



Association for Real Change (NI)

Response to the
LEARNING & IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY FOR SOCIAL
WORKERS AND SOCIAL CARE WORKERS
2017-25

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Association for Real Change, Northern Ireland (ARC NI) is an umbrella body, representing 38 providers of learning disability services. Members include statutory, voluntary and private organisations, all of whom provide a range of services to the learning disability population. ARC NI welcomes the opportunity of responding to this consultation.

1. The 6 Strategic Priorities

ARC NI overall welcomes and concurs with the strategic priorities as outlined within this Strategy to address the learning and development needs of the social care workforce. There are a number of current pressures faced by the learning disability sector which are at risk of significantly impacting negatively on the lives of people with a learning disability if not addressed. These include the inadequate pipeline of workforce entering the Social Care Sector, the imbalanced salaries of workforce versus the skills and qualifications required, and the changing, more complex needs of people with a learning disability.

1.1 Strategic Priority 1:

Person-centred practices, user involvement and co-production are models of working which have been implemented over a number of years within the learning disability sector by providers of support. ARC NI however has reservations of how inclusive and accessible other bodies have been in ensuring the voice of a person with a learning disability is central to broader service design and planning. **ARC NI therefore welcomes the focus of community development approaches being introduced more widely across the H&SC workforce.**

ARC NI is highly aware of the challenges in recruiting and retaining staff within the social care sector but the critical aspect is finding those with the right value base. A number of learning disability providers currently use value based recruitment to assist and **ARC NI welcomes NISCC taking this forward regionally and aligning with the Standards & Conduct of Practice for social care workers.**

1.2 Strategic Priority 2:

ARC NI agrees with the actions and outcomes listed within priority 2 however feels there has been a missed opportunity to capture the current qualifications of social care workforce through the mandatory registration process administered by NISCC. **ARC NI urges this to be addressed urgently.**

The social care sector invests heavily in the skill and competence of its workforce but sometimes the proportion of spend in Learning & Development leans heavily towards courses meeting minimum mandatory requirements. **ARC NI looks forward to RQIA**

re-issuing lighter touch guidance for training requirements which will allow providers to invest in other areas of learning.

ARC NI would issue caution however of the potential imbalance between the level of skill, knowledge and qualification required versus the levels of pay received by social care workforce. Whilst acknowledging under Priority 1 the importance in workforce holding the correct value base to undertake their role, social care providers would hold strong desires to pay their workforce suitable salaries to reflect the nature of these roles and in recognition to the contributions social care workforce make in caring for some of the most vulnerable people in NI. This is not however possible due to contract values & commissioning rates. Many social care staff are paid NLW and even meeting this has presented significant financial challenges for charitable providers due to current commissioning arrangements. **ARC NI would therefore recommend this be considered and communicate the rationale of financially investing in our workforce through learning and development because we care and value them.**

1.3 ***Strategic Priority 3:***

ARC NI welcomes this priority and associated activity, specifically the collaboration across disciplines including academia. One of the opportunities not referenced is the offering of Apprenticeships within Social Care. **ARC NI would advocate the need for the Department of Health to support the messaging for social care to be considered a priority and propose this be available to support a Level 3 post upwards.**

1.4 ***Strategic Priority 4:***

ARC NI recognises the need for a focus on leadership as the challenges faced by the Social Care sector, at a time of such significant external changes are well documented. We particularly welcomed the acknowledgement within the Begoa Report of the need to change processes, including the reduction of regulatory demands. This also requires a shared understanding of risk. **ARC NI proposes collaboration across sectors occur to develop a shared approach to risk taking.**

Whilst the outworkings of the changeover of QCF qualifications to RQF are yet to be finalised we believe there are additional measures that can be applied to accommodate

those who have a qualification obtained outside of NI. **ARC NI calls for a sensible approach to ensuring the required pipeline of Level 5 workforce can be met.**

1.5 ***Strategic Priority 5:***

ARC NI considers collaboration across sectors, disciplines and workforce to be key to delivering consistent high quality support and achieving meaningful outcomes for people with a learning disability. We therefore welcome this Priority. At a time of reduced funds, continual reflections are required on how to make efficiency savings. ARC NI is aware of the portfolio of training delivered in-house across the Health & Social Care Trusts, including classroom based and e-learning. **ARC NI would request the Department of Health and the 5 HSCTs make their training available across sectors, enabling multi-disciplinary workforce to learn in the room together.**

1.6 ***Strategic Priority 6:***

This Priority is considered by ARC NI to be very relevant but least likely to be achieved, without significant investment. Many of the workforce in Social Care are not provided with up to date technology such as smart phones, tablets etc and many support individuals within their own homes and hence are not based in an office environment.

Furthermore there has been an uncoordinated approach to the development of e-learning for Social Care in NI. Providers have tried to progress through a number of options at a cost to their organisation and some have proved more adequate than others. It is ARC NI's view that had this been coordinated at a regional level, a shared resource could have been developed at reduced cost. As a result, organisations are more limited in what they can invest to resolve this issue.

As outlined above, it is ARC NI's view that blended learning across disciplines presents a great opportunity. **ARC NI would ask the Department of Health to explore a regional HSC e-learning platform with shared content across providers and disciplines.**