



Ag Rialáil Gairmithe Sláinte
agus Cúraim Shóisialaigh

Regulating Health +
Social Care Professionals

Social Workers Registration Board

Standards of Proficiency and Practice Placement Criteria

Bord Clárchúcháin na nOibrithe Sóisialta
Social Workers Registration Board

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Supporting CORU documentation

The following documents must be read in conjunction with each other by applicants for recognition of professional qualifications:

- The application form for recognition of international qualifications
- Guidance notes for recognition of international qualifications
- Standards of proficiency and criteria for practice placements

Background

The Health and Social Care Professionals Act, 2005 (as amended) (HSCP Act, 2005) provides for the establishment of a Social Workers Registration Board, whose functions include establishing and maintaining a Social Workers Register. Registration will allow a person to use the title Social Worker.

The object of the Social Workers Registration Board is to protect the public by fostering high standards of professional conduct and professional education, training and competence among social work registrants (HSCP Act, 2005: Section 27(1)).

Statutory registration is fundamental to the delivery of quality and accountability in the provision of social work and will ensure that members of the public are guided, protected and informed, so that they can be confident that social workers providing services are properly regulated and qualified for the job.

This system of statutory regulation is designed to ensure professional conduct and the maintenance of high standards of professional education and training among social workers, regardless of whether they work in the public or private sector or are self-employed.

All applicants who hold professional qualifications gained outside the Republic of Ireland (ROI) must first have their qualification recognised by the Social Workers Registration Board before an application for registration can be made.

Standards of proficiency and Irish approved qualifications

One of the functions of the Social Workers Registration Board is to set the standards of proficiency for social workers. The standards of proficiency are the threshold standards required for the safe and appropriate practice of the profession in Ireland. They are the knowledge, skills, competencies and professional attributes for the safe practising of the profession. The standards of proficiency are the standards required for all entrants to the register.

Irish approved qualifications for entry to the register are at the following level:

- Social Work (Honours) Bachelors Degree NFQ Level 8

Undergraduate programmes combine an academic social science degree with social work training. They are full-time courses of four years duration.

- Social Work Masters Degree NFQ Level 9
- Social Work Postgraduate Diploma NFQ Level 9

Entry to postgraduate professional courses requires a three-year social science degree or equivalent and relevant work experience.

The Social Workers Registration Board set standards for the delivery of social work education and training in Ireland. It approves and monitor programmes against these standards. Graduates from an approved programme meet the Standards of Proficiency for Social Work and are eligible to apply for registration. Please see the Coru website for the list of current approved Irish programmes.

Recognition of professional qualifications obtained outside Republic of Ireland

If you were awarded your Social Work qualification outside the (ROI) and are interested in working here you must firstly apply to the Social Workers Registration Board to have your qualification recognised. **You cannot apply for registration until your qualification is recognised.**

The Social Workers Registration Board is designated as the Competent Authority under European Union (EU) legislation - Directive 2005/36/EC for the purposes of recognition of professional qualifications for applicants from the European Economic Area (EEA).

A Competent Authority under EU legislation is any authority or body e.g. regulatory body or professional body empowered by the State to validate professional qualifications. The Registration Board may also recognise professional qualifications from outside the EEA.

For further detailed information about Directive 2005/36/EC log on to the European Commission website: www.ec.europa.eu. Please also read the CORU Guidance notes regarding application for recognition of international qualifications

Standards of proficiency

This section sets out the standards of proficiency required of graduates from an Irish approved programme for the safe and effective practice of social work. They are the minimum standards necessary to protect the public and are required for entry to the Register for Social Workers.

They are also the standards of proficiency required of applicants with professional qualifications obtained outside ROI.

All applications for recognition of professional qualification (s) obtained outside of the ROI will be assessed against these standards of proficiency. Applicants must demonstrate to the Registration Board that their professional qualification(s), additional education and training and / or work experience gained in the profession meets the minimum standards of proficiency required. Evidence must be provided as part of the recognition application process.

The standards of proficiency explain the key obligations for a graduate in the profession and are accompanied by specific indicators, which provide more detail. The standards are highlighted in bold i.e. 2.1 with the specific indicators listed below them i.e. a, b, c...

These standards of proficiency are the intended learning outcomes which a professional qualification must meet. A diverse range of potential programmes and programme learning outcomes will be compatible with these standards.

The standards of proficiency are grouped under six domains:

Domain 1: Professional autonomy and accountability

Domain 2: Interpersonal and professional relationships

Domain 3: Effective communication

Domain 4: Personal and professional development

Domain 5: Provision of quality services

Domain 6: Knowledge, understanding and skills

Domain 1: Professional autonomy and accountability

Graduates will:

- 1. Practice within the legal and ethical boundaries of their profession to the highest standard.**
 - a) Act in the best interest of service users at all times and within the boundaries of their profession.
 - b) Respect and, so far as possible, uphold the rights, dignity and autonomy of every service user, including their role in the diagnostic, therapeutic and social care process.
 - c) Provide and articulate professional and ethical practice.
 - d) Practise in accordance with current legislation applicable to the work of their profession.
 - e) Contribute to the development of effective, ethical and equitable policy and practice, regarding issues addressed by their profession.
 - f) Understand the implications of duty of care for service users and professionals.
 - g) Understand the principles of professional regulation and the provisions of the Social Workers Registration Board Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics.
 - h) Manage themselves, their practice and that of others in accordance with the Social Workers Registration Board Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics.

Domain 1: Professional autonomy and accountability

Graduates will:

2. Practice in a anti-discriminatory way

- a) Acknowledge and respect the differences in beliefs and cultural practices of individuals or groups.
- b) Promote equality and mutual respect, without prejudice, in a culturally competent, anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive manner.
- c) Assist in the promotion of policies and systems to protect the health, safety, welfare, equality and dignity of staff, volunteers and service users.
- d) Demonstrate a commitment to human rights and social justice.
- e) Recognise the moral and legal rights of individuals to the promotion of wellbeing and protection, if at risk of abuse, exploitation and violence from others or themselves.

3. Understand the importance of, and be able to maintain, confidentiality.

- a) Respect the confidentiality of service users and use information only for the purpose for which it was given.
- b) Understand confidentiality within a team setting.
- c) Understand the limits of confidentiality, particularly in relation to child protection and elder abuse.
- d) Be aware of data protection, freedom of information and other relevant legislation.
- e) Understand the potential conflict that can arise between confidentiality and whistle-blowing

Domain 1: Professional autonomy and accountability

Graduates will:

4. Understand the importance of, and be able to obtain, informed consent

- a) Demonstrate competence in gaining informed consent to carry out assessments or provide interventions.
- b) Understand the issues associated with incapacity and how to deal with service users who are not capable of giving consent.
- c) Maintain accurate records relating to consent.
- d) Respect the rights of the service user.

5. Be able to exercise a professional duty of care

- a) Recognise personal responsibility for one's actions and be able to justify reasons for professional decisions made.
- b) Understand the need to maintain the highest standards of personal/professional conduct

6. Be able to practise as an autonomous professional, exercising their own professional judgement.

- a) Know the limits of their practice and know when to seek advice or refer to another professional.
- b) Recognise the need for consultation and supervision.
- c) Be able to assess a situation, determine the nature and severity of the problem and call upon the required knowledge and experience to deal with the situation.
- d) Be able to initiate appropriate resolution of problems and be able to exercise personal initiative.
- e) Recognise that they are personally responsible for, and must be able to justify, their decisions.

Domain 1: Professional autonomy and accountability

Graduates will:

- 7. Recognise the need for effective self-management of workload and resources and be able to practice accordingly.**
 - a) Understand the demands that are placed on the professional practitioner in a given field and the skills required to practise effectively with the workload and available resources.
 - b) Be aware of responsibility to bring to the attention of management situations where unrealistic/unachievable demands are made of staff.

- 8. Understand the obligation to maintain fitness to practise.**
 - a) Understand the need to practise safely and competently within their scope of practice.
 - b) Understand the importance of maintaining their physical and mental health.
 - c) Understand the importance of keeping skills and knowledge up to date over a lifetime of practice.

Domain 2: Interpersonal and Professional Relationships

Graduates will:

- 1. Work in partnership with service users and their relatives/supporters, groups and communities and other professionals.**
 - a) Demonstrate capacity to build and sustain professional relationships as both an independent practitioner and collaboratively as a member of a team.
 - b) Demonstrate capacity to engage service users and carers in the assessment process, and planning and evaluating interventions to meet their needs and goals.
 - c) Recognise and understand the concepts of power and authority in relationships with service users.
 - d) Be able to make appropriate referrals.

- 2. Contribute effectively to work undertaken as a member of a team (be it multi-disciplinary; interprofessional; multi-service or inter-agency).**
 - a) Understand the role of professional collaboration, consultation and decision making in multi-disciplinary, inter-professional, multi-service and/or inter-agency teams.
 - b) Demonstrate an understanding that relationships with professional colleagues can impact on service delivery and therefore should be based on mutual respect and trust.

Domain 3: Effective Communication

Graduates will:

- 1. Demonstrate effective and appropriate skills in communicating information, listening, giving advice, instruction and professional opinion**
 - a) Understand how communication skills affect the assessment of service users and clients and how the means and channels of communication should be modified to address and take account of factors such as gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, race or membership of the Traveller community and socio-economic status.
 - b) Demonstrate the ability to produce clear, concise, jargon-free written communications.
 - c) Demonstrate the skill of writing reports, articulating the situation and drawing appropriate conclusions.
 - d) Be able to select, move between and use appropriate forms of verbal and non-verbal communication, including listening skills, with service users and others.
 - e) Demonstrate an appropriate level of skill in the use of information technology relevant to social work.
 - f) Understand the importance of, and demonstrate effective communication with, other colleagues (inter-disciplinary communication) and management.
 - g) Be aware of the characteristics and consequences of non-verbal communication and how this can be affected by, for example, culture, age, ethnicity, gender, religious beliefs and socio-economic status.
 - h) Understand the need to provide service users (or people acting on their behalf) with the information necessary to enable them to make informed decisions.
 - i) Understand the need to use an appropriate interpreter to assist patients/clients/service users with language and communication difficulties

- 2. Understand the need for effective communication throughout the care of the service user**
 - a) Recognise the need to use interpersonal skills to facilitate the active participation of service users.
 - b) Show effectiveness in communication with involuntary service users and an ability to manage conflict and resistance.
 - c) Demonstrate competence in presenting professional judgements and information in a variety of settings.

Domain 4: Personal and professional development

Graduates will:

- 1. Understand the role of reflective practice in relation to personal and professional development.**
 - a) Understand the importance of self-awareness and self-reflection.
 - b) Be able to reflect critically on personal practice in order to be able to improve it.
 - c) Be aware of the relationship between personal life experiences and personal value systems, and the impact these can have on one's decision-making or actions.
 - d) Understand the role, purpose and function of supervision and the importance of seeking supervision to practice.
 - e) Actively avail of opportunities for feedback, mentoring and support from senior colleagues in order to continuously improve personal practice.
 - f) Take responsibility for personal and professional development.
 - g) Develop and critically review a personal development plan which takes account of personal and professional needs.
 - h) Identify and avail of opportunities to promote professional development of self, colleagues and teams and the broader development of disciplines.
 - i) Understand the role of performance management as part of on-going professional development.
 - j) Understand the role of continuing professional development and demonstrate commitment to life-long learning.
 - k) Recognise the need to contribute to policy development.
 - l) Recognise the contribution and value of research in developing evidence-informed practice.

Domain 5: Provision of quality services

Graduates will:

- 1. Be able to identify and assess service users' needs**
 - a) Be able to gather appropriate information.
 - b) Fully engage service users in the assessment process
 - c) Undertake or arrange investigations as appropriate.
 - d) Analyse and critically evaluate the information collected.
- 2. Formulate and deliver plans and strategies to meet identified needs of service users**
 - a) Develop and deliver appropriate plans and strategies, according to best available evidence, agreed national guidelines, protocols and pathways, where available, in consultation with service users where appropriate.
 - b) Identify needs and advocate for the resources required to meet the needs.
- 3. Use research, reasoning and problem solving skills to determine appropriate action**
 - a) Recognise the value of research to the systematic evaluation of practice.
 - b) Engage in evidence-informed practice, evaluate practice systematically, and participate in audit and review procedures.
 - c) Be aware of a range of research and evaluative methodologies, including evidence-informed research.
 - d) Demonstrate sound professional practice decision-making, which can be justified even when made on the basis of limited information.
 - e) Demonstrate a logical and systematic approach to problem-solving.
- 4. Draw on appropriate knowledge and skills in order to make professional judgements**
 - a) Understand the need to adjust/adapt their practice as needed to take account of new developments in knowledge and skills.
 - b) Demonstrate a level of skill in the use of information technology appropriate to social work.

Domain 5: Provision of quality services

Graduates will:

- 5. Formulate specific and appropriate management plans, including the setting of timescales**
 - a) Understand the requirement to adapt practice to meet the needs of different groups distinguished by, for example, physical, psychological, environmental, cultural or socio-economic factors.

- 6. Use of safe work practices at all times in the interest of service users and staff**
 - a) Understand the need to maintain the safety of both service users and those involved in their care.
 - b) Empower service users to manage their wellbeing and recognise the need to take responsibility for meeting their own needs with the support of professionals.

- 7. Implement best practice in record management**
 - a) Keep accurate, legible and timely records and recognise the need to handle these records and all other information in accordance with applicable legislation, protocols and guidelines.
 - b) Understand the need to use accepted terminology in making records.

- 8. Monitor and review on-going effectiveness of planned activity and modify it accordingly**
 - a) Gather information, including qualitative and quantitative data that help to evaluate the responses of service users to their intervention.
 - b) Evaluate intervention plans using tools and recognised performance/outcome measures. Revise the plans as necessary and, where appropriate, in conjunction with the service user.
 - c) Recognise the need to monitor and evaluate the quality of practice and the value of contributing to the generation of data for quality assurance and improvement of programmes.
 - d) Recognise important human factors and risk management measures, learn from adverse events and communicate learning.
 - e) Under supervision, make reasoned decisions to initiate, continue, modify or cease interventions/techniques/courses of action and record the decisions and reasoning.
 - f) Understand that outcomes may not always conform to expectations.
 - g) Be aware of risk indicator measures in place in the workplace.

Domain 5: Provision of quality services

Graduates will:

9. Be able to evaluate audit and review practice

- a) Understand the principles of quality assurance and quality improvement.
- b) Be aware of the role of audit and review in quality management, including the use of appropriate outcome measures.
- c) Monitor and evaluate performance by conducting regular reviews in accordance with national guidelines/best practice and implement improvements based on the findings of these reviews.
- d) Participate in quality assurance programmes where appropriate.
- e) Understand the value of reflective practice and the need to record the outcome of such reflection.
- f) Recognise the value of different methods of review.

Domain 6: Knowledge, understanding and skills

Graduates will:

- 1. Know and understand the essential knowledge areas relevant to social work**
 - a) Demonstrate a critical understanding of social work theory, methods and skills, social policy, sociology, psychology, social research, law and the legal system, economics, political science and other related social sciences.
 - b) Demonstrate an understanding of the theories of individual and social development across the life span and within different cultures.
 - c) Know and understand the principles and applications of social research, including the evaluation of intervention efficacy, the research process and evidence-informed practice.
 - d) Demonstrate an understanding of the theory, concepts and methods pertaining to social work practice.
 - e) Understand the theoretical basis of, and the variety of approaches to, assessment/diagnosis and intervention.
 - f) Understand interpersonal and social structural influences on the individual, group and community, including marginalisation, stigma, discrimination and oppression.
 - g) Have knowledge of economic perspectives on human interaction and social structures.
 - h) Understand the rationale for government intervention (social, demographic, political and economic) and the impact on individuals, groups, communities and service delivery. Understand the political process and the process of public administration within Ireland at local and national level.
 - i) Have knowledge of the roles of other professions in health and social care.

Domain 6: Knowledge, understanding and skills

Graduates will:

- 2. Have knowledge of how professional principles are expressed and translated into action through a number of different approaches to meet the needs of individuals, groups or communities**
 - a) Understand issues and trends in Irish public and social policy development which influence social work practice.
 - b) Have knowledge of relevant legislation, regulations, national guidelines and standards, findings of inquiries, investigations and associated reports influencing social work practice with the full range of social work clients.
 - c) Understand the concepts and frameworks underpinning theories of social work.
 - d) Possess a rights-based and evidence-informed understanding of a range of social work methods in order to apply them to practice, which will provide a foundation for continuous professional development.
 - e) Understand the role of interpersonal exchanges in identifying, releasing and appropriately managing the expression of emotions, enhanced by an understanding of the importance of self-awareness

- 3. Be able to understand, explain and apply generic skills and methods appropriate to delivering a range of social work interventions to meet different needs within a variety of settings**
 - a) Demonstrate assessment and intervention skills with an understanding of the process of social work intervention with individuals and groups.
 - b) Demonstrate intervention skills of planning, implementation, evaluation and closure, contracting, negotiating and formulating plans with service users and providers.
 - c) Demonstrate the theoretical knowledge and practice skills required to work therapeutically with individuals, children, families and groups, using a range of interventions appropriate to the needs of the service user.
 - d) Have knowledge of the concepts and explanatory frameworks that underpin a range of individual counselling theory and practice; theory and practice of working with children and families; community work theory and practice and group work theory and practice.
 - e) Demonstrate skills in advocacy on behalf of service users.

Domain 6: Knowledge, understanding and skills

Graduates will:

- 4. Have knowledge and understanding of the skills and elements required to maintain service user, self and staff safety**
 - a) Understand the importance of organisational systems and their impact on service user care.
 - b) Understand risk assessment and risk management in relation to service users.
 - c) Understand how to identify, prevent and manage risk and adverse events and demonstrate an openness to learn from errors.
 - d) Understand the importance of communication with service users and staff.
 - e) Be aware of applicable legislation, for example, health and safety legislation, employment legislation and relevant national guidelines.
 - f) Recognise the need for safe environments for practice, which minimises risks to service users, those responsible for them, and others, including the use of hazard control and infection control.
 - g) Undertake appropriate health and safety training.

Practice placement criteria

Practice placement learning enables students to acquire the standards of proficiency for the social work profession and become safe, competent practitioners willing to accept personal and professional accountability for their work.

Learning initially developed within the academic component of social work programmes must be integrated into practice through the experience and supervision offered by structured placements within social work settings.

Practice placement education is an integral component of social work education and training programmes.

Requirements

- a) Students must spend at least 1,000 hours in practice placements, 350 hours of which must be in one block and full-time.
- b) The selection of practice reflects the scope of social work practice settings in which the social worker normally operates.
- c) The placement should provide the student with a minimum number of hours of supervision by a practice teacher each week.
- d) Practice teachers will have relevant social work qualifications, at least two years' relevant practice experience and competence, and be in their current post for a minimum of one year where possible. Practice teachers should be fully informed of the expectations, organisation and arrangements for the placements. In addition, they will have undertaken appropriate training to enable them to carry out their role effectively and efficiently and will normally be located in the same practice setting as the practice students.
- e) There should be a minimum of two placements during the programme of training for each student and at least one of these should be full-time. At least fifty per cent of placement time should be spent in the home country.
- l) A varied range of appropriate placements must be available so that students are exposed to different areas of social work and given the opportunity to practise a range of approaches. This might include a mix of placements in a variety of areas of potential employment, such as acute and community services, disability, mental health, older persons' services, children and family services, the Probation Service and local authorities, to reflect the distribution of placements offered on a consistent and annual basis.
- m) Student allocation to practice placements is based on the need to integrate theory and practice and to facilitate the progressive development of knowledge, skills and competencies. The knowledge, skills and competencies learnt in this way should be transferable between situations, contexts and agencies.
- n) Pre-placement requirements, such as Garda vetting and appropriate health and safety measures, are in place.

- o) Policies and procedures are in place for the assessment of students on practice placements, including appeal mechanisms for failed placements. Placement reports should be jointly signed by the practice teacher and the student.
- p) A code of conduct for students whilst on placement should be in place