



Communication and Engagement Strategy 2017 - 2021



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Introduction

This Communications and Engagement Strategy supports the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) Corporate Plan 2017 - 2021 and identifies how we will communicate with and engage people and partners in the regulation, registration and development of the social work and social care workforce in Northern Ireland (NI) over the next four years.

In the past 15 years NISCC has made considerable progress in achieving our corporate aims to protect the public through improving safeguards for vulnerable people, raising the standards of social care practice and strengthening the professionalism of the workforce.

The original policy intent for the registration of social workers and social care workers contained in the Health and Personal Social Services Act (N.I.) 2001 has been completed and there are now more than 37,000 social workers and social care workers in Northern Ireland registered with NISCC.

To have an impact on this large and diverse workforce which is employed by more than 500 different employers in the voluntary, community, private and statutory sectors and provides care and support for many thousands of people across the region the Council needs to have in place an effective and meaningful Communication and Engagement strategy.

Communicate, Connect and Engage is one of the five key strategic themes in the NISCC Corporate Plan 2017/21. It recognises the crucial importance of effective and meaningful communication and engagement with our key stakeholders in helping to build better relationships in our areas of work. The outcomes we are aiming to achieve are:

- Improved public perception of social workers and social care workers as a workforce that is committed to upholding standards
- Increased confidence in the contribution of workforce regulation in serving and protecting the public, minimising risk and reducing harms by embedding and raising standards
- The views, experience and expertise of service users and carers in informing our business is valued and can be evidenced

However we recognise that communication and engagement is a broader more inclusive and continuous process encompassing a range of activities and approaches across the organisation. This strategy does not set out to describe the work of a dedicated communications team but is designed to help focus all areas of NISCC on the priorities for communication and engagement that should be built into every aspect of planning across the organisation.



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The key priorities for communication and engagement for NISCC in the years ahead are to:

- Raise awareness of the Standards of Conduct and Practice as a key tool to underpin workforce development in social work and social care
 - promote awareness of and confidence in the contribution of professional regulation in the prevention of harms and the raising of quality standards in the provision of social care across Northern Ireland
 - Develop further our approach to engagement and partnership with services users and carers so that their views, experience and expertise is informing our work and is underpinned by the principles of co-production
 - Support partnerships and relationships that ensure our key stakeholders are engaged in our work, inform our approach, are involved in our activities and benefit from what we do
 - Influence and help shape the development of a learning and development framework for the social care workforce
- Focus on helping registrants, employers and other key stakeholders understand their responsibilities in relation to registration, regulation and workforce development and the ways in which the NISCC can work in partnership to support them
 - Raise awareness of the PiP Framework and position it as a significant contributor to the development of the social work profession in Northern Ireland
 - Build the reputation for NISCC as an expert organisation in workforce regulation with a particular reference to social work and social care regulation
 - Promote a positive perception of social workers and social care workers and contribute to a better understanding of the value of social work and social care
 - Create a new and progressive understanding of the relationships between regulation and quality care
 - Develop an evaluation framework that will engage our key stakeholders in a structured feedback process that will help us monitor, review and share our progress towards the outcomes contained in the NISCC Corporate Plan

1.0

Aims and Objectives

1.1 Aim

The aim of this communications and engagement strategy is to support NISCC to achieve our corporate outcomes by providing a framework to guide communication and engagement. This will be underpinned by the need for a **clear message**, delivered **effectively** to **our key audiences** in a **timely manner**. It will **empower** our council members and staff to appreciate the need for communications and engagement as part of their role within the NISCC and ensure a clear

and consistent voice between NISCC and our various stakeholders. It will facilitate **dialogue** between NISCC and our partners to ensure they are part of the decision making process and **uphold our commitment to the principles of co-production**. It will build on **good relationships** and **reputation**, and **lead the way** on contributing to the debates around regulation, social work and social care practice.

1.2 Communication and Engagement Objectives

The NISCC Corporate Plan has five strategic priorities:

1. Standards are at the heart of social work and social care practice
2. Regulation is robust, agile, valued and trusted
3. Developing the workforce so they are enabled to deliver safe, effective and values led care
4. Promoting a Systems Leadership approach through partnerships and relationship building
5. Developing an effective and meaningful framework for Communication and Engagement that underpins our commitment to co-production and informs influences and raises awareness.

The following communication and engagement objectives will support the achievement of these strategic priorities:

- To co-ordinate communication activities to ensure consistency of message and brand to all our target audiences both internal and external, with the correct message at the right time and in the most appropriate format
- To ensure NISCC has a strong online presence through the website and social media to inform and raise awareness, to facilitate dialogue, to allow for communication in 'real time', to reach a range of audiences, and to enable communication in new and innovative ways – for example stories and features, video, infographics, and animation,

- To work across the whole system to inform, influence and raise awareness of social care and regulation, building and sustaining a positive profile for the organisation,
- To create a framework for evaluation that will encourage and support all stakeholders to engage with us to provide feedback and challenge on how we are delivering on our outcomes,
- To develop relationships with media so that there is a better profile of social workers and social care workers, a better understanding of what they do and of the system of regulation that underpins their professionalism,
- To inform and influence the political leadership in Northern Ireland with regard to the contribution of social work and social care to the social and economic fabric of Northern Ireland,
- To ensure that NISCC Council members have all the information and support they require to fulfil their role as ambassadors for the organisation,
- To ensure that NISCC Council members and staff have access to all the information they need to make informed decisions and maximise their output and impact,
- To engage with the Social Care workforce to promote the benefits and value of registration,
- To engage with employers to support them to meet their responsibilities in maintaining the registration of the social work and social care workforce,
- To engage with service users and carers to ensure their views, experience and expertise is informing and influencing the way in which we are working towards achieving our outcomes
- To inform and support registrants to enable them to meet the NISCC requirements for their professional registration on an annual basis,
- To raise awareness of the new Fitness to Practice Model of regulation with all stakeholders to ensure appropriate referrals are received and that there is effective engagement in the process from registrants, employers and all key stakeholders,
- To raise awareness of the Standards of Conduct and Practice with social workers and social care workers in order to develop their knowledge, understanding and application of the standards,
- To inform and educate the social care workforce and their employers of the value of and need for ongoing learning and development to underpin their competence and improve the quality of their practice,
- To promote the value of engagement in the PiP Framework for Social Workers in order to improve the quality of social work practice.

Identifying and prioritising key messages will ensure that the communication and engagement activities deliver the correct message, develop and sustain the right relationships and partnerships, and make the most of resources. Through the period of our corporate plan the key messages will be:



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- NISCC has a leading role in the continued development of high quality social care services and is contributing to this through registration, regulation and workforce development
- NISCC provides an efficient and effective system of regulation and registration to improve the social care workforce and protect the people who use services
- NISCC works with partners to strengthen the professionalism and skill of the work force through the provision of education, training and learning opportunities
- Social Workers and Social Care Workers registered with NISCC are fit to practice
- NISCC Standards of Conduct and Practice are at the heart of social work and social care practice in Northern Ireland
- People who use social care services and carers are central to our work
- NISCC has a strong voice in social care

Having identified the key strategic messages we will agree the core campaign for each year, linking it to the business plan, which will shape the communication messages and segment them for stakeholders for each year covered by the corporate plan. This process will be supported by an evaluation framework that will ensure we are capturing feedback from stakeholders on a regular and consistent basis so we are well informed about our messages and their impact.

2.1 *Delivering key messages for External Stakeholders*

Communication and engagement is a two way process and it is important for NISCC that we have in place, as part of our annual business and operational planning process, a clear and coordinated plan that identifies the range of activities and approaches that will be used to communicate and engage with all our key external stakeholders. NISCC has a range of stakeholders from key partners who are involved with us in joint learning, decision making and development activity to those who simply wish to access accurate and timely information with ease from our website. We will ensure that the most suitable approaches and methods are used and balanced in a way that our communication and engagement with all our stakeholders is efficient and effective in terms of output and impact. The range methods and approaches will focus on:

- demonstrating the role and value of NISCC to all stakeholders through testimonials, key reports, case studies, events and working with our Ambassadors
- establishing a structure for briefings and meetings with the key people that we need to reach and influence within our external audiences
- putting in place a yearly schedule of events and activities that will support a strong presence at local and regional levels
- maintaining a strong and dynamic focus on our online and social media presence
- prioritising the use of technology and design for our publications, products and information material and work with a range of partners in this area to ensure consistent high quality output
- managing our brand and corporate identity in a clear and consistent manner and developing a suite of branded promotional materials
- supporting and promoting our key partnerships in their central role within NISCC - Professional in Practice, Registrants Forum, Participation Partnership and the Workforce Development Partnership
- regularly measuring and reviewing our approach to customer services to ensure it is maintained at consistently high levels
- establishing an evaluation framework that will report on the formal and informal feedback from our external stakeholders and ensure it informs and influences the work of NISCC on progress towards our outcomes

We will work to ensure that communication is accessible to all by making information a variety of formats for example in alternative languages, in Braille, in line with NISCC's commitment to Equality and other relevant legislation.

2.2 *Internal Communication*

Good, clear internal communications are vital as the culture of NISCC is developed and the values and behaviours expected are held and adhered to by the Council and by all staff. NISCC currently holds the Investors in People Bronze Award and carries out regular staff surveys to make sure that staff have the opportunity to be heard. This is part of the ongoing process of staff engagement.

To ensure we make progress towards our outcomes we will enhance the existing mechanisms to increase staff understanding of NISCC's vision, core values and corporate outcomes. An internal quality project group will be established to develop and monitor an internal communications plan that will sit alongside this communications and engagement strategy. This will ensure that a robust two way system of communication is in place for staff. The plan will support the primacy of a new NISCC intranet as a central vehicle for interactive and innovative internal communication within NISCC as well as underpinning the effective use of existing methods of communication such as:

- Team/Staff meetings
- In-service training and induction
- One to one interviews / meetings
- Staff performance appraisal
- Newsletters
- Direct mailshots to staff
- Staff social events
- Staff attitudinal surveys
- Corporate events
- Pop up e mail alerts
- Formal and informal information sessions

3.0

Managing the Media

We will develop and co-ordinate a proactive and reactive media strategy so that there is an appropriate profile for NISCC and an improved profile for social workers and social care workers which provides a better understanding of what they do. This will include:

- Preparing an annual media schedule to include details of major events, service developments and campaign issues
- Establishing regular meetings to discuss and agree feature stories
- Further developing relationships with key media representatives by establishing a schedule of informal briefing meetings with key journalists
- Offering media skills training workshops to relevant NISCC staff, prepare a list of media spokespeople as a result and provide regular refresher training,
- Encouraging all staff to communicate new service developments, ideas and achievements to the Communication Team
- Preparing monthly plans of forthcoming media opportunities
- Ensuring that all media activity is approved
- Monitoring coverage achieved monthly and evaluate effectiveness of approach,
- Identifying and briefing key decision makers including the Department of Health, political representatives, and the community and voluntary sector,

3.1 Public Relations and Engagement

We believe it is important for NISCC to establish and maintain relationships with Assembly Members to inform the decisions they make which impact on the regulation, training and development of the social work and social care workforce.

In the current dynamic political environment NISCC must ensure a two-way flow of communication with NI political representatives. We will:

- Continue to monitor proceedings in the Northern Ireland Assembly affecting social work and social care and be kept informed of key relevant developments
- Further develop the database of key influencers with specific interest in social work and social care
- Meet with MLAs and policy representatives to share information so that they are aware of the workforce issues relating to social work and social care workers,
- Invite MLA's and policy representatives to attend major NISCC events.

4.0

Delivering the Strategy

In NISCC communication and engagement is everyone's business. We have a broad range of stakeholders and a broad range of contact points for communication and engagement. The delivery of this strategy is dependent on a culture within the organisation that is underpinned by awareness, understanding of and commitment to the key strategic themes and outcomes contained within the NISCC Corporate Plan 2017/21. Everyone in NISCC, Council Members and staff, will be encouraged and supported through the appraisal and management process to identify their distinct contribution to the delivery of this Communication and Engagement strategy. The strategy will be a central component of the business planning, performance management and evaluation of NISCC's impact within the social work and social care sector. It will be the responsibility of the Senior Management Team to review and report on the progress being made on the delivery of the strategy across all levels of the organisation.

Key elements of the strategy will be delivered directly by a communications and engagement team that will contain the appropriate mix of expertise, skills and knowledge, to be effective in the delivery of the plan. Expertise and training will be sourced from outside the organisation in key areas to augment the work of the team and to ensure the output from the organisation is of the highest possible quality standards.