

A LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY

FOR
SOCIAL WORKERS
AND
SOCIAL CARE WORKERS
2019 - 2027



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Máinnystrie O Poustie

www.health-ni.gov.uk

*“Rules, standards, regulations and enforcement
all have a place in pursuit of quality...
but they pale in potential compared to
the power of pervasive and constant learning.”*

*“You always have two jobs; you have your job
and you have the job of improving your job.”*

Professor Don Berwick

(A Promise to Learn, a Commitment to Act: Improving Patient Safety in NHS England)

Chief Social Worker's Foreword

Society in Northern Ireland is changing rapidly. We are living for longer and communities are now much more diverse than ever before.

Developing new models of care and creating co-operation between formal and informal care providers is an important opportunity to be grasped. Having a dynamic, highly skilled and well-motivated workforce that can innovate and adapt to new ways of working will also be essential.

Delivering Together-Health and Wellbeing 2026 sets the future direction for health and social care by identifying how to meet our existing and emerging needs. The social work and social care workforce is central to achieving its vision of person-centred, compassionate care delivered in communities, with and for service users, families and carers.

The learning and improvement of social workers and social care workers has, for many years, been a key strategic objective for the Department of Health in Northern Ireland.



This **Learning and Improvement Strategy** builds upon that commitment and plots a course for the future development of the social work and social care workforce.

By creating a learning culture in which staff are expected to continuously improve their practice to better meet people's needs, we will establish safer, more sustainable services in the coming years.

I commend the Strategy to you as an important contribution to delivering the changes we need to make, to meet our future social care needs.

Sean Holland
Chief Social Work Officer

Developing the Learning & Improvement Strategy

This is the fourth strategy to be produced in relation to the training and development of the social work and social care workforce in Northern Ireland. It follows-on from the Personal Social Services Training and Development Strategy 2006-16, which was successfully implemented through the concerted efforts of a wide range of individuals and organisations

The implementation of the previous strategy resulted in several notable achievements, including;

- an increase in the number of qualifications achieved by social workers and social care workers,
- significant improvements in the professional leadership and management of social work and social care services. and;
- the development of more flexible approaches to learning.

Above all, the previous strategy, alongside other important developments, created the expectation among social workers, social care workers and their employers that they must continuously develop their knowledge and skills in order to improve outcomes for people who use services, their carers and communities.

This new Learning and Improvement Strategy builds upon those successes and is intended to set the direction for the future development of the social work and social care workforces.

It has been informed by extensive engagement with a wide range of stakeholders who have provided very helpful input. Early planning meetings with key individuals in the sector and responses to consultations on the draft Strategy have contributed greatly to its' contents.



Who is responsible for the Learning and Improvement of Social Workers and Social Care Workers?

A wide range of individuals and organisations share responsibility for the continuous development of social workers and social care workers.

Employers have the primary responsibility to ensure that staff have the knowledge and skills they need to competently fulfill their role and function.

Social workers and **social care workers** must also seek to improve and add to their skills set, which is a requirement of continued registration with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council. Individual practitioners and teams should **want to** continuously improve their own practice, learn new methods, and demonstrate professional pride in what they do.

All learning and improvement activity should contribute to better outcomes for people who use services, their families and carers.



The Strategic Context

The Learning & Improvement Strategy has been developed within a much wider strategic context. The projected growth of the Northern Ireland economy is likely to be modest for the foreseeable future, meaning that there will be a continued emphasis on budgetary constraint and achieving best value for money.

The impact of austerity measures will continue to be felt across NI, but most acutely in areas of high deprivation. As a consequence, the demands on public services, including social services, are expected to increase substantially in the coming years.

Northern Ireland has also experienced rapidly-changing racial, ethnic and cultural trends in recent years. The size of the total population is set to grow by around 6% by 2020, and the proportion of people aged 65 years and over will increase by 45% by 2030.

More people are living for longer and as a result, many of us will have long-term health and social care needs. How we deliver and receive our health and social care services will therefore have to fundamentally change in order to meet these growing, more challenging demands.

As part of the response to these changes, it will be necessary to build capacity in individuals, in families and in communities, to reduce inequalities and ensure the next generation is encouraged to stay healthy and well.

Health and Wellbeing 2026 'Delivering Together' (DoH 2016), sets the future direction for Health and Social Care in NI by identifying the importance of;

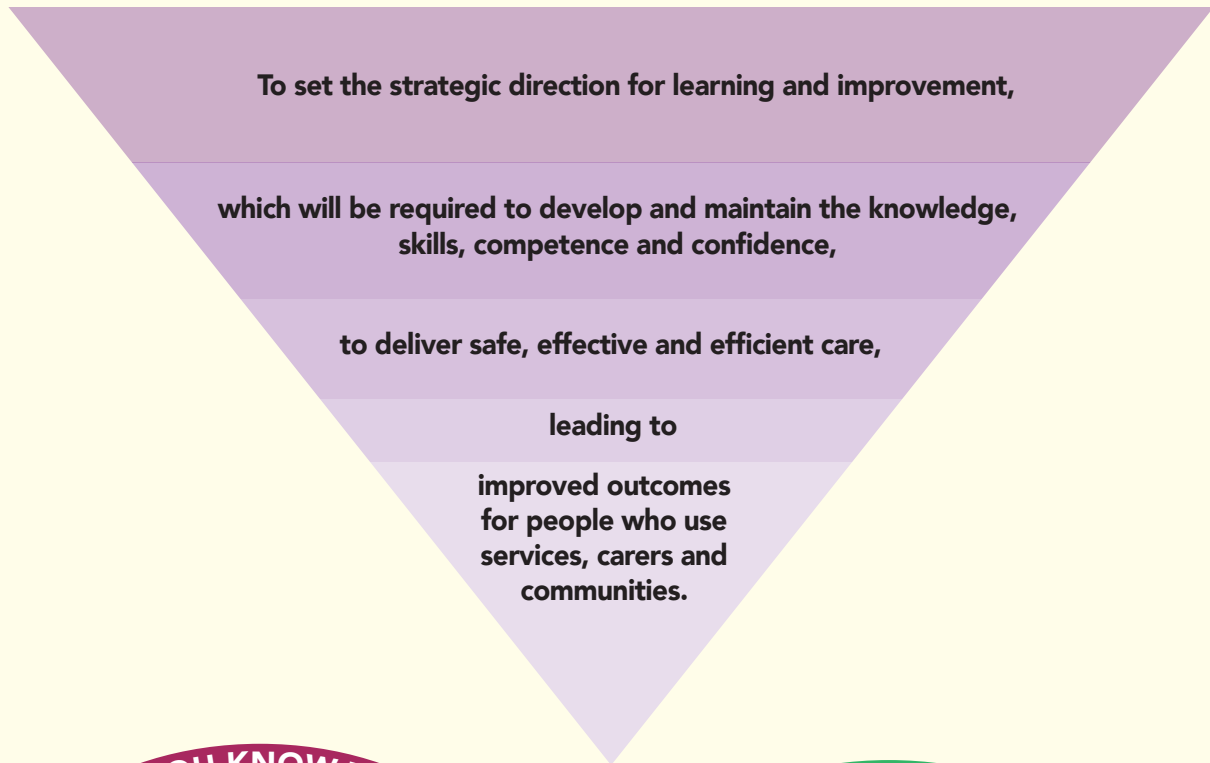
- supporting people to avoid ill-health and stay well in the first place,
- providing access to safe, high quality care when it is needed,
- empowering and supporting health and social care staff to perform their roles to the best of their ability, and
- designing services which are efficient and sustainable.

Alongside societal changes, the Learning & Improvement Strategy must also be informed by and complement existing legislation, policy and strategies – and take account of new and emerging ones.

For example, the Strategy for Social Work, Quality 2020, Making Life Better, A Whole System Framework of Public Health, Power to People, the HSC Collective Leadership strategy, and the Industrial Strategy for NI will all contribute to efforts to ensure that we have a competent and confident health and social care workforce in the future.



The Aim of the Learning and Improvement Strategy for Social Workers and Social Care Workers is;



DID YOU KNOW THAT?

....by 2020, the number of people aged 65+ in NI is expected to increase from 290,000 to 471,000.



DID YOU KNOW THAT?

....61% of the NI population are adults, 23% are children and young people and 16% are older people aged 65+.



The Social Work Workforce

Social workers often work with some of the most marginalised people in society, by promoting their rights, challenging inequalities and improving the quality of their lives. Social workers share a common purpose, which is to improve and safeguard the social wellbeing of individuals, families and communities.

Improving Social Wellbeing

Social wellbeing is a broad concept and applies to many areas in a person’s life – for example, how someone feels about themselves, the quality of the relationships they have with others, or the freedom they have to make important decisions which impact on their daily lives.

Social workers improve social wellbeing by empowering people to manage their own lives, by supporting social inclusion and participation in society, and helping people to stay safe and well.

Central to the effectiveness of all social work practice is the quality of the relationships between a social worker and the people they work with.

The Social Work Practice Continuum summarizes the range of functions which social workers typically fulfil, depending upon their job role. It reflects the diversity of life circumstances and needs of individuals, families and communities with which social workers work.



Social work practice is also underpinned by a core set of **professional values**;



Social Work - interesting Facts and Figures

There have been significant changes in the social work workforce in Northern Ireland in recent years. The number of registered social workers has risen substantially from **5,060** in 2007 to **6,100** in 2018, which represents a **17% increase**.

The majority of social workers, around **70%**, are employed within the Health and Social Care sector; in family and child care settings, in adult services, hospitals, mental health teams and helping people with a learning disability.

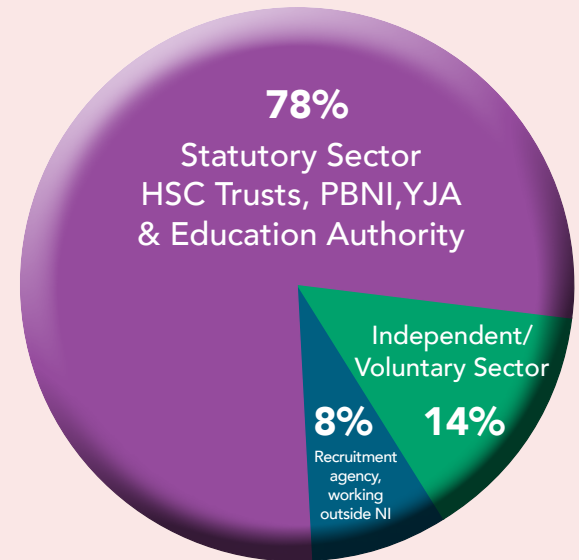
Social workers also work in many different settings and contexts. Within statutory agencies, such as HSC Trusts, Probation or the Education Authority, social workers typically carry out tasks related to legal or statutory requirements.

In total, around **80%** of all social workers are employed in the statutory sector. This often involves working collaboratively with a range of other public services such as the police, health professionals or housing providers.

Northern Ireland also has a rich history of many social work services being delivered by the voluntary and community sectors, often in collaboration with colleagues from statutory services.

Who employs social workers?

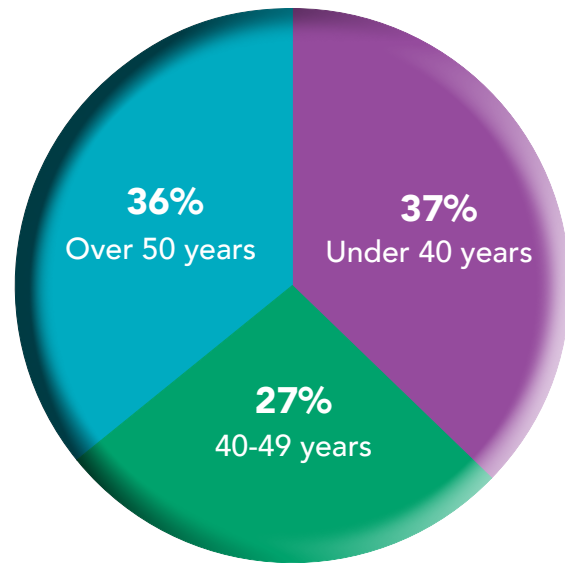
The pie chart below provides details of the sectors in which social workers are currently employed;



17% increase
in registered social workers
from 2007 to 2018

Age and Gender of Social Workers

The profile of the social work profession in Northern Ireland is one of a mature, predominantly female (81%) and locally trained workforce which has remained relatively stable over the last ten years. Approximately 250 social workers graduate from Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University each year.



The majority (63%) of registered social workers are over 40 years of age and around one third (36%) are aged 50+. The majority of social workers employed locally are originally from NI and most have received their professional training at Universities here.

DID YOU KNOW THAT?

...all Probation Officers and most of the staff employed by the Youth Justice Agency are social workers.

DID YOU KNOW THAT?

...the majority of Education Welfare Officers are social workers.

The Social Care Workforce

Social care workers help to support, protect and empower people to live as well and as independently as possible. They often deliver a range of practical help and emotional support to individuals, families and communities.

Typically, social care workers provide;

- personal care for individuals who have particular needs associated with ill-health, disability, frailty or aging,
- care for people in day care settings, domiciliary care or reablement services,
- more intensive support, in residential homes or delivering complex home-care packages; and
- informal community support, for example, befriending services or engaging with community groups.

People who work in social care often come from diverse backgrounds. The level of competence or type of qualification required to be a social care worker is determined by the role or job function, the nature of the care and support required by the individual or family, and the level of responsibility vested in the worker.

To become a social care worker, a number of employer criteria and regulatory requirements have to be met. The values, skills and personal qualities demonstrated by staff are key to the delivery of safe and effective, person-centred social care.



Meeting individual needs

In recent years there has been a growing emphasis on the personalisation of social care to meet individual needs. There has also been a wider societal expectation that, where possible, a person's social care needs should be met within his or her own home or community. This is intended to give an individual or a family, greater choice and control over the kind of care that they wish to receive. The **Co-production** of services and Self Directed Support continue to be embedded in the suite of social care provision in NI.



DID YOU KNOW THAT?

...the independent social care sector provides all Nursing Home care, 83% of Residential Home care and 68% of domiciliary care in NI.

DID YOU KNOW?

...there are approximately
120
 Domiciliary care providers in NI

Social Care Work - interesting Facts and Figures

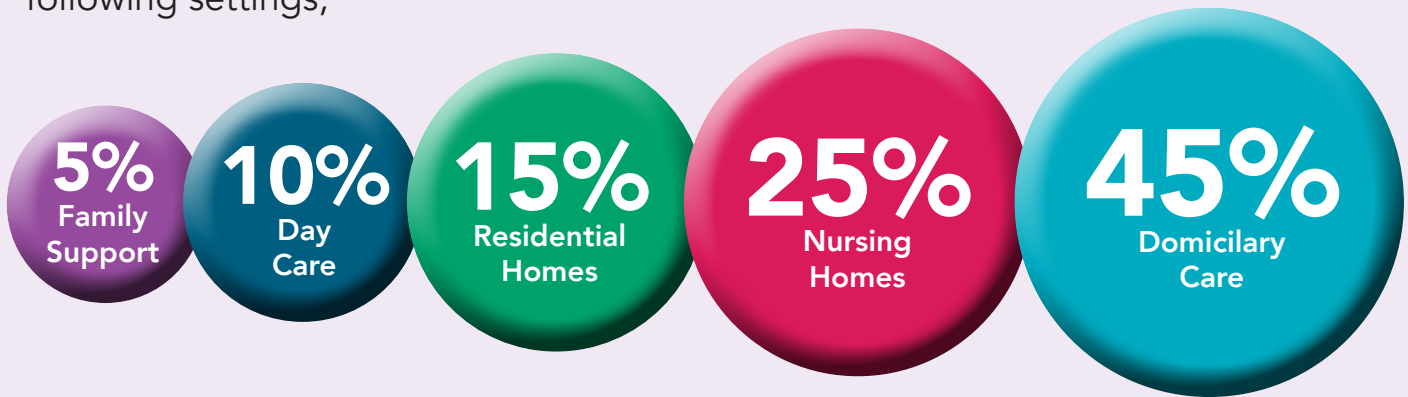
Since 2017, it has been compulsory for all social care workers to register with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) . There are approximately **33,000 registered social care workers**, which is the largest workforce in HSC, and represents 4% of the total workforce in NI.

A majority of social care workers have achieved qualifications which are relevant to their job role and function. All social care workers are expected to improve their knowledge and skills as a requirement of their continued registration with the NISCC.

There are approximately 900 registered providers of social care services in Northern Ireland. One quarter of the social care workforce is employed directly by the HSC Trusts. The majority (75%) of social care workers are employed in independent, private and voluntary sector organisations.

Where do social care workers work?

Social care workers are typically employed in one or more of the following settings;



Age and Gender of Social Care Workers

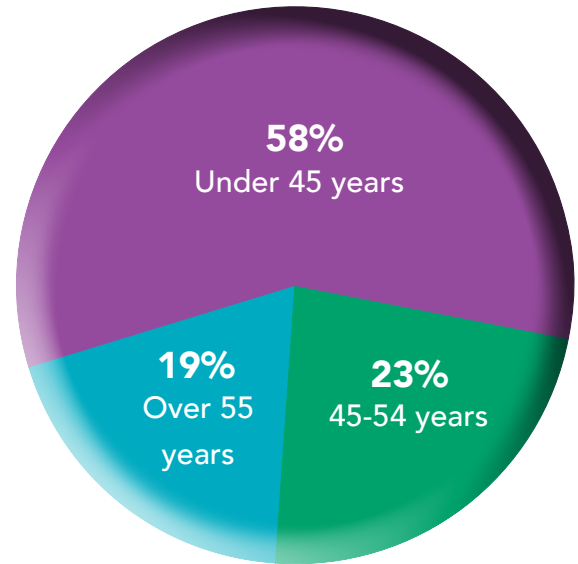
The profile of the social care workforce in NI is very different to that of social workers. As well as the difference in the size of the workforce, almost 19,800 (58%) of social care workers are under 45 years of age.

The social care workforce is also predominantly female (87%) and includes people from a wide range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds.



For some time, employers have reported difficulties with the recruitment and retention of social care workers. This is a particular problem in rural areas and in the private and voluntary sectors where there can be less favourable terms and conditions of employment.

The co-ordination and implementation of key workforce policies, including those relating to learning and improvement, will help to determine the future recruitment and retention of suitably qualified and highly motivated social care workers.



DID YOU KNOW THAT?

...most social care workers are employed by private, independent or voluntary sector organisations. Around one quarter are employed by HSC Trusts.



DID YOU KNOW THAT?

...it is estimated that in NI there are around 33,000 social care workers providing services to the public every day.



Registration, Regulation and Standards of Practice

The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) is responsible for approving the professional training for social workers, against a set of regional standards, and for approving post qualification training and learning provision. To maintain their registration with the NISCC, social workers are required to complete and record at least 90 hours of professional development every three years.

Social workers can accumulate Professional in Practice credits for learning achieved through a variety of routes, including formal training events, individual study and academic courses.

All social care workers in Northern Ireland are now registered with the NISCC. To maintain their registration, social care workers must also demonstrate that they have undertaken the requisite learning and improvement activity as prescribed by the NISCC. It is estimated that at present more than half of social care workers have one or more qualification which is relevant to their job role.

Employers of social workers and social care workers are expected to ensure that their staff are appropriately trained to competently fulfil the duties of their job role. This includes mandatory training courses and adherence to relevant minimum standards, which is monitored by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority.

The NISCC is also required to publish Standards of Conduct and Practice for social workers and social care workers. These provide clear criteria to guide practice and ensure that social workers and social care workers are aware of the standards they are expected to meet. The Standards also provide service users and carers with a clear description of the nature and quality of care they can expect to receive.



To achieve the Aim of the Learning and Improvement Strategy, we have identified **six Strategic Priorities;**



- 1. Relationship-based Practice**
- 2. Highly Skilled, Resilient and Confident Workforce**
- 3. Continuous Learning and Improvement**
- 4. Effective Leadership and Management**
- 5. Collaboration and Partnership**
- 6. Practising in a Digital World**

Each Strategic Priority has a series of associated Policy Statements and Actions which, if completed, will contribute to the achievement of identified Outcomes. An initial Implementation Plan will be developed to help to ensure that the Strategy receives the support needed to secure the delivery of the Strategic Priorities.

As before, the energy and commitment of the various stakeholders will be required to ensure that the Learning and Improvement Strategy is successfully implemented in the coming years.



Strategic Priority 1:

Relationship-based Practice

Social work and social care work is about relationships – first and foremost with people who use services and their carers. The ability to build purposeful and trusting relationships to create positive change is the cornerstone of best practice.

Social workers and social care workers engage with individuals, families, carers, communities and other professions in a concerted effort to produce better outcomes for and with people.

A co-production approach to improving social wellbeing is a collaborative process between the person supported by services and those who support them. It allows all parties to work together to determine an outcome that draws on someone's strengths and assets, their knowledge, skills and abilities and those of a wider support network.

Tackling inequalities and promoting social justice using community development approaches can also enhance social work and social care practice by empowering and bringing about positive changes in the lives of individuals and in communities. It encourages people to take personal and collective responsibility and helps them to organise and work together to improve their own and others' health and wellbeing.

Policy Statements

1. A relationship-based approach will be an integral part of social workers' and social care workers' practice.
2. Social workers and social care workers will be supported to develop and maintain the values and skills they need to enable and empower individuals, families, carers and communities to improve their social wellbeing.
3. Co-production and use of strengths-based and community development approaches will be promoted as a means of building upon people's capacity to manage their own lives and bring about positive change.

Strategic Actions

1. Education and training providers will ensure that there is a strong emphasis on relationship-based practice and co-production, in professional and vocational training for social workers and social care workers.
2. Learning and improvement activity will increase social workers' and social care workers' capacity to use strengths-based and community development approaches to their practice.
3. Service users and carers will be encouraged and helped to co-produce learning and improvement activity for social workers and social care workers.



Outcomes

- ✓ A relationship-based approach, based on empathy, reliability and respect will be integral to social workers' and social care workers' practice.
- ✓ There will be evidence of the increased use of strengths-based and community development approaches in social work and social care services.
- ✓ People who use services, their families and carers will be more directly involved in decision making regarding the design and delivery of the care they receive.
- ✓ The knowledge, skills, expertise and experience of service users, their families and communities will help to shape and inform the development of future social work/social care training, policy and practice.



Strategic Priority 2:

Highly Skilled, Resilient and Confident Workforce

Social workers and social care workers play a crucial role in improving and safeguarding the wellbeing of people who use services. Ways of working are changing but values and principles will remain constant. Services of the future will be increasingly dynamic, flexible and responsive and build upon individual, family and community supports.

Social workers and social care workers will need the energy, confidence and resilience to adapt to continuous change. Learning and improvement activity must focus on developing the knowledge and skills required to provide safe and effective care, which improves the lives of those people who use services.

Policy Statements

- 1.** Social workers and social care workers will be skilled, resilient and responsive, and demonstrate enthusiasm, confidence and competence in their practice, whilst upholding highest professional standards.
- 2.** Social workers, social care workers and employers are responsible for developing and maintaining the knowledge and skills needed to be safe, effective and caring practitioners.
- 3.** Social workers and social care workers will be supported to achieve qualifications which are relevant to their job role and function.

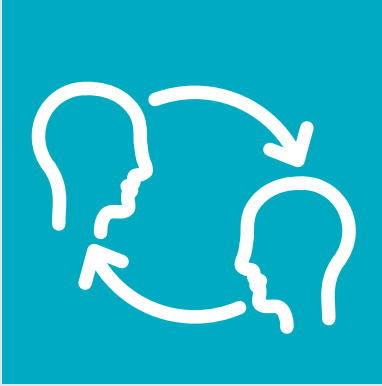
Strategic Actions

1. An audit of qualification achievement in the social work and social care workforce in HSC will be conducted and appropriate targets set for future attainment.
2. The commissioning and provision of learning and development opportunities for social workers and social care workers will be reviewed to ensure that it is fit for purpose.
3. A Framework for Career Progression for social workers will be developed, which will link to the achievement of qualifications and/or learning criteria.
4. A Learning and Improvement Framework for social care workers will be developed which will be in keeping with the strategic direction for future social care provision.

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Outcomes

- ✓ Social workers and social care workers will be supported in applying and sustaining core knowledge and skills into practice, and in the achievement of more specialist expertise and/or qualifications as their careers progress.
- ✓ There will be a more strategic and co-ordinated approach to the commissioning and delivery of learning and improvement opportunities for social workers and social care workers employed in the HSC sector.
- ✓ Learning and improvement activity will focus on developing the knowledge and skills that are essential to the delivery of safe and effective care, leading to improved outcomes for people who use services, their families and carers.
- ✓ There will be an increase in the achievement of qualifications for social workers and social care workers in NI.



Strategic Priority 3:

Continuous Learning and Improvement

A culture of continuous learning and improvement within any organisation is as important as rules, standards and control strategies in the pursuit of higher quality outputs. Organisations which employ social workers and social care workers must be committed to creating learning communities, in which staff are supported to be professionally curious, share information and expertise, are open-minded and want to do even better.

The workplace should be exploited as a rich field of learning in which individuals can learn from their own experience, from each other and from planned and unplanned learning opportunities. All staff should be able to identify how any learning activity relates to their job function, and understand how acquiring new knowledge, skills and qualifications will help their employer to better meet the needs of those people who use services.

To ensure the effective transfer of learning to improving practice, new and more meaningful measures for evaluating the benefits of staff learning and development activity will be required.

Policy Statements

1. Employers will encourage and support social workers and social care workers to engage in the continuous development and improvement of their practice throughout their careers.
2. Social workers and social care workers will be equipped to contribute to continuously improving practice and service provision, in partnership with people who use services.
3. Learning and improvement activity will be expected to deliver better outcomes for those people who use services, and agreed criteria will be developed to assess its impact on improving practice.

Strategic Actions

1. Social work and social care employers will encourage and develop a culture of continuous learning and improvement at individual, team and organisational levels.
2. The knowledge-base for effective social work and social care practice in NI will be built upon and supported by evidence and validated research.
3. The impact of learning and improvement activity will be evaluated to determine the extent to which it improves practice and leads to better outcomes for people who use services.
4. Social workers and social care workers will build their capacity to lead and contribute to continuous improvement, in partnership with people who use services and their families.

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Outcomes

- ✓ A learning culture will be evident at team, organisational and regional levels in social work and social care organisations, where staff experience a commitment to “help to learn” throughout their career.
- ✓ Social workers’ and social care workers’ practice will be evidence-based, underpinned by up to date research and they will be aware of the most effective ways of working within their chosen practice field.
- ✓ New methods will be designed to measure the quality of learning and development practice and its impact upon improving social wellbeing.
- ✓ Social workers and social care workers will demonstrate an expertise in measuring the outcomes and experiences of people who use services, their carers and wider support networks.



Strategic Priority 4: Effective Leadership and Management

High quality, safe and effective services, and the drive for continuous improvement in organisations comes from what leaders do – through their vision, commitment and modelling of appropriate behaviours. The best leaders and managers support and empower their staff by cultivating a positive organisational climate, promoting staff health and wellbeing and inspiring innovation and change.

Social work and social care services of the future will require leaders and managers at all levels, who involve staff and people who use services in decision making, provide regular helpful feedback, and recognise achievement and excellence. They address systems problems as they arise and ensure that staff feel supported, respected, empowered and valued at work.

Leaders and managers should also engage in activities which promote a higher, positive public profile for social work and social care, leading to a better understanding of its unique contribution to improving and safeguarding the wellbeing of society.

Policy Statements

1. Leaders and managers of social workers and social care workers at all levels will be equipped with the skills they need to provide professional leadership and management, coaching, and the development of others.
2. Leaders and managers will work collectively to appropriately influence relevant policy and strategy and the future development of social work and social care.
3. The future leaders of social work and social care organisations will be nurtured, encouraged and assisted to develop the knowledge and skills they require.

Strategic Actions

1. Leaders and managers at all levels in social work and social care organisations will engage in a range of learning and improvement opportunities aimed at enhancing their leadership capabilities.
2. Leaders and managers will adopt a collective leadership approach to ensuring the development and future strategic direction of social work and social care.
3. Social work and social care providers will be responsible for ensuring that their staff have the knowledge, skills and expertise they need to deliver safe and effective care.

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Outcomes

- ✓ Social work and social care organisations will have strong leaders and managers who drive safe and effective practice and are committed to securing the best possible outcomes for people who use services.
- ✓ Leaders and managers will work collegiately to influence policy, to set strategic direction and to promote social work and social care within a wider professional, political and economic context.
- ✓ The leaders of social work and social care organisations will nurture and maintain an ambitious and creative organisational culture which is focussed on learning and continuous improvement.
- ✓ Opportunities will be made available for future managers of social work and social care to gain the expertise and experience they will require to be the most effective leaders of tomorrow.



Strategic Priority 5: Collaboration and Partnership Working

Collaboration and partnership working is key to improving and safeguarding social wellbeing. Social workers and social care workers must be able to participate fully in existing partnerships, forge new and effective relationships with colleagues and be confident of their role and function within multi-disciplinary teams.

Social workers and social care workers should continue to develop and enhance their skills in collaborative and multi-disciplinary working.

Effective partnerships in the provision of learning and improvement also offer the best opportunity for achieving higher standards and securing regional consistency. The partnerships in place between social work and social care employers, Further/Higher Education providers and service users, also help to ensure that professional and vocational training courses are of the highest quality and keep pace with changing needs.

Policy Statements

1. Social workers and social care workers will have the confidence and skills to be effective and respected practitioners who can clearly articulate their role and function, and their contribution to improving and safeguarding social wellbeing will be understood and valued.
2. Social workers and social care workers will actively participate in multi-disciplinary and inter-professional teams, leading to a sharing of experience and expertise and better outcomes for people who use services.
3. The partnerships in place between employers, education providers and service users will be maintained and strengthened in order to maximise the availability of high quality learning opportunities for social workers and social care workers.

Strategic Actions

1. Social workers and social care workers will be supported to acquire the skills they need to work in multidisciplinary teams, with colleagues from other professions and across different sectors.
2. Key stakeholders, including employers, providers, the NISCC and relevant Government Departments, will work together to maximise the availability of high quality learning opportunities for social workers and social care workers.
3. Partnership arrangements between employers, service users and education providers will be strengthened, to ensure that professional and vocational training courses reflect the changing needs of social workers, social care workers and people who use services.
4. Where appropriate, training and development opportunities for social workers and social care workers will be delivered on a partnership basis to facilitate the sharing of best practice, regional consistency and to make the best use of scarce resources.



Outcomes

- ✓ Social workers and social care workers will have a clear understanding of their roles and functions within multi-disciplinary settings and be confident of their unique contribution to improving the wellbeing of people who use services.
- ✓ More effective working relationships will be evident between social workers, social care workers and colleagues from other disciplines and professions, in multidisciplinary and interprofessional teams and across different sectors.
- ✓ There will be a better co-ordination of effort and expertise between the relevant stakeholders in the provision of learning opportunities for the social work and social care workforce.
- ✓ Learning and development activity within social work and social care organisations will be strengthened and improved.



Strategic Priority 6:

Practising in a Digital World

Working practices are changing, and social workers and social care workers are expected to use up-to-date assistive technology to help them to provide the most effective and efficient services.

Greater diversity in the workforce and more flexible working arrangements also mean that new approaches to learning and development will be required. In the future, there will be particular emphasis on improved e-learning methodology, which can allow information to be delivered in different ways, at different times and places, and at a pace which matches individual learning styles.

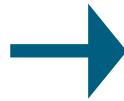
Digital technology already provides a range of innovative approaches to gaining knowledge and skills. A mixture of e-learning, face-to-face training and work-based experience provides a wider range of improvement opportunities. This 'blended approach' makes it possible to maximise the opportunities to apply new learning to practice, leading to improved outcomes for people who use services, families and communities.

Policy Statements

1. Social workers and social care workers will be equipped with the skills they need to make best use of technological advances, leading to more effective and efficient services.
2. Learning and improvement approaches which involve the use of new technology will be accessible, flexible and provide good value for money.
3. Social workers and social care workers will have the knowledge and skills they need to better understand and manage the risks associated with the use of technology in the workplace, and to help to maintain the safety of people who use services within a complex digital world.

Strategic Actions

1. Social workers and social care workers will become skilled in the use of existing and emerging technology which is aimed at improving outcomes for people who use services.
2. A range of methods to facilitate staff training, which includes high quality e-learning packages, face-to-face training and work-based mentoring, will be developed and made available.
3. Employers will ensure that social workers and social care workers have the knowledge and skills they need to make best use of modern technology to enhance and improve services; that they use it responsibly and help to safeguard people who use services from any associated harm.



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Outcomes

- ✓ Social workers and social care workers will use the most effective and up-to-date methods, including appropriate technological advances, which are designed to support working practices and enhance the services they deliver.
- ✓ Access to learning opportunities for the workforce will be improved by being more flexible and available at different times and places, to best suit learners' needs.
- ✓ Using blended-learning approaches to training and improvement activity, social workers and social care workers will maximise the opportunities to transfer newly-acquired knowledge and skills to the workplace.
- ✓ Social workers and social care workers will act responsibly in their use of technology, to improve practice in the delivery of efficient and effective services while assisting people who use services to maintain their safety and wellbeing.

Setting the direction for the future development of the social work and social care workforce.





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Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
An Roinn Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí

The Employer of Choice:

Caring for Staff

Caring for Service Users

*A strategy for managing and
developing people in the Health
and Personal Social Services*

Consultative Paper – August 2001

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PURPOSE OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGY

Why do we need a HR Strategy for the HPSS?

The Executive Committee of the Assembly has published its Programme for Government which sets out its priorities for tackling problems and improving public services over the next few years. This Programme was issued for public consultation and contains plans for improving the health and well being of the population and seeks to adopt a "joined up" approach across Departments.

The Programme emphasises its commitment to modernise and improve hospital and primary care services in the HPSS. The driving force of the new HPSS is quality.

For nearly thirty years, we have had integrated Health and Personal Social Services. During this period staff working in the HPSS have served with dedication, professionalism and fairness, often through difficult times. There is no doubt that the HPSS has a history to be proud of.

Throughout its existence, the HPSS has been subject to constant change and rising demands. Today there are increasing pressures for change as a result of demographic factors, clinical and technological advancements, economic constraints and the rise in public expectations. An effective HPSS Human Resources Strategy is central to the delivery of a modern, responsive, person centred HPSS.

How was the HR Strategy for the HPSS developed?

In November 1998 the Minister for Health and Social Services acknowledged that high quality services will only be delivered by staff who are well trained, well motivated and supported by their employer. He stated that a service-wide strategic framework of people management would be required, underpinned by a human resource strategy for the HPSS. The HSS Executive recognised that a Human Resources Strategy for the HPSS would be more meaningful if it was developed in partnership with staff and their representatives. As a first step a 'listening exercise' was undertaken throughout the HPSS in an attempt to identify and understand the major issues that provide the context for the human resources strategy. The results of the exercise were published in July 1999.

The next step in the process involved the establishment of the Human Resource Strategy Steering Group. The Group was convened in September 1999 and

included representatives from both management and staff side. A list of Steering Group members is attached in Annex 1.

The Group worked in partnership **"to develop a comprehensive Human Resources Strategy aimed at delivering a better, fairer workplace for staff, and thereby deliver benefits for service users."** This document represents a culmination of their work.

What's in it for me?

The Steering Group in undertaking the work was mindful that HPSS staff have experienced constant change over many years. It recognised that staff have been coping with increased workloads and ever increasing public expectation and scrutiny. Staff agendas are full. For this reason the Steering Group proceeded cautiously in an effort to ensure that the HR Strategy for the HPSS would strike a chord with every person working in the service.

This strategy has been developed to bring tangible, long term, demonstrable benefits to the HPSS workforce and ultimately to the people who use our services. The Steering Group believes that the full benefits of the Human Resource Strategy will only be realised if staff in the service are fully engaged to shape and influence the implementation and evaluation of the strategy. The group believes that we will achieve the best results if we work in partnership to decide the way forward.

Our Shared Agenda

A modernised Service is the future. It is imperative that the staff who work in the HPSS are able to make the best possible contribution, individually and collectively, to improving health and patient care. This strategy is based on the concept of partnership. Working together to create a responsive, skilled HPSS with a shared vision of improving the quality of service for those who receive treatment and care from health and social services providers.

Throughout the listening exercise strong recurrent messages can be found which confirm that staff want to be involved in all decisions that affect them: from big decisions on organisational change to the day to day decisions on how services are delivered. We need effective partnership, good communications and, above all, real teamwork. Staff recognise that they will need to be more flexible within the workplace to meet the challenge of necessary organisational changes. They in turn will need to be supported by improved employment practices, which will provide them with opportunities to adapt and learn new skills and which give reassurances on the security of their employment. It is important that staff enjoy a working environment where they are treated fairly and with respect and where all parts of the organisation work together, cutting across traditional functional boundaries.

The Steering Group believes that the HR Strategy for the HPSS will support the realisation of a modernised HPSS, delivering results for both staff and patients. No one however, should doubt the size of the task. We need to ensure that we find ways to move forward together. We must work together to both identify and meet the challenges ahead.

Making it real

The HPSS wants to become the employer of choice. If we are to improve the services we provide to service users, the HPSS needs to attract, retain and develop the best staff. We need to create the conditions within which staff can give of their best. This strategy deals with issues traditionally associated with human resources such as workforce planning; education and training; employee relations; equality and fairness and improving working lives. It is however equally important that we record the wider set of core values and beliefs which were used to inform the strategy, and which the Steering Group believes should underpin the way we do business throughout the HPSS.

As part of the listening exercise staff identified a range of values and principles that they felt should underpin the treatment of staff working in the HPSS. Staff said that there was a need throughout the HPSS to:

- recognise and appreciate the contribution of each individual staff member;
- treat others as we expect to be treated ourselves;
- make sure everybody is treated fairly with equal opportunities for all;
- be open and honest with each other;
- build high levels of trust between everybody, at all levels of the organisation;
- be flexible with staff and encourage them to be flexible.

A White Paper "Agenda for Change – Modernising the NHS Pay System" was published containing outline proposals which provide a blueprint for a new NHS pay system covering all of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Detailed consideration is being undertaken on a partnership basis involving the major trades unions representing staff and the four territorial Health departments. Staff employed in the HPSS are linked for pay and conditions of service purposes to the pay and conditions of similar staff in the NHS, and it will be a matter for the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in conjunction with the Assembly and the Executive Committee, to decide on local issues surrounding implementation.

The new system for the HPSS will be based on principles of efficiency, fairness, flexibility and partnership. This will give better career progression and modern conditions of service. A national job evaluation scheme is being developed for assessing all NHS and HPSS jobs and will be used to place grades on common pay spines.

When the complete package is finalised it will be for the Assembly to decide the extent of the link between the NHS framework and the local flexibility required to meet the needs of the health and personal social services.

Creating the environment, which encourages, supports and sustains change will be the challenge for the future of the HPSS. The Steering Group believes that giving life to the HR Strategy will support the creation of this environment.

Conclusions

The Steering group considered that, in order to achieve the strategic human resources agenda, the principal areas to addressed are

- Workforce Planning
- Recruitment, Retention and Return
- Improving Working Lives
- Equality and Fairness
- Education and Training
- Industrial Relations

Section 1

Workforce Planning

- 1.1 Workforce Planning is about seeking to predict the future demands for different types of staff and seeking to match this with supply. Its fundamental purpose is to ensure that there are sufficient staff available with the right skills to deliver high quality care to service users. Workforce Planning supports the development of a workforce which is flexible and responsive and which supports change in service delivery.
- 1.2 Prediction of future needs has always been difficult. It is further complicated by the need to have some slack in the system to take account of the increasing numbers of staff who need to take time out or who wish to work flexibly. Effective workforce planning must balance the training needs of staff with the demands of the service they work in; it is an exceptionally complex task. It is complex because of the number of professional groups involved, the long lead-times for training, the pace of change within the HPSS and the range of areas across the HPSS whose requirements for staff need to be taken into account.

Challenge

- 1.3 One of the biggest problems facing the HPSS has been our inability to carry out effective Workforce Planning. This has resulted in shortages of staff within the HPSS, excessive and inefficient use of temporary contracts across a wide range of disciplines and an over reliance on agency staff. Shortages of staff relate not only to numbers but also to an overall skill deficit in the workforce. These problems cannot be resolved by simply pledging to create more jobs. As it is often staff with specific skills and competencies that are needed, not just extra pairs of hands, additional staff may not necessarily be in the right place or have the right skills to contribute immediately to the HPSS.
- 1.4 While there are immediate concerns about staff shortages, focusing too narrowly on short term needs will not be enough to improve workforce planning. We need to develop our capacity to assess demand and to understand how to link workforce planning to planning for other purposes. In looking at the current arrangements for workforce planning there are separate systems that cover the various sectors, employers and staff groups within the HPSS. This has resulted in fragmentation of planning to the extent that plans for service improvements have in the past been thwarted because due consideration has not been given to the recruitment or deployment of staff needed to provide the service.

Meeting the Challenge

Key Priorities: -

To carry out a full review of the workforce planning arrangements for all groups within HPSS.

To develop a more holistic approach to workforce planning.

To continue to develop team working across professional and organisational boundaries.

Reviewing Arrangements

- 1.5 Traditional workforce planning arrangements have focused on staff as the providers of services. The vision for a modern HPSS is one that delivers care to people in a way that is sensitive to their needs and expectations. We need to ensure therefore, that workforce planning is an activity carried out to support the care of people and not for its own sake. This will require a shift in emphasis to ensure the needs of the service users are the focus of workforce planning arrangements. This should help us to ensure that we have the staff we need to deliver the service the users need.

A More Holistic Approach

- 1.6 There are currently separate systems for workforce planning across the range of professional and non-professional groups within HPSS. This has led to very different approaches to planning and poor integration between groups. Workforce plans need to be developed on a multidisciplinary basis. We need therefore to establish a simple common language for workforce planning. We need to jointly develop positive, forward thinking models for workforce planning that can be applied and understood throughout the service. This will require the development of a two-way process that allows workforce planning to be both "bottom up" and "top down", ensuring that it will be strategically led but informed by operational issues. Resources will need to be made available to enable the new planning models to be used effectively, this will in particular mean establishing an appropriate skill base, and the development of appropriate information systems. We must also ensure that all strategic/policy discussions and all business plans identify the impact of service developments on the workforce. There is a vital role for both commissioners and providers to jointly explore the staffing implications of any service development proposals to ensure they identify and provide the appropriate human resources.

Team Working

- 1.7 To make sure we have the staff we need to deliver a high quality, person focused service we need to examine how staff should work together to deliver that service. We need to look at the workforce in a different way – as teams of people rather than as separate disciplines. We will need to develop flexible systems that will help with the inevitable peaks and troughs in the supply and demand for different skills. This will inevitably change the way staff are used, will drive change in the skills they require and will require improvements to be made in the way training and education is provided. Effective workforce planning is inextricably linked to the education and training of staff. It is therefore critically important that the needs of service users care drive the education and training agenda (see para. 5.5).

Working Group

- 1.8 Effective workforce planning has a central part to play in establishing a successful Human Resource strategy. It is essential therefore that a working group, combining expertise from management and staff representatives is set up to explore this issue in detail. The working group will be required to review existing arrangements and recommend a process to enable workforce planning to be implemented effectively. The working group will report on the training requirements identified in the area of workforce planning, establish the basic information requirements for an effective workforce planning model and research methods to ensure the Human Resource implications of all policy decisions are taken into account.

Strategic Issues: -

Establish a joint working group to be charged with assessing workforce planning issues, recommending best practice and developing effective structures for integrated workforce planning.

Review approach to workforce planning to ensure it is driven by the needs of service users.

Develop a workforce planning model that will ensure plans concerning services, workforce and resources are made jointly, are consistent and are well co-ordinated.

Assess and provide the resources required to implement new planning model.

Develop team working to provide for more flexible deployment of staff and maximise the use of skills and abilities.

Improve education and training to ensure staff are equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to work in a complex, changing HPSS.

Expand the workforce to meet future demands.

SECTION 2

Recruitment, Retention and Return

- 2.1 The HPSS depends upon the skills and knowledge of staff and the availability of suitably qualified people to match the increasing demands placed on it. As services expand the demand for skilled staff rises and there is an ever increasing need for the HPSS to:
- **Recruit** – attract more people into the HPSS,
 - **Retain** - encourage more staff to stay in the HPSS, for longer,
 - **Return** - make it easier and more attractive for staff to return.
- 2.2 The cost to the organisation in not having the right staff in the right places, doing the right things in the right way is very substantial. There is lost investment in training when qualified people subsequently spend much of their working lives outside the HPSS. Loss of staff from the service also generates costs in recruitment and the expense of bridging gaps in staffing. Sickness levels too, are influenced by the conditions of work and the low morale generated when staffing levels are inadequate. If the experience of people working in healthcare is negative, then this is picked up by family, friends and by the media in general. People make career choices based on what they see and hear and on the views expressed around them. Negative work experiences passed on in these ways will make future recruitment more difficult and more expensive.

Challenge

- 2.3 There are national shortages of some skilled staff in healthcare, which has been widely acknowledged across a range of specialities. The HPSS has found it increasingly difficult to recruit staff with the right skills and experience. The resulting shortages have been compounded by high staff turnover, the inappropriate use of fixed term and temporary contracts, reliance on agency staff and increases in sickness absence. As well as placing a financial burden on the service, this self-perpetuating situation places a burden on the staff who are in work. Problems with the current grading systems and with career progression within the HPSS add to the frustrations and can leave some staff disillusioned. The outcomes are a reduction in applicants to and trainees within the HPSS and staff already in the organisation become dissatisfied with the pressures of work, which in turn creates low morale.
- 2.4 Demand for professional staff outside the HPSS is growing. Areas such as expanding private sectors and foreign and national health care providers

have launched aggressive recruitment campaigns which target current and potential HPSS staff. As the HPSS reshapes itself to meet the needs of its service users it will need the best (most appropriate) staff in practice at all levels. We need staff who are looking for new positions to choose the HPSS and, to influence their decisions, we need the HPSS to have a good public image.

Meeting the Challenge

2.5. Key Priorities: -

*To attract more people into the HPSS;
To encourage staff to stay in the HPSS, for longer;
To make it easier and more attractive for staff to return.*

Recruit

2.6 The HPSS needs to develop an effective recruitment policy to attract the best applicants to new posts. This will inevitably involve the promotion of the HPSS as a developing, "people-friendly" organisation. Employee friendly policies provide staff with more flexibility to balance work and other responsibilities. As one of the largest employers here we have a responsibility not only to match the standards of other organisations, but also to set the pace of employment practice. There continue to be specific needs in relation to employment practice for sections of our workforce that must be addressed. These include hours of work, conditions, quality of training, career progression and flexible work patterns. We need to end the inappropriate use of fixed term and temporary contracts and to address our reliance on agency staff. In doing so we need to develop and promote best recruitment practices throughout the HPSS.

Retain

2.7 Healthcare is a 24-hour, 7 days a week activity. Providing these services should not mean asking staff to work hours which make their lives away from work more difficult. Rather, the delivery of such services should be seen as an opportunity to develop innovative working patterns to match the needs of users with the preferences of staff. By definition, supportive and employee friendly ways of working cannot be imposed. They are developed by asking, not telling. The examples of most successful practice occur where staff are allowed to be involved in making decisions affecting their own working lives. We need to examine the conditions under which staff work, to promote the physical health, mental health and well being of staff at all times and to examine how the conditions of work and morale influence sickness levels in the HPSS. Helping staff to combine work with the commitments they have outside the world of work can reduce absenteeism and help encourage trained and skilled staff to remain within the HPSS.

Return

- 2.8 The pool of trained and qualified staff who are not working in the HPSS is a major potential resource. Typically these are people who left to raise a family or care for a relative. They may also include some who became dissatisfied with the pressure of full time work, suffered illness or injury, or simply wanted to follow other ambitions. Given the right circumstances and support, many may want to return. To make it easier the main barriers to return need to be addressed. These are likely to be; loss of confidence in clinical competence, where an individual feels their skills have lapsed or are outdated; unsuitability of existing work patterns, where inflexible hours conflict with other commitments; no awareness of return to work opportunities within the HPSS. To address these issues the HPSS will need to develop a considered and co-ordinated set of training options for returning staff, commit to family friendly and flexible ways of working and publicise return to work opportunities through advertising and PR campaigns.

Strategic Issues:

Develop effective recruitment policies to attract the best applicants to the HPSS.

Promote uniformity in recruitment practices throughout the HPSS.

Improve employment practice within HPSS by addressing specific areas of need e.g. hours of work, conditions, quality of training, career progression, flexible working patterns.

Review the use of temporary and fixed term contracts and agency staff to allow for their use in limited and specific circumstances only.

*Protect and promote the health and well being of staff within the workplace
Seek to develop effective "Managing Attendance" and "Managing Absence" programmes.*

Develop a successful "return to work" initiative, which will aim to overcome the obstacles that exist for trained and qualified staff not currently working in the HPSS.

SECTION 3

Improving Working Lives

- 3.1 We have determined that to promote the HPSS as a developing, "people-friendly" organisation the experience of the people who work in the organisation must be positive. The quality of care provided to service users, their families and carers goes hand in hand with the quality of the working lives we provide for everyone who works in the HPSS. To improve the working lives of our staff we need to transform working and training practices and sustain a healthy balance between work and our lives outside it.
- 3.2 A modern HPSS requires modern employment practices. It is well documented nowadays that "the healthy workplace" is about much more than merely addressing Health and Safety issues in Employment. "Healthy" is used in the broadest terms and incorporates employee friendly policies, equality of opportunity, dealing with issues of stress, mental health, bullying/harassment and the development of effective Occupational Health services.

Challenge

- 3.3 Achieving "quality of life" for many people is dependent on finding a balance between the demands of employment and the responsibilities of home life. While a number of policies have been developed within the HPSS with a view to improving the working environment and its flexibility, it is widely acknowledged that a more comprehensive range of flexible working arrangements need to be developed and supported. The recently published document "Opportunity 2000 Models of Flexible Working" - now known as "Opportunity Now" - provides wide-ranging examples of flexible working arrangements which can help managers to achieve their objectives in a way that also supports employee need.
- 3.4 The HPSS knows how to provide round the clock care - now it has to make services more accessible and respond to rising public expectations. Offering greater flexibility in working patterns can help in the delivery of better care and will also benefit staff. However, to enable the HPSS to improve its general reputation and become an employer of choice, staff must also feel that they are valued. This will be achieved where staff believe that there is equality of opportunity in promotion and training and where issues which contribute to stress in the workplace are addressed. Quality of working life is an increasingly important factor that influences staff to remain in their jobs and staff who are committed to their place of work, are more likely to recommend others to join them.

Meeting the Challenge

Key Priorities: -

*To create an "employee friendly" workplace
To provide a healthy workplace for all staff;
To maintain a safe working environment.*

An Employee Friendly Workplace

- 3.5 The government has recognised that to help recruit and retain skilled staff, to reduce absenteeism and increase morale, employers must try to help employees find a balance between the demands of employment and the responsibilities of a home life. Caring for children, elder-care and care for dependants are just some examples of the commitments staff have outside the world of work. Managing these demands positively can help keep staff in the HPSS who may otherwise leave. "Opportunity Now" presents a wide range of flexible working models that provide tangible benefits for both the employer and the employee. We need to involve staff and managers in the development of policies. To ensure that policies are put into practice a full training programme for managers will be required and auditing the effectiveness of the policies will be essential.

A Healthy Workplace

- 3.6 It is the duty of a responsible employer to work with staff to act against the causes of preventable ill health and to play a part in providing a supportive, safe and healthy work environment. To build a better quality of life for HPSS staff we need to create better health at work and take clear action to achieve it. To this end, the HPSS needs to develop an effective and comprehensive Occupational Health Service that will take the lead in assessing the health needs of staff and will take action to promote good health and reduce ill health among staff, caused, or made worse by work. This will best be achieved through the development of a strategy on Occupational Health Services for HPSS staff. Among the issues that the strategy should address are the identification of best practice, roles and responsibilities, education and training needs and the role, aims and minimum standards of an Occupational Health Service in the HPSS.

A Safe Workplace

- 3.7 The skilled and dedicated people who work in the HPSS spend their lives caring for others, yet too often they are victims of violence and intimidation, bullying and harassment. "Violence" means any incident where staff are abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work and as such will not be tolerated. There is no single solution to preventing

violence against staff working in the HPSS. Preventing violence at work must start with a full assessment of the risks. This must be followed by the development of strategies to reduce identified risks. Establishing procedures for dealing with violent situations will give staff confidence in how to cope effectively. Similarly, bullying and harassment within the workplace is a serious issue. It can undermine a person's physical and mental health and in doing so can affect their work performance. Obviously, the employer has a duty of care to provide a safe and healthy working environment but employees also have a duty to ensure their behaviour does not have an adverse impact on colleagues. The HPSS must have effective policies in place for dealing with bullying and harassment. The development of a Staff Charter will promote the rights of staff in this area and help staff to feel valued within the organisation.

Strategic Issues: -

Promote and support the development of a wide range of working patterns to enable staff to balance work with their other responsibilities.

Address the "long hours" culture that exists in parts of the HPSS.

Produce a strategy document that will guide the development of an effective and inclusive Occupational Health Service to be accessible by all staff in the HPSS.

Ensure that policy documents addressing safe working conditions are developed and issued in all local management areas.

Develop a Staff Charter that will promote the rights of staff in relation to violence, bullying and harassment.

SECTION 4

Equality and Fairness

- 4.1 The Northern Ireland Act 1998 places new duties on all public authorities to promote equality of opportunity and good relations and has considerable implications for how the HPSS conducts its business. The Act creates a statutory obligation on public authorities in carrying out their functions to:-

have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between certain groups (persons of different religious beliefs, political opinions, racial groups, ages, marital status or sexual orientation, between men and women, between persons with a disability and persons without and between persons with dependants and persons without); and

have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious beliefs, political opinions or racial groups.

- 4.2 The Act also sets out a detailed procedure for the enforcement of these duties, which include a requirement on all public authorities to submit equality schemes to the new Equality Commission. The main vehicle through which the HPSS will fulfil its statutory obligations is through its equality schemes.

Challenge

- 4.3 Within the HPSS it has been regarded as very important that sound equal opportunities principles should be applied to everything we do. The traditional equal opportunities approach has however, tended towards the letter of the law rather than the promotion of a good equal opportunities culture. It has for too long been confined to the personnel department, often taking the form of paper policies and statistical exercises.
- 4.4 The key equality principles for the HR strategy are based on the effective implementation of the full range of equality legislation and, most importantly for the HPSS, on the implementation of the statutory duty of equality of opportunity under the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The HPSS plays a key role in delivering services to the community, it is a major employer of men and women and forms many links with external agencies. It should therefore be seen to take a lead role in the integration of equal opportunity policies into all policy development, implementation, evaluation and review processes.

Meeting the Challenge

Key Priorities: -

*To promote equality of opportunity within the HPSS;
To ensure equality is sustained throughout the HPSS by ongoing monitoring;
To ensure the equal and full protection of all part-time workers.*

Promoting Equal Opportunities

4.5 There is a statutory duty under the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and other legislation, to promote equality throughout the HPSS. However aside from the legal reasons there are moral and economic reasons for having a good equal opportunities policy and promoting equality of opportunity within the organisation. The HPSS operates in a very complex and demanding environment where the only constant is change. To help meet these challenges we need to ensure that we make the best use of the skills, expertise and talents of our staff. This will best be achieved where all eligible staff have equal opportunities for employment and advancement in the HPSS based on their ability, qualifications and aptitude for work. As a catalyst to stimulate awareness and interest in good equal opportunity practice we need to integrate a full equality approach into training strategies and programmes. We need to fully integrate equality into the procurement and review of service delivery and into resource allocation. When developing key policies, not just those promoting equality of opportunity, their likely impact on the promotion of equality must be assessed and adequate consultation must ensue with service users/those affected. The successful promotion of good equal opportunities practices will generate cost and we will need to allocate specific resources, including staff, to maintain a working environment where staff feel confident that the HPSS is indeed an equal opportunities employer.

Monitoring Equality of Opportunity

4.6 Despite the recognised merits of equal opportunities policies there are barriers to translating them into daily practice. Problems can persist which include prejudices, existing work practices, attitudes, stereotyping and behavioural problems. Monitoring arrangements will have to be put into place/maintained to help identify problem areas and to assist management and staff in overcoming them. There will need to be continuous monitoring of existing policies and procedures, and quality assurance of any proposed new operational policies to ensure the rigours of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the HPSS equal opportunities policies are met. We need to ensure that questions of equality and non-discrimination are not sidelined. Employers must engage directly with equality issues.

Protecting Part-time Workers

- 4.7 In recognising that a modern HPSS requires modern employment practices it is necessary that we challenge traditional working patterns and promote a variety of working arrangements that meet the needs of staff and benefit users. Research evidence, however, suggests that staff who work part-time can become marginalised in terms of their contribution to care and their own career development. It is important to prevent such an undervaluing of skills and experience and therefore policies need to be put in place to address directly the situation of part-time staff. Part-time staff should have the same opportunities to update and develop skills as full time staff. They should be involved in meetings and not distanced from decision making within teams. It is vital that mixes in working patterns are not allowed to undermine continuity of care for service users. Effective handover and communications procedures must be in place. The existence of part-time posts at all levels - up to the most senior - will capture the contribution of staff whose ability and skills would otherwise be lost. Such a structure would enable careers to be progressed.

Strategic Issues: -

Ensure policies that actively promote equality of opportunity for all staff (including part-time workers) are developed/maintained and are consistent with the legislative requirements and HPSS equal opportunities policies.

Integrate a full equality approach into training strategies and programmes.

Develop procedures to assess and consult on the likely impact of policies on the promotion of equality.

Develop a system for analysing, monitoring and evaluating the application of equal opportunity policies and procedures by all managers and staff.

Develop a set of standards to ensure staff are valued and rewarded according to the contribution they make to patient/client care and meeting the needs of the service, and not according to their working patterns.

SECTION 5

Education and Training

- 5.1 The skills, experience and commitment of the workforce determine the quality of care provided by the HPSS. Our workforce is generally highly educated and well trained. This, combined with the experience gained in providing care, represents a high investment in expertise and skills by both the staff themselves and the HPSS and ultimately by the taxpayer.
- 5.2 This accumulation of knowledge and skills is a critical valuable resource in planning to meet the future needs in terms of promoting health and well being. But like any other valuable investment it presents a challenge to ensure that it is protected, maintains its value in meeting the needs of service users and enhances the career prospects of staff.

Challenge

- 5.3 The delivery of the more flexible, responsive, person-focused service that will be needed in the future will have a major impact on the workforce. Particular attention will need to be paid to how staff are skilled and trained, how their skills are maintained and developed and how different disciplines work together to enhance the user's experience. There is the emphasis on primary care, the modernisation of secondary care, the shift away from institutional care to care in the community and there is the organisation's responsibility to deliver on clinical and social care governance. This means that there will be a greater need for many professional staff to adapt, to learn new skills and to work in changed environments as new roles emerge and others cease to be relevant.
- 5.4 The HPSS must demonstrate that it is fiercely committed to helping its people to succeed. We must dedicate ourselves to giving staff the support and resources they need by investing in their training, education and overall employability. Staff, for their part, need to be responsive to the opportunities provided for their continuing development. In an environment ever changing through advances in technology and the development of clinical practice, it does not take long for skills and knowledge to become outdated. Staff must be prepared to adapt to new products and techniques. They need to be kept informed of changes to their work areas so they can update their knowledge, acquire new skills and stay abreast of what is happening in their field/profession.

5.5 Meeting the Challenge

Key Priorities: -

To develop, maintain and support a culture of lifelong learning throughout the HPSS;

To ensure that there is a business focus to all training and development programmes;

To promote learning among staff who do not hold professional qualifications.

Learning for All

- 5.6 It is clear that investment in post registration/post graduate/continuous professional education is at best static and is frequently under threat when resources are constrained. We must also acknowledge that there is currently little infrastructure for the promotion of learning among staff who do not hold professional qualifications (with the possible exception of management). This is unacceptable and we need support the training and development of all staff in the context of business need, and to accept that Continuous Professional Development is a "must" for all groups of staff.

Lifelong Learning

- 5.7 The HPSS needs to develop a culture of lifelong learning to ensure that all staff will be able to develop and update their skills and knowledge throughout their working lives. Improvements need to be made to the way in which we identify the knowledge and skills required by the workforce. As new skills and knowledge requirements are identified these must be incorporated into the curriculum by the education providers. There is therefore a need to develop and improve the relationship between the HPSS and the providers of education to ensure, particularly in relation to higher education, that providers remain in touch with modern service needs – improvements must include the provision of far more multi-disciplinary education and training programmes. Adopting a culture of lifelong learning will require investment but we need to recognise that failure to make the requisite investment is short sighted and will ultimately lead to a lowering of standards.

Business Focus

- 5.8 While individuals need wider access to opportunities for learning, there must be a clear focus for training and development activities. The Investors in People (IIP) standard requires that all training and development activities meet the business needs of the organisation and all areas of HPSS should strive to attain/retain this standard. The reward for any organisation in adopting this approach, is added value to organisational performance. It is equally important for the HPSS to develop the flexibility

for added skills which enhance the business to attract added reward, to develop and support career progression by creating genuine flexibility between jobs and to develop and support career structures that encourage and recognise specialist skills.

Strategic Issues: -

Develop a programme for the systematic examination of training and development provided for staff.

Promote lifelong learning through the creation of a personal development planning system.

Ensure education providers incorporate the skills and knowledge requirements of the HPSS into the curriculum.

Develop structures that reward skills development, support career progression and recognise specialist skills.

Ensure Continuous Professional Development is provided for staff.

Create an infrastructure for the promotion of learning among staff who do not hold professional qualifications.

SECTION 6

Employee Relations

- 6.1 The promotion of effective and harmonious employee relations is a key component in the development of a successful Human Resource Strategy for the HPSS. The HPSS needs, and wants, to meet its responsibilities as a good employer and in doing so commands widespread respect and commitment from the workforce. Better employee relations are fostered where there is effective employee involvement and genuine partnership arrangements. This requires leaders to adopt modern and effective leadership styles that seek to support staff and involve them fully in the change process.
- 6.2 Against a background of changing service needs the HPSS must be able to recruit retain and support a fairly paid, well trained and highly motivated workforce who are free from uncertainty over employment security. Recent research commissioned by the TUC confirms that one of the principles needed for trades unions and management to work successfully together is a commitment to employment security.

Challenge

- 6.3 Both the employers and the staff in the HPSS are firmly committed to the aim of improving the health and social wellbeing of service users. This shared goal will be achieved in a working environment where staff are involved and feel valued. A proactive, collaborative approach involving the Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety, HPSS employers and the recognised trade unions and staff organisations in developing a policy of fostering good industrial relations is therefore essential to improving the working environment.
- 6.4 The HPSS is facing considerable change in the near future and during times of transition and change it is difficult to maintain a "business as usual" working environment. Restructuring within any workplace affects staff morale as apprehension grows over perceived risks/threats to jobs. In the past managers have felt powerless to offer guarantees on jobs and have expanded the use of fixed term and temporary contracts, which added to staff's feelings of vulnerability.

Meeting the Challenge

Key Priorities: -

*To improve the current mechanisms for negotiating within the HPSS;
To develop policies and practices to manage change;
To introduce employment security policies to the HPSS.*

Improve Negotiating Machinery

- 6.5 The Regional Joint Council machinery was abolished in April 1995 and was replaced with a Regional Consultative Forum and some 28 separate local negotiating units. While there have been some examples of good industrial relations practice at local level under these arrangements, situations have also arisen where, because of the number of local negotiating units, there has been unnecessary bureaucracy and duplication of work. We need therefore to review the existing industrial relations arrangements at local level, and to build on examples of best practice. We acknowledge the need for regional negotiating and will jointly develop appropriate regional consultative and negotiating mechanisms.

Managing Change

- 6.6 There is widespread recognition of the changing environment the HPSS is now operating in, which has in part come about as a result of the rapid evolution of the government's health policy. To manage change effectively requires an investment in leadership skills. Staff will feel valued where they are involved in improving care and providing better services. Effective involvement happens only where leaders at all levels in an organisation are committed to an open, participative working style. With an emphasis placed on co-operation, true partnership can provide a positive framework for the management of change. While a partnership approach is directly related to the HR Strategy it is not just about Human Resources – it is about engaging the whole process and will for example embrace policy formulation in the widest sense. It is about drawing together the different employer and staff perspectives. Future reorganising and restructuring processes need therefore to be supported by the appropriate regional negotiating machinery and need to be managed in such a way as to avoid uncertainty and insecurity over contractual employment and industrial relations issues.

Employment Security

- 6.7 One of the most prized benefits of employment to every employee is security. Modernising the HPSS will mean adapting to new technology and new working patterns and consequently all jobs will continue to be subject to change. Employment security policies recognise change and

acknowledge that individual jobs will not necessarily be secure. They do however provide a strong commitment from the employer to securing employment. This is achieved by requiring people to work flexibly and to change jobs as business requirements dictate. The effectiveness of an employment security policy is determined by the organisation's investment in re-training staff and through genuine flexibility between jobs. The more flexible staff are prepared to be, the greater their employment security will be. Employment security policies create the right environment in which to manage change by recognising staff's concerns and providing the necessary support to overcome them

Strategic Issues: -

Develop appropriate regional negotiating and consultative mechanisms.

Undertake a comprehensive review of industrial relations procedures.

Define the core competencies and qualities required by leaders key to the management of change.

Develop open, participative leadership skills through a programme of training and development.

Employers to develop Partnership Agreements with staff and their representatives

Facilitate the management of change through the adoption of employment security policies, with the aim of reassuring employees and committing them to the change process.

Annex 1

Steering Group Members

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