The Northern Ireland Degree in Social Work Partnership

INTERESTED IN BECOMING A SOCIAL WORKER?

This document sets out what to expect when you are a training as a **student social worker**

SO YOU WANT TO BE A SOCIAL WORKER?

SOCIAL WORKERS often work with society's most vulnerable populations, frequently providing assistance directly in the service users' home. As a student social worker, you'll be responsible for delivering crucial support, offering informed guidance, and implementing appropriate interventions for those in need

YOUR JOURNEY TO A CAREER IN SOCIAL WORK

1. Pre-application

Do you know what a social worker does? Have you spoken with a social worker or read about what their job entails?

2. Training to be a social worker

The Degree in social work is a generic qualification that qualifies you to work in a range of organisations to include **The Health & Social Care Trusts**, **Voluntary & Community Sector**, **Education Authority**, **Probation**, **Youth Justice Agency** with individuals across their life course.

a. Social work training is undertaken through either a **2-year relevant graduate route (RGR)** or a **3-year undergraduate route (UGR)**. ✓

b. Both the **RGR** and **UGR** degree programmes are full-time. ✓

c. Students who live in NI can receive a **student incentive scheme from the DoH of £4500 per annum** across two payments within the academic year. The student incentive scheme is based on full time study / and time in a practice placement opportunity (PLO). Full attendance is expected, with attendance linked to receiving the bursary. ✓

d. **The Degree in social work is approximately equal in academic teaching in university/college and on Practice Learning Opportunity (PLO) with an employer organisation.** ✓

e. You can study the degree in Social Work at **Belfast Metropolitan College**, **Open University**, **Queens University Belfast**, **South West College**, **Dungannon** and **Ulster University, Derry / Londonderry.** ✓

3. **What to expect in University/College**

The **Bachelor of Social Work (Hons) degree** is a professional qualification approved by the **Northern Ireland Social Care Council** and recognized throughout the UK, Ireland, and internationally. This program blends academic coursework with supervised practical experience, known as a practice learning opportunity (PLO).

The Social Work degree is offered as a full-time course and provides a comprehensive education that prepares students to work across various social work settings and with diverse service user groups. In addition to practice learning opportunities, students attend lectures, tutorials, and workshops on campus. The programme employs multiple assessment methods including written assignments, presentations, and examinations.

The curriculum typically covers psychology, sociology, social policy, law, social work theory and skills, research methods, life course perspectives, adult and child/family social work, and court procedures.

Each student is assigned to a personal tutor group. The personal tutor plays a vital role in providing pastoral support and serves as an essential link between students and the university throughout the program.

4. What to expect on your Practice Learning Opportunity? (PLO)

4.1. What is a Practice Learning Opportunity?

a. Direct practice in an organisation where you will be working under supervision but often autonomously, with service users and carers. ✔

b. During the degree, you will undertake a minimum of 2 PLOs. You must successfully complete a PLO at level two and level three in order to professionally qualify as a Social Worker. ✔

c. The first will be for 85 consecutive working days and the second will be in the final year for 100 consecutive working days. ✔

d. PLO is full time (37.5 hours per week). ✔

e. PLOs have varying work patterns i.e. day time, evenings, weekends to meet the needs of service users and carers. You will need to be prepared to work the hours of the organisation that you are allocated to for PLO. ✔

f. You will be supported on PLO by a practice teacher, members of the team and your personal tutor. You will also have support through student support sessions, recall days in the Further & Higher Education Institute (FHEI), and training on PLO. ✔

4.2. Timing of PLO during the degree in social work

a. UGR 3-year Degree. All students will be on PLO in their second year from August – December (85 Days) and in the third year from January-May (100 days).

b. RGR 2-year Degree. All students will be on PLO in their first and second years from January – May (85 and 100 days).

c. Full attendance on PLO is mandatory.

d. Students **cannot** take holidays during PLO.

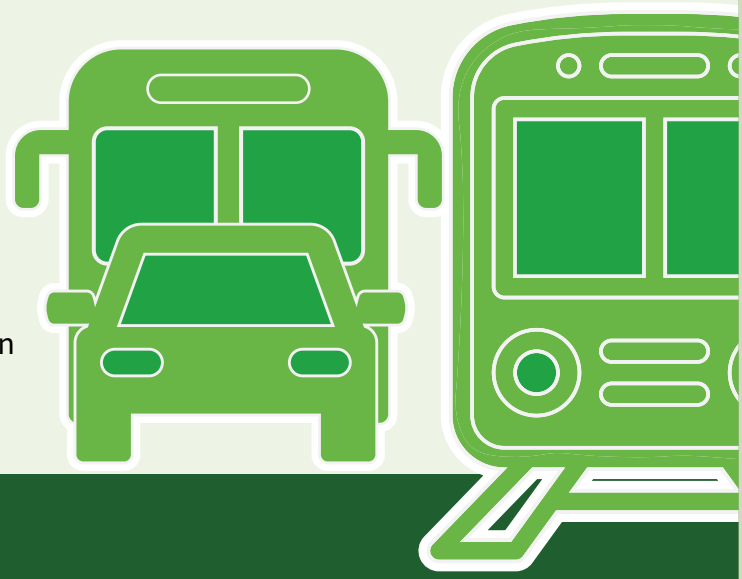
4.3. Are you prepared and able to travel regionally for PLO?

a. Students should be prepared and expect to travel throughout NI to their PLO site. This is determined by the availability of PLO sites to meet students' learning requirements. ✓

b. Students are also expected, as part of their student social worker role, to travel whilst on PLO to meet the needs of service users and carers e.g. undertake home visits, attend agency meetings etc. ✓

c. For students who are not car drivers, travel to the PLO site and whilst on PLO is also expected and may require multiple trips via public transport. ✓

d. Students are responsible for funding travel costs to and from PLO in years 2 & 3. These costs are offset by a £500 contribution included in the DoH bursary for travel costs specific to PLO. ✓

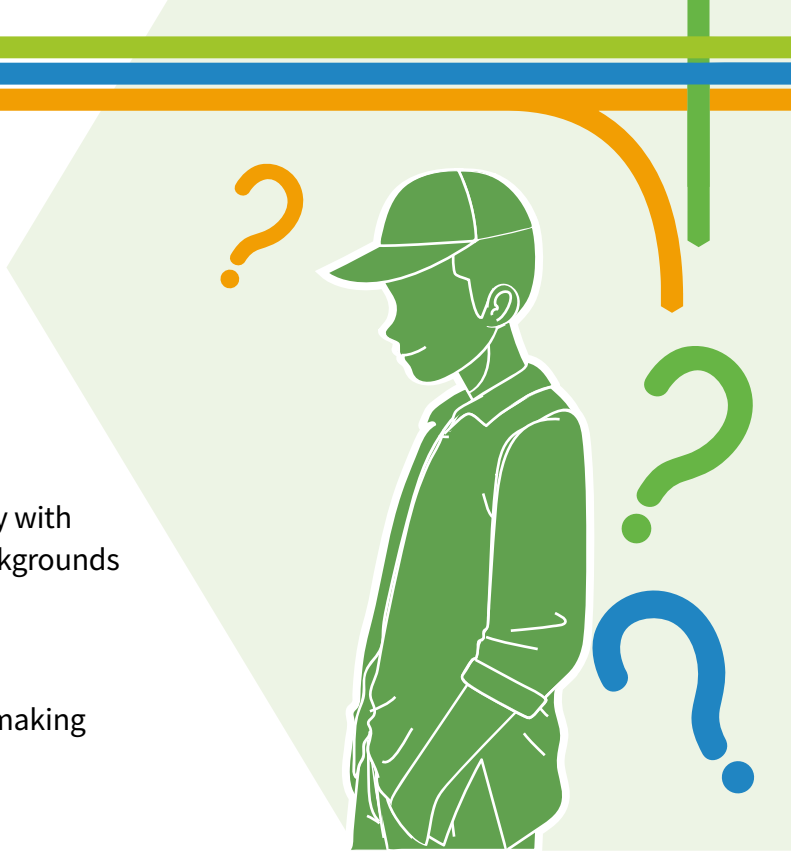


4.4. Preparation for PLO

To be eligible for going on PLO, all students must:

a. be registered with the regulatory body for social work, **Northern Ireland Social Care Council** ✓

b. complete a police check **(ACCESS NI)** ✓



4.5. What will you do on PLO?

With appropriate supervision, you will;

a. be allocated a small case load

b. work directly and at times, independently with service users and carers from diverse backgrounds

c. complete social work tasks

d. be responsible for professional decision making

e. work with diverse and complex issues

f. be required to provide written work to your supervisor to show that you are competent in areas of social work to include skills, knowledge and values. Your supervisor will also directly observe your practice with service users and assess your competence

4.6. What if you require additional support (Reasonable Adjustments) for University and PLO?

a. The delivery of the Degree in Social Work is underpinned by the Disability Discrimination Act.

b. For some students, accommodation of disabilities can be considered through a referral to the FHEI student disability services.

c. For a minority of students, there may need to be an assessment by Occupational Health to ensure a student is Fit to Practice for PLO.

4.7. What if you have previous involvement with the Police / Social Services

a. You will be required to share all relevant information with the Social Care Council, your university and PLO provider

b. PLO agencies may be unable to offer or may refuse or withdraw a PLO based on concerns over fitness to practice, criminal convictions, health issues, individual circumstances, or personal involvement in safeguarding investigations (adult/ children).

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READY?
TO TAKE YOUR FIRST STEPS
TOWARDS A CAREER IN SOCIAL WORK?

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