indicate that you are 'prepared for practice' and ready to begin practice learning with service users at Stage 2.

On K216 and K315 you will also have a practice tutor who will organise meetings to support and monitor your practice learning. You can read more about this role in Part 1. These meetings will take place in the agency where you are undertaking your practice learning opportunity, but may also be online if required.

An experienced tutor can enrich the student's understanding of the module materials and facilitate their application of theory and knowledge to practice. In addition, we know from experience and research that students who attend tutorials and workshops are more successful in their studies. Furthermore, these events provide an opportunity for you to meet other students and your tutor face-to-face. It is important that you inform your tutor and explain the reason if you cannot attend any tutorials, both as a matter of professional courtesy and because the University may share non-attendance details with sponsors. If you do not attend a workshop, you will be asked to complete additional assessed work, but please note that on K113 you must attend at least 80 per cent of workshops and additional assessed work to compensate non-attendance will only be accepted for up to 20 per cent of missed workshops.

Another way of maintaining contact with your tutor and other students is through the range of online interactions made possible via forums and online 'rooms' provided on most of the module websites. Here you can interact with other students and your tutor and participate in online discussions over a period of time. Students find this a valuable way to further explore the module themes and develop the online communication skills that are important to social work.

2.6 OU online learning systems

When you join the OU you have access to a range of online tools via StudentHome or your module website. Please refer to the K113 Module Guide for information about getting connected and contacting the Computing Helpdesk.

2.7 Access to a computer and the internet

It is your own responsibility to make sure you have access at home to a computer or other similar digital or mobile device and that this includes an internet connection and access to a printer. It is important to have a working microphone (preferably a headset) in order to be able to fully participate in the online workshops.

Details of the general computing specifications for any module can be found within the 'Computing requirements' section of the module description, available on StudentHome. This includes further detailed information on the computing specifications for social work modules (including the software you need and checks you should make), as provided in the document called 'Digital literacy and use of computing on the Social Work Degree' (The Open University, 2014).

While you are studying each module, you will need to be online regularly in order to access the module website learning materials, to keep in touch with your tutor and fellow students, and to receive OU news updates. To complete the interactive computer-marked assignments (iCMAs) and submit your tutor marked assignments (TMAs) you will need to be online. You may choose to download materials in other formats to enable you to study offline alongside any printed materials you receive.

In the lead-up to an assignment cut-off date you will need more sustained access to a computer to write the assignment and complete any related skills work. You may find it useful during the first weeks on the module to monitor how long you spend on the computer on these different tasks to help plan when and where you need internet access. For activities that make use of media clips of case study material, you are likely to need access for longer periods, depending on the nature of the activity.

2.8 Checking compatibility

Early on in each module it is important to check that you and your tutor are using compatible software so that tutor feedback on assignments can be read. On occasions, if settings are incorrect or inappropriate software is used, you may be unaware that there is feedback available in the marked assignment script. Since this is one of the most valuable learning opportunities in the module, it is essential to ensure this exchange of information is set up correctly. A trial exercise is therefore scheduled at the start of each module for you and your tutor to exchange a 'dummy' assignment and resolve any issues with the OU Computing Helpdesk.

Part 3 The social work curriculum

The following sections summarise the content of the BA (Hons) Social Work (Northern Ireland) degree, outline the programme's approach to the academic and practice curriculum, and explains how you will be assessed.

3.1 Academic and professional requirements

The BA (Hons) Social Work (Northern Ireland) curriculum is underpinned by the following academic, regulatory and professional standards required for Northern Ireland:

- The *Subject benchmark statements: Social work* (QAA, 2016)
- The *Northern Ireland Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work* (DHSSPS and NISCC, 2014, amended 2015)
- *The practice learning requirements for the Northern Ireland social work degree* (NISCC, 2010)
- *The standards for practice learning for the degree in social work* (NISCC, revised 2018)
- *Improving and safeguarding social wellbeing – A strategy for social work in Northern Ireland (2012–2022)* (DHSSPS, April 2012)
- *The purpose of social work: Improving and safeguarding social wellbeing* (DoH, 2017)
- *Review of the degree in social work* (NISCC, 2019) – report on the five-yearly review of the degree in social work.

The *Northern Ireland framework specification for the degree in social work* sets out a single comprehensive set of learning outcomes in the form of performance criteria, core skills, and knowledge statements for all honours degrees in social work in Northern Ireland. This document is based on the Key Roles and National Occupational Standards (NOS) for social work. You can read more about them in Part 4 of this handbook.

3.2 The four components of good practice

The academic teaching in the practice learning modules is built around four components of good practice which are introduced in K113. The four components are:

- knowledge
- skills
- values and ethics
- the social work process.

You will find more details in 'Getting started' in Week 1 of the K113 module website.

3.3 Social work values

As part of your learning, you will be assessed on your ability to discuss and apply social work values, and you will need to develop your skills in anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice. Students find that their ability to do these increases throughout their learning on the programme. There is learning material in each of the modules to help you develop in this area.

Students in Northern Ireland should be aware and adhere to the International Definition of Social Work.

'Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.'

(DHSSPS and NISCC, 2015)

The Northern Ireland framework specification for the degree in social work sets out the 'Value and Ethical Principles' for social work students. These state that:

'Values are not ideals. They are a set of practical criteria to inform and guide actions, decision making and the relationship between the social worker and others. Values are determinants of behaviour and should be integral to social work practice. To be competent against the standards contained in the Framework Specification, social work students must demonstrate that they have achieved the performance criteria whilst adhering to and demonstrating the values and principles stated within the NISCC Standards of Conduct for Social Work Students, and the values embedded in them' (please refer to Appendix 1).

(DHSSPS and NISCC, 2015)

The following values inform and underpin the Standards of Conduct.

- Social work students must: respect the rights, dignity and inherent worth of individuals.
- Work in a person-centred way and treat people respectfully and with compassion.
- Support and promote the independence and autonomy of service users while acting in the best interests of service users and carers.
- Uphold and promote equality, diversity and inclusion ensuring the care they provide is safe and effective and of a high quality.

Social work students will work with a range of service users and carers and will be working with the groups outlined in Section 75, and Schedule 9, of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 which came into force on the 1 January 2000. This places a statutory obligation on public authorities, in carrying out their various functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity (DHSSPS and NISCC, 2015).

Furthermore, students also need to be aware of the Statements of Expectations from those who use services and their carers and meet them in their practice. Work was undertaken with those who use services and their carers to develop statements of their expectations of social workers (please refer to Appendix 2).

Further information on the *Northern Ireland Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work* and other relevant documents can be located in the Practice Management Section of the Module Websites for K216 and K315.

3.4 The relationship between academic and practice

learning

The BA (Hons) Social Work comprises six modules (see Section 3.5). The three 'practice learning' modules (K113, K216 and K315) focus on relating theoretical knowledge, skills and values to social work practice. They provide the spine for the degree and mark your progress through it, as you cannot move on to the next stage of the practice learning module until you have completed the previous one. The other modules do not include assessed practice learning but focus on specific areas of knowledge that are relevant to practice. You will be expected to draw on your academic knowledge – from all of the modules – as you progress through your practice learning.

3.5 Brief module descriptions

Stage 1 modules

K102 An introduction to health and social care

We all depend on care services at some time in our lives – at home; in hospitals, clinics or doctors' surgeries; in community and residential settings. As a key Stage 1 module, K102 provides an authoritative overview of health and social care underpinned by health and social policy, practice expertise and social science. The learning experience is greatly enhanced by real-life case studies taking you deep into the experience of receiving care and working in care services. This module will help you to build knowledge and understanding of care work and care services, develop skills, and prepare for further study.

and

K113 Foundations for social work practice

This key introductory Stage 1 module is a compulsory module of the BA (Hons) Social Work (Northern Ireland) programme. It will help develop your knowledge of the key roles of social work and introduce the social work Standards of Conduct and Practice required by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council. It explores ideas about what social work is – using case studies with children, older people, mental health communities, children with disabilities, and people with learning disabilities to apply learning to practice contexts. The module will have ten days of verified practice experience and a range of compulsory face-to-face and online workshops/tutorials. Within the face-to-face workshops you will have the opportunity to practise and develop your skills using role plays. You will be observed and given written feedback during the workshops. You must pass this aspect of the module, as it is a threshold and regulatory assessment which should indicate that you are 'Prepared for Practice' and ready to begin practice learning with service users at Stage 2.

Stage 2 modules

K271 Social Work Law

This module provides social work students with a comprehensive overview of the law and law-informed practice. Additional study materials will be provided for Northern Ireland students that are nation specific. K271 has three blocks of study. The first block discusses the Legal Context of Social Work – reviewing legal principles, structures and processes, including human rights, the courts and criminal justice. Block 2 is about Adults and the Law – examining legal aspects of social care, safeguarding, mental capacity and mental

health. Block 3 considers Children and the Law – addressing private and public law for children, child protection, and permanency planning. As well as providing up-to-date legal knowledge, K271 considers in detail the complexities of social work practice in legal and organisational settings.

and

K216 Applied social work practice

This module is only available to social work students who are sponsored on the Social Work (Northern Ireland) degree and have passed K113. K216 helps you to understand the application of social work knowledge to practice, addressing key roles and standards for social workers and relevant knowledge, values and skills for social work. The module includes an 85-day placement (usually in your own organisation) under the supervision of a practice teacher appointed by your sponsoring agency. This module includes academic work through Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAs) and an End of Module Assessment (EMA). In addition, you will complete an e-portfolio which includes a Practice Assessment Report (PAR) which evidences your learning from the placement period.

Stage 3 optional modules

You must choose one from the following options:

K314 Approaches to Mental Health

Over the past century there has been a radical shift in responses to people who experience mental health problems. In this module you will learn about how politics and concepts about mental health and professionalism have driven contemporary approaches to these issues. By directly relating theory to case studies and examples, you will reflect upon how the services that are offered shape the lives and experiences of individuals supported by a range of practitioners in statutory organisations, the third sector and beyond. You will also critique the role of psychiatry and other professional groups and consider how diagnosis shapes mental-health practice and the benefits and limitations of current responses.

or

K323 Investigating Health and Social Care

In an age in which various kinds of knowledge and research can be instantly available via the internet it is essential for health and social care students to learn discernment, and critical appreciation of the best knowledge and research available. This module concentrates on teaching you the skills necessary to conduct an investigation into a subject area of your own choice in a systematic way through a literature review.

or

K318 Leading, managing, caring

This module is designed to appeal to anyone with an interest in caring services in a modern, complex and demanding world. From service users and informal carers to social workers and clinicians, if people don't work effectively together, the quality of services will be undermined. Rooted in the foundations of a caring approach to leadership and management, this module provides tools and insight to understand your role in relation to others. Whether you are managing a large team of people or simply trying to ensure good-quality care for yourself or a loved one, this module will help you achieve the best outcomes.

or

KE322 Young lives, parenting and families

In this module, students will consider the following: What does it mean to be a child or young person today? How is childhood, youth, parenting and family shaped by society and culture, and how do current ideas compare with those of the past? Is this a good time to be young? What is the influence of age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, disability and geography? This module takes an interdisciplinary approach to exploring these issues, drawing on a range of data, research and audio-visual material. It will develop your study and employability skills and provide you with opportunities to debate issues with academics and other students.

and

K315 Critical social work practice

This is the final module in the Social Work degree and therefore must be the last module to be completed. This module will support you as a student social worker in becoming a confident, critical, analytical and reflective practitioner, and an independent learner. It guides you towards sources of information to interrogate and evaluate. It identifies what critical reflection is and supports its application across a range of knowledge and practices. You will reflect on practice and develop research literacy; and explore how research can inform practice and be used by practitioners. You will also examine the nature of organisations supplying social work services, how they are changing and what this means for social work practice and practitioners. The module includes a 100-day placement under the supervision of a practice teacher appointed by your sponsoring agency or the Northern Ireland Degree in Social Work Partnership (NIDSWP). Similar to K216, this module includes academic work through Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAs) and an End of Module Assessment (EMA). In addition, you will submit a Practice Assessment Report (PAR) which evidences your learning from the placement period.

3.6 Academic assessment

Within each module you will complete a series of Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAs) and an End of Module Assessment (EMA). When on placement, alongside TMAs and an EMA, you will also complete a Practice Assessment Report (PAR). The PAR is essentially a portfolio evidencing the work you have completed while on placement and demonstrating how you have met placement standards. The PAR will be made up of a number of documents completed at various stages as you progress through your PLO. The PAR which you complete on K216 will be completed electronically and will be called an e-portfolio. More guidance on this platform will be provided prior to placement starting. On K315, the PAR will be a paper document which you must upload and submit to the university assessment portal.

There is detailed information about academic assessment on the relevant module websites. Please read the guidance carefully as the structure of assignments and the assessment requirements differ for each module. The online assessment guidance for each module will advise you on the cut-off dates for submission and explain what you need to do.

Within the module websites, you will also be able to access general guidance on writing assignments for assessment purposes and other study support resources.

3.7 Practice learning and assessment

Each stage of the degree carries different expectations about practice learning to meet regulatory and professional standards. K113 will have 10 days of practice experience and includes the Preparation for Practice assessment. This will involve opportunities to practice and develop your skills and receive feedback and an assessment of your progress in this area. Successful completion of the module will enable sponsored students to progress to K216.

On K216, you will undertake an 85-day placement and on K315, you will undertake a 100-day placement. K216 will be your first opportunity to begin applying your learning to real practice contexts. It will also be the first real life assessment of your practice. When you move on to your K315 practice learning opportunity, you will consolidate your learning and also develop your practice skills further by demonstrating a greater level of skill and autonomy.

Your practice learning will be assessed using the Six Key Roles and the 20 National Occupational Standards (NOS) which are contained within them. See Part 4 of this handbook.

The Framework Specification describes the key components of the social work role and these are outlined in Appendix 1 of the Practice Learning Guide. Each NOS standard includes a set of Performance Criteria, (learning outcomes), a set of Core Skills, and a set of Knowledge & Understanding Statements (available at www.niscc.info).

Your sponsor and/or the practice learning coordinator are responsible for arranging appropriate practice learning opportunities in accordance with the OU and the NISCC Standards for Practice Learning.

Placements must be in two different practice settings providing contrasting experiences in working with different service user groups. At least one placement must be located away from your own workplace. During either placement you are required to gain experience of working in a children's setting and also to gain experience of carrying out statutory (legal) social work interventions. You must pass both the academic assessment and the practice learning assessment within K216 and K315.

Students in NI must also complete 15 Practice Development Days (PDDs), in addition to their placements. Further information on this can be found in the Practice Learning Guide.

To be awarded the BA (Hons) Social Work (Northern Ireland) qualification, as well as passing all of the required modules and fully completing both placements, you will also need to demonstrate, throughout the degree, that you have complied with the Standards of Conduct for Social Work Students. Successful completion of the BA (Hons) Social Work (Northern Ireland) degree will then permit you to undertake employment as a qualified social worker and register on Part 1 of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) register for 'registered individuals with a social work qualification'. This registration is conditional upon successful completion of an 'Assessed Year in Employment' (AYE). The AYE is for newly qualified social workers in NI and supports them during their first year of employment and assesses their competency in practice.

3.8 Practice Learning Guide

The Practice Learning Guide for Northern Ireland is an important document for you to familiarise yourself with when you are studying the practice modules on the degree, i.e. K113, K216 and K315. It contains full guidance on the practice learning requirements for each stage of the degree, including how you will be supported and assessed. You should ensure that you have the correct guide for the nation you are studying in, as

requirements vary across England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. You should read your guide thoroughly before you begin any assessed practice. You will need to refer back to it from time to time; it will advise you about all the requirements that you have to undertake during your period of assessed practice, i.e., your placement. It will act as your handbook while on placement. Your practice teacher and onsite supervisor will also have a copy. This guidance is available electronically via the 'Practice Management' section of the module websites and on the Social Work Agency website.

3.9 Practice skills and workshops

Social workers need to develop a wide range of 'practice skills', such as communicating, listening, empathising, interviewing, reflecting and analysing.

On K113, you will undertake a number of skills workshops in order to meet the regulatory requirement for the Preparation for Practice assessment. You will also undertake 10 days' practice experience in a social care setting which will give you the opportunity to practise your skills.

On K216 and K315, in addition to your assessed practice placements, you will complete the remaining practice skills days in the form of regular workshops. These face-to-face and online workshops are compulsory and will provide an important opportunity in helping you to integrate your academic study with practice experience.

3.10 Moving through the three stages of the social work degree

Moving through the degree is not only about gaining credits; it is also about accomplishing increasingly complex academic and practice skills as you progress through each stage. In simple terms, the expectations and requirements at the three stages of the degree are summarised below.

The 'Statements of Differential' for Practice Learning highlight the knowledge, skills and values that a student should achieve at each stage. This can be located in the appendices of the Practice Learning Guide for Northern Ireland.

Stage 1 (*K102 Introducing health and social care and K113 Foundations for social work practice*)

At this stage you are acquiring the underpinning knowledge, values and skills to inform your future practice. You are expected to have entry-level skills in literacy, but will develop these during your Stage 1 modules to enable you to write both academic essays and reflective writing assignments. You will begin to develop your skills in reading a range of academic texts and understanding how theory is relevant to practice contexts.

By the point of assessment for 'Preparation for Practice' and readiness for direct practice (that is, prior to your first placement) students need to prepare for initial engagements with service users, use a range of tuning-in frameworks, demonstrate basic communication skills, develop knowledge and understanding of working as a member of an organisation, develop understanding of key theoretical concepts which inform social work practice, show a willingness to learn from feedback and supervision and an ability to evaluate and reflect on their own practice and demonstrate basic social work values, knowledge and skills in order to be able to make effective use of the first practice placement.

Stage 2 (K271 *Social work law and K216 Applied social work practice*)

At this stage you begin to apply your theoretical learning to practice, both during your practice learning and in your academic work. You will be acquiring a broader knowledge base and will be expected to demonstrate that you can select and explain the application of appropriate aspects of knowledge to specific practice contexts. You will therefore be expected to demonstrate the ability to be selective and transfer learning from one context to another. You are also expected to begin to search and identify your own sources at this stage, rather than just use material provided in the study materials.

By the end of the first placement students should demonstrate effective use of knowledge and skills and commitment to core values in social work in a given setting, predominantly dealing with situations of lower complexity, with supervision and support. They will have started to demonstrate capacity to work with situations of greater complexity and where solutions and outcomes are uncertain or less clear-cut. They will have started to: apply social work theories and methods to direct and inform practice, use appropriate sociological/psychological material to further understand a service user's situation and relate knowledge of law and social policy to agency functions.

Stage 3 (KE322 or /K318 or /K314 or /K323 and K315 *Critical social work practice*)

At this stage you move on to develop a critical approach to theory and to your own practice. This means that you are expected to analyse and evaluate the ideas that you come across, comparing them with other options and weighing up the relative value of different ideas and approaches. You will be working more independently, seeking out your own sources, as well as drawing on learning from across the programme. You are also expected to be working more independently in practice, applying your learning in a range of contexts and demonstrating that you can evaluate your own practice and that of other people critically.

By the end of qualifying programmes newly qualified social workers will have demonstrated competence in applying social work approaches with a range of service user groups, the ability to undertake a range of tasks and social work interventions at a foundation level and evidenced the capacity to work effectively with more complex situations. They will have developed confident and competent use of a range of verbal and nonverbal skills and an ability to respond to complex situations. They will demonstrate informed and critical awareness of agency function. They will show ability to challenge individual, institutional and structural oppression in an appropriate and constructive manner. They should be able to work with appropriate autonomy, whilst recognising that final decisions will often rest with their supervisor or other senior authority. They will seek appropriate support, supervision and be ready to pursue continuing professional development. These competences will have been demonstrated through the last (or latter parts of their) placement together with their final assessment of other course work in the social work programme.

Part 4 Professional standards for Northern Ireland

The practice learning module materials are designed to apply across the nations of the UK. They can be located under 'Practice Management' on the social work module websites.

This part of the handbook will introduce you to the professional requirements and standards for social work in Northern Ireland, which are set out in the *Northern Ireland Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work* (2015). It will also outline the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) Standards of Conduct for Social Work Students that students must adhere to and demonstrate during their study (Appendix 1). At certain points in your study you will be asked to refer to the specific professional and regulatory standards for Northern Ireland and to gain more understanding of them. All social work students have to register with NISCC prior to commencing the social work degree. This section will also introduce you to continuous professional development for social work in Northern Ireland and make reference to current policy documents that provide contextual information about social work in Northern Ireland.

4.1 Introduction to social work education in Northern Ireland

Social work is a regulated profession, which means that only those who are registered with the appropriate regulatory body and hold a social work qualification are entitled to practise and use the protected title of 'social worker'. The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) is the regulatory body for Northern Ireland.

The NISCC is a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department of Health (DoH), which was established on 1 October 2001 by the Health and Personal Social Services Act (Northern Ireland) 2001. The Act requires the NISCC to promote high standards for social workers in their conduct, practice and training.

As the regulator of social work education and training in Northern Ireland, the NISCC is also responsible for setting standards of social work education, ensuring these standards are being met by course providers, and that social workers are equipped with the knowledge and skills to deliver quality services that meet the needs of users of services and their carers. These standards are set out in the *Northern Ireland Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work*.

Fifty per cent of the degree is delivered through practice learning; therefore, a partnership approach between academic and workplace staff is essential to support the integration of theory with practice, to promote the implementation of evidence-based practice and to ensure that there is coherence and progression between the academic and practice components of the course.

The degree seeks to prepare students to work in a broad range of situations and respond to and contribute to change. A social work course must provide three main elements of professional development:



Figure 3 Three main elements of professional development (DHSSPS and NISCC, 2015)

Social work undergraduate education in NI is supported by a strong weave of partnership arrangements that ensure the Degree meets the needs of service users and carers, employers, and communities.

The Northern Ireland Degree in Social Work Partnership (NIDSWP) was established to co-ordinate a consistent regional approach to delivery of the degree, including admissions and practice learning. The OU in Northern Ireland became a partner member of the NIDSWP in April 2020 when the OU Social Work degree was approved to provide social work education in Northern Ireland (<https://nidswp.net>).

The BA (Hons) Social Work (Northern Ireland) degree was approved by NISCC in April 2020 (with conditions) to provide a programme of education that is delivered in accordance with regulatory and professional requirements. Successful completion will provide students with both an honours degree and a professional social work qualification.

The Open University has established a Collaborative Partnership which is made up of relevant stakeholders across the statutory and voluntary sector, including a NISCC professional adviser and NIDSWP representative. This partnership will monitor and review all aspects of how the OU degree is delivered and managed.

4.2 Standards in social work education

The *Northern Ireland framework specification for the degree in social work* (2015) and associated NISCC requirements and standards specify what should be taught and assessed as part of the degree to promote consistency across courses and relevance to the needs of service users, carers and employers.

There are **six Key Roles** that set out in detail the key core skills, knowledge and standards that all students are required to meet during their practice learning opportunity in K216 and K315.

The key roles are further broken down into **20 National Occupational Standards (NOS)** which students are required to meet in order to fulfil the Key Roles.

The Key Roles and NOS are statements that set out what student social workers must know, understand and be able to do in their practice learning opportunity at the required stage.

The NOS standards are the general benchmark statements that explain the professional practice components of each key role.

Course providers are also expected to maintain a curriculum which meets the knowledge statements, core skills and values of the six Key Roles and NOS.

The six Key Roles:

- Key role 1: Maintain professional accountability
- Key role 2: Practice professional social work
- Key role 3: Promote engagement and participation
- Key role 4: Assess needs, risks and circumstances
- Key role 5: Plan for person-centred outcomes
- Key role 6: Take actions to achieve change

Please familiarise yourself with Appendix 1 of the Practice Learning Guide, which provides full details of the Key Roles and NOS that you will be working towards on your practice learning opportunity.

4.3 Standards of Conduct for Social Work Students

All students undertaking social work training in Northern Ireland are required to be registered with NISCC before they commence their training. The Register will allow employers and the public to verify that a social work student has met the requirements for entry to the Register and has formally agreed to abide by the standards set in the NISCC Standards of Conduct for Social Work Students. This makes it clear to students from the outset of their training course what is expected of them as a registered social work student.

The NISCC has also developed Standards of Practice for Social Workers, which outline the knowledge and skills required for competent practice – these are not applicable to students until they are qualified; and Standards of Conduct, which describe the values, attitudes and behaviours expected of social workers.

Together, both sets of standards combine to provide a baseline against which a social worker's conduct and practice will be judged.

Students who are already employed in social care may already be registered with the NISCC as a social care worker and will have previous knowledge and experience adhering to the standards of Conduct and Practice for Social Care Workers. Registration as a social care worker while students are also registered as a student social worker is not a requirement from the NISCC. Students are not required to hold dual registrations, unless this is a specific employment or other regulatory requirement. Some students who hold managerial positions in social care may be registered with the NISCC as a social care manager. In some instances, these students may need to maintain this registration, while also registered as a student social worker, as this may be an RQIA requirement. Students should ensure to check registration requirements with their employers, but in all instances, students must be registered as a student social worker while studying this degree.

Summary of the Standards of Conduct for Social Work Students (Refer to full text in Appendix 1)

As a social worker, you must:

- protect the rights and promote the interests and wellbeing of service users and carers
- strive to establish and maintain the trust and confidence of service users and carers
- promote the autonomy of service users while safeguarding them as far as possible from danger or harm
- respect the rights of service users while seeking to ensure that their behaviour does not harm themselves or other people
- uphold public trust and confidence in social care services
- be accountable for the quality of your work and take responsibility for maintaining and improving your knowledge and skills.

As a social work student, you must register with the NISCC and will be expected to conduct yourself, in both private and professional life, in accordance with the Standards. During your time on the programme, if anything happens that might call your conduct into question, it is vital that you share this information immediately with both the OU social work team in Northern Ireland and your sponsor. Part 5 provides further details about circumstances that you need to inform us about.

4.4 Assessed Year in Employment (AYE)

Successful completion of the BA (Hons) Social Work (Northern Ireland) degree is followed by an Assessed Year in Employment (AYE).

Newly qualified social work graduates wishing to practise in Northern Ireland will be registered on the social work part of the register with a condition on their registration that they complete an AYE. The NISCC must ensure that all registrants are fit and competent to be on the Social Work Register and that they meet the requirements to maintain their registration.

During the assessed year, graduates will have the opportunity to apply and consolidate the knowledge, skills and performance criteria (learning outcomes), acquired during training in their employment setting.

Employers must confirm to the NISCC that the registrant is fit to practise as a fully accountable social worker before the AYE condition can be removed (see www.niscc.info).

4.5 The Professional in Practice (PiP) Framework for Social Work

Professional in Practice (PiP) is the continuous professional framework for social work in Northern Ireland. As registered professionals, social workers are required to develop and maintain their knowledge and skills to practise competently and safely.

PiP recognises all learning, both formal and informal. It offers flexibility and autonomy, and places practitioners in charge of their own professional development. It provides an opportunity to accumulate credit by recognising a wide range of training and learning, as well as providing a range of Professional Awards, certificated by NISCC.

Part 5 Registration with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council

'Social work' in Northern Ireland has been a protected title since 1st June 2005, with social workers required by law to register with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) in order to be able to practice in Northern Ireland.

5.1 How to register

The NISCC registration process is conducted through the Online Portal. All social care workers, social work students and UK-qualified social workers who wish to work in Northern Ireland must use this system to register, pay fees, update their registration details and record their training and learning.

For further information you can contact the Customer Service Team if you need advice about registering, if you are unable to access the online service.

Once you are registered as a student social worker with NISCC, you are obliged to inform NISCC of any changed circumstances. This includes change of name or address, change in employment, any new convictions or alternatives to prosecution or disciplinary investigations, as outlined in the NISCC documentation. Failure to disclose this information could lead to withdrawal from the NISCC register and possible consideration under the University Fitness to Practice procedure.

5.2 Duration of registration

Once you have been offered a place on the OU social work degree programme, you must apply to join to the NISCC student social worker register. You may not be able to start your module until you have provided the social work team in Northern Ireland with confirmation of your registration with the NISCC. Furthermore, students must keep their registration up to date and proof of this will be required when they start an external practice learning opportunity (PLO), otherwise it will be withdrawn and students may have to take a gap in their studies. Students are responsible for maintaining registration and yearly payment of fees, however, the OU social work team in NI will endeavour to remind all students about registration at the beginning of each academic year.

You have up to eight years to complete the BA (Hons) Social Work (Northern Ireland) degree from the point of registration. Failure to complete the registration process correctly may delay your registration and could result in withdrawal from the relevant practice learning module.

5.3 Your responsibilities as a student

It is your responsibility to inform the University immediately if something happens that might affect your professional suitability. Concerns might arise when there is evidence that a student's behaviour may be inconsistent with the NISCC standards. Examples of potential concerns include:

- a new or an undisclosed conviction or caution for a criminal offence
- concerns raised about dishonesty, abusing someone's trust, or causing deliberate harm
- proven findings of plagiarism (whether on your practice learning opportunity or in academic work)

- breaches of confidentiality (whether on your practice learning opportunity or in academic work)
- disciplinary investigation or proceedings taken by another body, such as an employer
- other, equally serious, activities that affect public confidence in the social work profession.

The above examples are by way of illustration only, and, if you are in any doubt, you should seek advice from the practice tutor. You should also let us know if your children become subject to any child protection procedures, or if there are any changes in your physical or mental health which may affect your capacity to study or practise. If any of these situations should arise, please be reassured that your circumstances will be considered individually and would not automatically lead to disciplinary action or prevent you from continuing with your training. However, it is essential that you provide us with prompt and accurate information, as failing to do this would usually be treated as misconduct. This applies during the whole of your studies, whether you are or are not engaged in practice learning.

Plagiarism and academic misconduct

Note, in some circumstances, academic misconduct (plagiarism or collusion) may have implications for fitness to practise, where questions are raised about a student's honesty and integrity. Advice about good academic practice and plagiarism can be found in the 'Assessment' section of your module website and via the Study Support link on StudentHome. Students should be aware that proven plagiarism on any social work degree module is automatic referral to the Fitness to Practise procedure.

Breaches of confidentiality

It is essential to ensure that all writing about practice for the social work degree is anonymised, and that no service users or carers can be identified from any examples used in any submitted work. It is a requirement that all identifying information (names, addresses, dates of birth, and so on) is replaced with pseudonyms, and that a clear statement to this effect is made at the beginning of any work for the social work degree involving reference to service users. The OU advice on confidentiality can be accessed from the module websites.

5.4 What happens if concerns arise about your conduct and professional suitability (fitness to practise)?

The NISCC requires universities to have processes in place to investigate concerns about students' conduct and professional suitability, and to take action to address the issue.

There are two OU policies that you need to be aware of in relation to conduct and professional suitability:

The Code of Practice for Student Discipline (available via StudentHome, under the link to 'policy documents for students'): the aim of this code is to make sure that the University maintains academic standards and provides an appropriate learning environment. The code defines conduct that is deemed by the University to constitute an offence. Section SD1.12 of the code clarifies that an offence may also include conduct that is 'likely to

render a student unfit to practise any profession to which the student's qualification leads directly'.

The University's Fitness to Practise Procedure, available via a link on the Social Work Agency website and in the 'Practice management' section of the module website. These procedures operate in conjunction with the University's Code of Practice for Student Discipline. They explain in detail how the University will respond when notified about conduct that has the potential to render a student unsuitable to practise the profession of social work.

The OU is required to inform the NISCC if it instigates the suitability procedures. The NISCC may choose to conduct its own investigation and has the power to suspend or remove a student from its register (which would prevent the student from continuing their social work degree).

The University's Fitness to Practise Procedure and the Code of Practice for Student Discipline both contain full information about appeals.

Part 6 OU student policies

On StudentHome you will find a link to access all of the OU's policy documents for students. These policies contain the rules and regulations that apply to all students registered with the OU, including documents about the OU's equality scheme, complaints and appeals procedures, assessment regulations, plagiarism, the OU Code of Practice for Student Discipline, and other policies that you may wish to refer to at various times. You should also be aware of the qualification regulations and module rules.

The Open University Equality Scheme and Equality Objectives (2012–2016) are also available from StudentHome. The scheme sets out the OU's commitment, vision and principles for promoting educational opportunity. As a public body, the OU also fulfils its Public Sector Equality Duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010.. In Northern Ireland the OU will comply with Section 75, and Schedule 9, of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which places a statutory obligation on public authorities, in carrying out their various functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity to identified groups within society.

On admission to the OU, you will be invited to disclose any health or specific learning needs (such as dyslexia). If you consider that you have particular needs in relation to your academic and practice learning, please discuss these with your sponsor in the first instance.

In addition, please familiarise yourself with the following policies of relevance to the social work programme, which are available on the Social Work Agency website and via StudentHome, under the link to 'policy documents for students':

- The Open University Fitness to Practise Procedure, which operates in conjunction with the OU's Code of Practice for Student Discipline and explains in detail how the programme will respond to professional conduct issues (fitness to practice).
- The Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing) Policy, which outlines the procedure for whistleblowing with particular reference to the experiences of social work students during periods of assessed practice learning (placements). As such it is complementary to, but separate from, the OU's general policies and procedures relating to whistleblowing, the University's complaints procedure, the Code of Practice on harassment, and the Code of Practice for Student Discipline as these apply to students.

When you are on your practice learning opportunity, you will also be subject to the placement agency's workplace policies and procedures while on their premises. Arrangements for finding out about these will be addressed by the practice teacher at your first practice learning meeting and written into the practice learning agreement. Relevant policies relate to health and safety, lone working, safe computer use, equality policies, complaints, grievances, harassment and bullying, whistleblowing, and any other policies specific to the agency.

6.1 Complaints and appeals

If you are unhappy with any aspect of your study on the OU social work degree, the first step is to talk directly with the person concerned, whether it is your module tutor, the practice tutor, a practice teacher or someone else. If this is not possible, or if you are still not satisfied with the response, then you should contact the social work team in Northern Ireland (Ireland-Social-Work@open.ac.uk) which is responsible for the module you are studying.

There are policies and procedures to support you if you wish to bring a matter to the attention of the programme team or the University on a more formal basis. Full information about complaints and appeals can be accessed from StudentHome via the link 'policy documents for students'.

Part 7 Programme management, partnership and quality assurance

There are several committees, groups and processes which play an important role in the management of the programme and its evaluation and development.

7.1 Board of Studies

The purpose of the Board of Studies is, on behalf of the Faculty, to oversee the development and maintenance of the curriculum, to monitor the performance of modules and qualifications within its area of responsibility, and to sponsor appropriate actions and interventions. The Board of Studies creates and develops the curriculum plan for its area of responsibility at both qualification and module level, identifies areas for improvement, and feeds that information directly into Faculty management. The membership includes representation from various stakeholders, including students.

7.2 The Northern Ireland Degree in Social Work Partnership

The NIDSWP is a public body set up by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) which it is accountable to. It represents social work education providers and social work employers engaged in the provision of the Northern Ireland social work degree. Its main remit is to facilitate regional policies and approaches in areas such as student selection, course content, delivery, practice learning provision and any other relevant issues. It has a responsibility for ensuring the monitoring of consistent standards in course provision. The NIDSWP is built on a framework of collaborative working within Northern Ireland. The Open University is a partner and will work collaboratively with the Partnership, in line with the Rules of Approval (NISCC, 2012) for all social work degree providers in Northern Ireland.

7.2.1 OU Collaborative Partnership

An OU Collaborative Partnership acts as a conduit between relevant stakeholders to discuss all pertinent issues for the delivery and management of the OU degree in Northern Ireland. This is a regulatory requirement. It acts as a two-way flow of information and decision-making between the NIDSWP and the OU, ensuring consistency and transparency. The group includes employers, the OU Professional Lead in Northern Ireland, module tutors, student representation and professional advisers from the NISCC and the NIDSWP.

7.3 Service user and carer involvement in the OU social work degree programme

The OU social work programme benefits from the commitment and expertise of service users and carers who have a very good understanding of the programme and work with us to develop it. Members of the Service User and Carer Group are engaged in various aspects of the programme, including elements of student recruitment and selection, the Practice Assessment Panels (see Section 7.9), the Board of Studies and a Practice Reference Group. Service users and carers have also contributed to all reviews of the

programme. In addition, a wide range of service users and carers are involved in the production of teaching materials and critically reading drafts of new materials prior to production.

7.4 Student representation

In addition to the OU-wide systems of obtaining structured feedback from students, there is a student representative for the social work degree in Northern Ireland, one for each stage of the degree programme and one student to present statutory sectors and one for the Third/voluntary sector. The relevant student representative will contact you before each meeting of the OU Collaborative Partnership group in Northern Ireland. They will also give you their contact details, if you want to raise any issues about your experience of the programme at other times.

7.5 Quality assuring teaching and academic assessment

The OU's quality assurance process is implemented through a combination of monitoring and local management. Tutorials (including online) may be visited by the staff tutor or other nominated person. Statistical information about assignment grading and turnaround times is monitored by the staff tutor. In addition, a sample of each module tutor's feedback on students' assignments is read by people appointed and trained as monitors for that module. Monitors also report on the overall quality of module tutor feedback to the Chair of the Examinations and Assessment Board. At the end of each module, students are also invited to provide individualised electronic feedback about their tutor's teaching.

Students are periodically invited to participate in an online survey about their experiences of modules. A further means of gaining feedback is the annual survey of module tutors' views. All survey information and other feedback is reviewed by the module teams.

Another important means of quality assurance is provided by 'external examiners', who are experienced senior academics with social work expertise from outside the OU. External examiners act as impartial and independent moderators who review samples of marked assignments and exams or end-of-module assessment scripts, are invited to comment on examination papers, and participate in the Examinations and Assessment Board. External examiners thus help to ensure that the social work degree's academic standards are comparable with those found nationally, and that its assessment processes are applied fairly and consistently.

7.6 Quality assuring practice learning

The social work programme produces annually updated practice learning guidance which outlines best practice and processes for resolving any issues. On a day-to-day basis, the quality of practice learning opportunities is managed by the OU practice tutor and the staff tutor, alongside the practice teacher, agency co-ordinator and in consultation with the sponsor. The implementation of practice learning processes is overseen by the regulator and NIDSWP and also monitored through the completion of forms returned to the University at critical points during the practice learning opportunity. The forms are scrutinised by the module team, and any concerns are passed to staff tutors to be addressed locally. Thus, the University is able to maintain an overview of practice learning provision and can be alerted to any issues needing attention.

This information enables the OU to review practice learning arrangements and make changes where necessary. While evaluations are collected with the Practice Assessment Report, please be reassured that the process for analysing the data is handled completely separately.

In addition to these formal processes, there is a continual feedback loop between staff tutors and module teams, and through the programme's Practice Reference Group. Informal feedback is also gained through the practice tutors' online forums. All sources of feedback are used to inform an annual review of practice learning processes, which is used to update the practice learning guidance. Responsibility for the provision and review of practice learning in NI sits with the NIDSWP and regulator and feedback on OU students' experiences of practice learning is also monitored through these established processes.

7.7 Role of agencies

As the OU degree is employment based, the University works closely with sponsoring employers, particularly on a regional basis. Many employers have developed long-standing and constructive relationships with the OU and are actively involved in the recruitment and selection of candidates, appointing practice teachers and providing placements. Employers are involved in quality assurance and development in a range of ways, including representation on the OU Collaborative Partnership, the Practice Assessment Panels and the Practice Reference Group.

7.8 Cluster Examinations and Assessment Boards

The OU's Module Result Panels (MRPs) and Cluster Examinations and Assessment Boards (CEABs) advise on the conduct of examinations and end-of-module assessments in consultation with the Assessment, Credit and Qualifications Division of Student Services. They also nominate markers and supervise the marking of examinations, end-of-module assessments and continuous assessment. They determine the awarding of results (via a recommendation to the Senate, which is the highest authority of the University). Their work is reported to the Senate, via the minutes of the award meeting.

7.9 Practice Assessment Panels

The Practice Assessment Panels (PAPs) – applicable for each of the practice learning modules – are another important part of the programme's quality assurance mechanism.

- PAPs quality assure the assessment of practice learning.
- PAPs advise on the practice assessment of individual students by reviewing fails, queries and a sample of 'pass' practice-assessment reports (PARs) to make recommendations to the Module Results Panel.
- Each PAP is chaired by an agency representative who is independent of the University. Membership includes representation from the module team, academic staff from the social work team in Northern Ireland, service user and carer representatives, an employer, a practice tutor and a practice teacher.
- The PAP meetings also consider any unresolved questions, issues raised by the reports and broader issues of quality to report to the CEAB. In exceptional circumstances, where a PAP considers that the practice teacher's recommendation is not supported by the evidence, the PAP may recommend that the CEAB should

overturn the practice teacher's recommendation. The final decision about each PAR is made by the CEAB.

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Appendix 1 NISCC Standards of Conduct and Practice for Social Work Students – (Full text)

1 As a social worker, you must protect the rights and promote the interests and wellbeing of service users and carers.

This includes:

- 1.1 Treating each person as an individual
- 1.2 Treating people with consideration, respect and compassion
- 1.3 Empowering service users and carers to communicate their views, needs and preferences, taking account of their preferred language and form of communication
- 1.4 Respecting and, where appropriate, representing the individual views and wishes of both service users and carers
- 1.5 Supporting service users' right to control their lives and make informed choices about the services they receive Gaining consent as appropriate from service users before you provide care or services, in line with your employer's procedures and any statutory requirements
- 1.6 Explaining your role, the purpose of your involvement and the reasons for any decision you make
- 1.7 Respecting and maintaining the dignity and privacy of service users
- 1.8 Treating service users and carers fairly and promoting equal opportunities
- 1.9 Respecting diversity, beliefs, preferences, cultural differences and challenging discriminatory attitudes or behaviour.

2 As a social worker, you must strive to establish and maintain the trust and confidence of service users and carers.

This includes:

- 2.1 Being honest and trustworthy
- 2.2 Communicating in an appropriate, open, accurate and straightforward way
- 2.3 Being able to communicate clearly in the English language, both verbally and in writing
- 2.4 Respecting confidential information and clearly explaining agency policies about confidentiality to service users and carers
- 2.5 Holding, using and storing records in line with organisational procedures and data protection requirements
- 2.6 Being reliable and dependable
- 2.7 Honouring work commitments, agreements and arrangements and, when it is not possible to do so, explaining why to service users and carers
- 2.8 Declaring issues that might create conflicts of interest and making sure that they do not influence your judgement or practice
- 2.9 Adhering to policies and procedures about accepting gifts and money, hospitality or services from service users and carers
- 2.10 Refusing any loans of money or property from anyone in your care or anyone close to them
- 2.11 Not engaging in practices which are fraudulent in respect of use of public or private monies.

3 As a social worker, you must promote the autonomy of service users while safeguarding them as far as possible from danger or harm.

This includes:

- 3.1 Promoting service users' independence and empowering them to understand and exercise their rights
- 3.2 Using established processes and procedures to assess, respond to and manage dangerous, abusive, discriminatory or exploitative behaviour and practice
- 3.3 Following practice and procedures designed to keep you and other people safe from violent and abusive behaviour at work
- 3.4 Bringing to the attention of your employer or the appropriate authority, without delay, resource or operational difficulties that might get in the way of the delivery of safe practice
- 3.5 Informing your employer or an appropriate authority, without delay, where the practice of colleagues or others may be unsafe or adversely affecting standards of care
- 3.6 Complying with employers' health and safety policies, including those relating to substance misuse
- 3.7 Recognising and using responsibly with service users and carers, the power that comes from your work role.

4 As a social worker, you must respect the rights of service users while seeking to ensure that their behaviour does not harm themselves or other people.

This includes:

- 4.1 Recognising that service users have the right to take positive risks and helping them to identify and manage potential and actual risks to themselves and others
- 4.2 Following risk assessment policies and procedures to assess whether the behaviour of service users or others presents a risk of harm to themselves or other people
- 4.3 Taking necessary steps to minimise the risks of service users' behaviour causing actual or potential harm to themselves or other people
- 4.4 Ensuring that relevant colleagues and agencies are informed about the outcomes and implications of risk assessments in a timely and effective manner

5 As a social worker, you must uphold public trust and confidence in social work services.

In particular you must not:

- 5.1 Abuse, neglect or harm service users, carers or colleagues
- 5.2 Exploit service users, carers or colleagues in any way
- 5.3 Abuse the trust of service users and carers or the access you have to personal information about them or to their property, home or workplace
- 5.4 Form inappropriate personal relationships with service users
- 5.5 Discriminate unlawfully or unjustifiably against service users, carers or colleagues
- 5.6 Condone any unlawful or unjustifiable discrimination by service users, carers or colleagues
- 5.7 Put yourself or other people at unnecessary risk

- 5.8 Behave in a way, in work or outside work, which would call into question your suitability to work in social care services
- 5.9 Use social media or social networking sites or other forms of electronic communication in a way that contravenes professional boundaries, organisational guidelines or NISCC standards.

6 As a social worker, you must be accountable for the quality of your work and take responsibility for maintaining and improving your knowledge and skills.

This includes:

- 6.1 Meeting relevant standards of practice and working in a lawful, safe and effective way
- 6.2 Taking personal and, where appropriate, collective responsibility for quality improvement and safety in line with your job role
- 6.3 Being personally accountable for your actions and able to explain and account for your actions and decisions
- 6.4 Maintaining clear and accurate records as required by procedures established for your work
- 6.5 Informing your employer or the appropriate authority in a timely manner about any personal difficulties that might affect your ability to do your job competently and safely
- 6.6 Informing NISCC and any employers you work for at the first reasonable opportunity if your fitness to practise has been called into question. This includes ill-health that affects your ability to practise, criminal convictions, disciplinary proceedings and findings of other regulatory bodies or organisations
- 6.7 Seeking assistance from your employer or the appropriate authority if you do not feel able or adequately prepared to carry out any aspect of your work, or you are not sure about how to proceed in a work matter
- 6.8 Ensuring that if there is a conflict between the NISCC standards of conduct and your work environment, your first obligation is to the standards
- 6.9 Helping service users and carers to make complaints where required, taking complaints seriously and responding to them or passing them to the appropriate person including your employer or NISCC
- 6.10 Making service users and carers aware of your responsibilities within the NISCC standards of conduct
- 6.11 Being open and honest with people if things go wrong, including providing a full and prompt explanation to your employer of what has happened
- 6.12 Co-operating with any investigation or formal inquiry into your conduct, the conduct of others, or the care or services provided to a service user where appropriate
- 6.13 Working openly and co-operatively with colleagues and treating them with respect
- 6.14 Taking responsibility for work delegated to you, recognising and working within the limits of your knowledge, skills and experience
- 6.15 Recognising that you remain responsible for the work that you have delegated to other workers
- 6.16 Recognising and respecting the roles and expertise of workers from other disciplines and agencies and working in partnership with them

- 6.17 Undertaking relevant training and learning to maintain and improve your knowledge and skills and meeting NISCC Post Registration Training and Learning Requirements in line with your job role
- 6.18 Contributing to the learning and development of others.

Appendix 2 Statement of Expectations from those who use services, and carers

This Statement of Expectations has been shared with the NISCC Participation Partnership and social work students. Service users and carers endorse the statements below and would remind social workers and social work students that they must be aware at all times that they are working with human beings who are real people, who lead real lives and have feelings and individual needs. Service users and carers are Experts by Experience and should be as involved as possible in decisions about their lives, bearing in mind the social worker's statutory duty of care to them and significant others.

5.1.1 Communication skills and information sharing

Social workers must:

- explain their:
 - a. role and the purpose of contact;
 - b. their powers, including legal powers in a way that can be understood by all involved;
- inform users and carers about what steps they are going to take;
- give information to users and carers about their rights and entitlements;
- be open and honest about what they can and cannot do;
- be honest if the agency they represent cannot offer the resources needed;
- inform users and carers about what is available, beyond the brief of their organisation;
- listen actively to what users and carers have to say;
- talk to those requiring and using services, and their carers, with due respect for their age, ethnicity, culture, understanding and needs;
- involve users and carers in decision making;
- offer users and carers choices and options;
- share records with users and carers;
- build honest relationships based on clear communication.

5.1.2 Good social work practice

Social workers must:

- be good at time keeping; and time management;
- be good at starting, continuing and closing relationships;
- respect confidentiality, and explain when there is a need to share information with others;
- recognise the expertise of users and carers groups, families and communities about their own situation and have regard for their wishes;
- involve users and carers in all meetings which may affect them, where appropriate;
- give users and carers groups, families and communities sufficient time to work with them properly;
- ensure that contact is maintained;
- assess needs properly:
 - a. making sure that all options are explored properly before deciding on a plan;
 - b. looking for options when the services needed are not available;

- c. being creative;
- d. involving users and carers:
- e. in setting goals;
- f. when developing a care plan, and being honest about the limitations of choice and the options;
- g. when reviewing and changing plans;
- help users and carers groups, families and communities access benefits and services;
- assess risk and support risk taking when appropriate;
- work with users and carers to develop and/or maintain independence;
- link users and carers to support groups and networks and support them to extend involvement with groups and networks;
- be accountable to users and carers for their practice.

5.1.3 Advocacy

Social workers must be able to:

- lobby on behalf of users and carers groups, families and communities to access services;
- challenge their own organisations on behalf of users and carers, communities, and excluded groups;
- challenge injustice and lack of access to services;
- challenge poor practice, racism and discrimination and promote social justice;
- advise users and carers about independent advocacy that can best meet their needs;
- enable users and carers, groups and communities to be empowered to represent their views;
- help users and carers, groups and communities, to represent their views in all meetings affecting them;
- involve independent advocates, where appropriate.

5.1.4 Working with other professionals, agencies and sectors

Social workers must:

- be honest, clear and make sure all involved understand:
 - a. what happens to the information users and carers give to the social worker;
 - b. how it is kept;
 - c. who it is shared with, and why;
 - d. how it might be used;
- understand what information other organisations can offer and share with users and carers;
- work effectively with others to improve services and best outcomes offered to users and carers.

5.1.5 Knowledge and Research

Social workers must:

- have knowledge of:

- a. services relevant to users' and carers' needs and circumstances (not just those offered by their organisation) and how to access other relevant services;
- b. benefits and direct payments;
- c. legislation;
- have in-depth knowledge of the users and carers group and communities they are working with;
- keep themselves up to date with:
 - a. all relevant knowledge, research and information;
 - b. the rights of users and carers.

5.1.6 Values

Social workers must:

- have respect for:
 - a. users and carers, regardless of their age, ethnicity, culture, level of understanding and need;
 - b. the expertise and knowledge users and carers have about their own situation;
- empower users, carers and communities in decisions affecting them;
- be honest about:
 - a. the power invested in them, including legal powers;
 - b. their role and resources available to meet need;
- respect confidentiality, and inform users and carers when information needs to be shared with others;
- be able to:
 - a. challenge discriminatory images and practices affecting users and carers and excluded groups and put users and carers first;
 - b. balance the needs of individuals, families, carers, groups and communities first.

Glossary of terms

Agency coordinator	The person in the sponsoring agency who liaises directly with the social work programme and the placement, and who supports practice learning placements, verifiers and practice educators. See Section 1.5 of this handbook.
Agency website	An OU website that provides information and resources for sponsoring agencies. See the Introduction to this handbook for access details.
Associate lecturer	Also known as an AL, a tutor, or a module tutor, this is a member of OU staff who tutors a group of students, marks assignments and supports students through the module via face-to-face, telephone, email or online contact. They may also deliver group tutorials. See Section 1.5 of this handbook.
BA (Hons) in Social Work (Northern Ireland)	The OU's official name for the social work degree qualification which is required by practitioners applying for NISCC registration as a qualified social worker. Also known as 'the social work degree'.
Cluster Examinations and Assessment Board (CEAB)	The OU board which oversees the conduct of exams and other forms of assessment, and determines students' results (see Section 7.8 of this handbook).
Curriculum	A programme of knowledge and skills which leads to qualification.
K113 Foundations for social work practice	Stage 1 practice learning module (for sponsored students who are registered for the social work degree and available as a stand-alone module for independent students).
K216 Applied social work practice	Stage 2 practice learning module (for sponsored students who are registered for the social work degree).
K315 Critical social work practice	Stage 3 practice learning module (for sponsored students who are registered for the social work degree).
Module	A discrete unit of study (used to be known as 'course'), which may be studied on its own or be part of a larger programme of study.
Module Guide	An OU guidance document that provides an overview of each module.
Module website	The website for each module, which provides access to the module and other study resources.
NIDSWP	The Degree Partnership is an association of education institutions and employing agencies – statutory and voluntary. Its main purpose is to facilitate regional policies and approaches in areas such as student selection, course content, delivery and practice learning provision.

Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC)	The regulatory body for social work in Northern Ireland , which students must register with as a social work student. See Section 5 of this handbook.
Onsite supervisor	A person who is appointed by the sponsor to provide day-to-day support and supervision during a K216 or K315 placement, in cases where the practice teacher is not located on-site.
Plagiarism	Submitting an assignment containing work that is not your own, without indicating this to the marker (acknowledging your sources). See the 'Assessment' section of the module website for further advice.
Practice Assessment Panel (PAP)	An OU panel which quality assures and reviews practice assessment reports, making recommendations to the CEAB. See Section 7.9 of this handbook.
Practice experience days	A short period of paid or voluntary work (non-assessed) in a social care agency, for K113 students.
Practice learning module	A module that includes a period of assessed practice learning (K216 and K315).
Practice learning opportunity	A sustained period of assessed practice that forms part of the K216 and K315 modules. It may sometimes be called a PLO or a 'placement'.
Practice teacher	A person appointed by the sponsor to teach and support the student in the placement, assess their ability and make a recommendation about whether they have passed or failed the placement. See Section 1.5 of this handbook.
Practice tutor	On K216 and K315, students have a practice tutor who acts on behalf of the OU to ensure that all programme and regulatory requirements are met in the placement. See Section 1.5 of this handbook.
Preparation for practice	This refers to the level which must be attained by the end of K113 (before the assessed practice learning on K216).
Registered social worker	A qualified social work practitioner who is registered with the NISCC. Only qualified and registered social work practitioners are legally entitled to use the title 'social worker'.
Registrant	A person who is registered with the NISCC (or another regulatory body).
School of Health, Wellbeing and Social Care	The collection of OU academic areas that specialise in health, social care and social work studies.
Social work degree	The qualification that is a requirement for working as a social worker.
Social work programme	The entire programme of study, administrative and management arrangements associated with the OU social work degree.

Social work suitability procedures	A set of OU procedures for dealing with concerns about a social work student's professional suitability and conduct. See Section 5.6 of this handbook.
Sponsor	The student's employer who agrees to support the student (regardless of whether the employer or the student is paying the tuition fees). Sponsors are responsible for organising placements and providing practice teachers. All applicants to the OU social work degree must submit their application through their sponsor. See also 'collaboration agreement'.
Staff tutor (social work staff tutor)	A locally based member of the University's academic staff, who manages the programme in Northern Ireland. The staff tutor is also the line manager for associate lecturers and practice tutors. See Section 1.5 of this handbook.
Standards in Social Work Education	These are part of the regulatory framework and set out what student social workers must know, understand and be able to do to achieve a professional social work qualification. The Standards underpin the degree curriculum and all aspects of practice learning and assessment. See Section 4.2 of this handbook.
Standards of Conduct for Social Work Students	A NISCC code that sets out the core values and principles for registered social service workers. See Part 5 of this handbook.
Statutory social work intervention	The tasks that a social worker must do, or has the power to do, as a result of legislation.
Steering group	A group of stakeholders which assists and advises the social work programme in Northern Ireland (see Section 7.2 of this handbook).
StudentHome	The personalised OU website which provides, and gives access to, all of the information needed by each student.
Tutor	See 'associate lecturer'
Tutorial	A group forum for teaching, led by the tutor.
Verifier	A manager or senior practitioner (provided by the agency) who confirms that the K113 practice experience days have been completed in a satisfactory manner.
WELS	Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies.
Workshop	This is similar to a face-to-face tutorial (see above) that takes place during the practice learning modules.

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