

Frequently asked questions (FAQ)

About the consultation

Why are we reviewing registration fees?

Our registration fees were last increased over ten years ago in 2016. Since then, our register has grown by 102% from 24,478 registrants in 2016 to 49,597. Also, referrals relating to conduct or practice have risen by 40%. We now, for the first time, have waiting lists for both Fitness to Practise referrals and Interim Suspension Orders. This poses a real risk to public protection.

Department of Health funding has also fallen by 24% over the last six years, with a further 5% reduction this year. Despite reducing our workforce capacity elsewhere, this is not enough to meet current demand. A review of registration fees is necessary to ensure we can continue to deliver effective, and sustainable regulation.

Is this consultation a legal requirement?

Yes. We cannot change our fee structure without first carrying out a public consultation. This consultation is a genuine process – nothing is decided, and the final fee levels will be determined only after the consultation responses have been analysed. You can find out more by reading the Consultation Document and Equality Impact Assessment available from our [website consultation page](#).

When does the consultation run?

The consultation is for an 8 week period from 14 September 2026 to 9 November 2026.

When would any fee changes take effect?

Subject to the outcome of the consultation, Ministerial approval is required before any new fees would take effect. At this stage the date of any fee changes is unknown, however there will be a lead in time following the Ministerial decision.

How many questions does the consultation ask, and where can I find them?

There are 15 questions in total. These begin on page 18 of the consultation document and are the same questions used in the online survey.

What do I get for my registration fee?

Paying your fee to be registered allows you to call yourself a social worker, social care manager or social care practitioner in Northern Ireland, and to be trusted with some of the most difficult and important work in our society.

Your registration fee is what makes that professional status mean something, both to the people you support and to your colleagues, employers and the wider public.

Every registrant is part of a collective system that only works because everyone contributes to it. Your fee isn't just an administrative charge, it is what allows the whole profession to be regulated, respected and protected.

In practical terms this means:

- **Maintaining the Public Facing Register itself:** Your fee supports a Register of almost 50,000 social work and social care registrants. Registration is a legal requirement to practise in Northern Ireland, and it gives you recognised professional status.
- **Setting standards for education and training:** Your fee supports the standards that underpin the Degree in Social Work and post-registration training – the Professional in Practice Framework for social workers, and the Care in Practice Framework for social care practitioners, helping ensure your qualification carries recognised weight. You get a Learning Zone with 52 resources created to support you with your professional learning and development.
- **Standards and guidance development:** Fees fund the ongoing development of standards of conduct and practice and other guidance, that shape safe and consistent care across the sector.
- **Fitness to Practise processes:** Fees fund the investigation of conduct and practice concerns. This system protects the public, but it also protects you: it provides a fair, regulated route for addressing concerns rather than leaving standards unchecked.
- **Supporting public trust in the profession:** A properly resourced regulator means the public, employers and colleagues can have confidence that you meet the required standards and remain accountable for your practice. We also promote social work and social care as careers of choice through annual campaigns that carry stories about real professionals - recognising your value and helping the community understand why the work you do is important.
- **Providing Leadership and Voice:** Being part of a registered workforce enables the Social Care Council to work in partnership with registrants, employers, stakeholders, Government and Ministers to ensure the challenges and contributions of the social work and social care practitioner workforce are to the fore when the Assembly are making decisions.

About the proposed fee changes

What fee changes are being proposed?

We are proposing a phased, two-year approach.

- In Year 1, the fee for social workers and social care managers would rise from £65 to £120, and the fee for social care practitioners would rise from £30 to £40. Student fees would remain unchanged at £20.
- In Year 2, a new tiered structure would be introduced for social work, linking fees to job role, with a new fee category role of 'senior leader - social worker' being introduced (which equates to Band 8a or above under Agenda for Change, or equivalent).

The proposed fee level increases are:

Part of Register	Current fee level	Proposed Fee First year	Proposed Fee Second year
Social worker	£65	£120	£127
Senior leader - social worker	N/A	N/A	£150
Social care manager	£65	£120	£127
Social care practitioner	£30	£40	£40 (no change)
Social work student	£20	£20 (no change)	£20 (no change)

There is no further increase for social care practitioners or students in Year 2.

These are proposals for consultation – they are not final.

Are these increases definitely going ahead?

Nothing is decided until the consultation closes, the responses are analysed, and a final recommendation is made. Final fee levels will be determined following analysis of consultation feedback, and any changes are subject to Ministerial approval.

Why are the increases different for social workers compared to social care practitioners?

The proposed increases reflect the different salary levels and levels of accountability and responsibility associated with each registered role. Social care practitioners are in lower-paid roles, and the proposed increase for them is more modest – from £30 to £40. The consultation specifically asks whether this approach is fair and proportionate.

How does the Social Care Council's fee compare to other regulators?

Our current fees for social workers remain lower than other comparable social work regulators and are the lowest of all comparable UK health and social care regulators.

Fee level comparisons across other UK social work and social care regulators (applicable from 1 April 2027):

Regulator	Annual fee
Scottish Social Services Council – Social care practitioner	£43
Scottish Social Services Council – Social worker	£104
Social Work England – Social worker	£122 (rising to £127 from 1 December 2028)
Social Care Wales – Social worker	£80
Social Care Wales – Social care manager	£80
Social Care Wales – Social care practitioner	£30
Social Care Wales – Social work student	£15

For context, our proposed Year 1 social worker fee of £120 is £2 less than the equivalent fee in England, £23 less than the fee charged to nurses in Northern Ireland by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (£143), and £3 less than most other regulated healthcare professionals across the UK. Our proposed social care practitioner fee is £1 less than the equivalent fee in Scotland. It is acknowledged that the fee is higher than currently being charged in Wales, however it is understood that they are also looking at a fee's consultation at some point in the near future.

Why is a two-year phased approach being proposed rather than a single increase?

We are not proposing an overnight increase. A phased approach is intended to make the transition more manageable for registrants, allowing time to adjust before any proposed changes in Year 2. The consultation asks whether increases should be introduced in a single year or phased over two years, and what factors should determine the pace and scale of any increase.

Will fees keep increasing after Year 2?

We are proposing that, following the Year 2 changes, fee levels should increase in line with inflation (and be formally reviewed at least every three years). This is intended to avoid long gaps between reviews and reduce the likelihood of larger increases in future. The consultation asks for views on this principle.

What if I pay my own registration fee and my employer doesn't contribute?

We know that some registrants, particularly in the independent and voluntary sectors, pay their own fees without employer support. The consultation specifically asks who currently pays your fee, and for evidence about self-funding impacts, so we can take this into account.

Is any tax relief available on registration fees?

Yes. If you are an eligible taxpayer, you can claim tax relief on your registration fee. HM Revenue and Customs has agreed that the registrant fee payable to the Social Care Council is tax deductible, and standard rate taxpayers may normally claim back 20% of their annual fee.

About equality

I'm worried about the impact of a fee increase on lower-paid workers. What is the Social Care Council doing about this?

We have carried out a full Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA), published alongside the consultation, which considers potential impacts across all Section 75 equality groups. The proposed fee for social care practitioners, our largest and lowest-paid group, is the most modest increase proposed. The consultation specifically asks whether any groups would be disproportionately affected and what mitigating measures we should consider.

What about disabled registrants?

Disabled registrants are one of the Section 75 equality groups considered in our Equality Impact Assessment. We welcome views from disabled registrants and their representative groups.

Will the Social Care Council consider instalment payments?

We currently support payment through our online registration portal, My Portal, and while we currently do not have the facility for payment through Direct Debit, we are asking for views on this.

For employers

What should I do as an employer?

We encourage all employers to share details of the consultation with their staff and to submit their own organisation's response.

Will employers be expected to pay increased fees on behalf of staff?

This is a matter for individual employers and employment arrangements. The consultation asks employers directly what impact the proposed changes would have on their organisation, including evidence about the number of staff whose fees they pay, and whether any increase is likely to be absorbed or passed on to staff.

How to respond

How do I respond to the consultation?

The easiest way to respond is through our [online survey](#). If you cannot access the online survey, or would prefer to respond in another way, please contact us by email at: businesssupport@niscc.hscni.net.

Can I get the consultation in a different format?

Yes. The consultation is available in other formats on request. If you need it in a different format or language, please email us at: businesssupport@niscc.hscni.net

Will my response be confidential?

The *Freedom of Information Act 2000* gives the public a right of access to information held by the Social Care Council, which can include consultation responses. We cannot automatically treat information you provide as confidential, but we will consider each request in line with our statutory obligations, including the public interest test. If you want any part of your response to be treated as confidential, please explain clearly why this is the case.

All responses will be handled in line with *UK GDPR* and the *Data Protection Act 2018* and will be retained for three years from the date the consultation closes before being destroyed.

You are not compelled to provide contact information if you do not wish to do so. Any personal data you do provide will be processed in accordance with our [Privacy Notice](#) and relevant data protection legislation.

When will we know the outcome?

A consultation analysis report will be prepared and published on our website. This will set out the responses received and how they informed our recommended approach. A final decision on fee levels will then be made, following Ministerial approval.

Further questions

If your question isn't answered here, please contact us:

✉ businesssupport@niscc.hscni.net

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