

**QQI**Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

Independent Evaluation Report on an Application for Validation of a Microcredential Programme

Part 1. Provider details

Provider name	Dublin Business School
Date of report	17 th May, 2021

Section A. Overall recommendations

Programme	Title	Certificate in Social Care Skills
	Award	Special Purpose Award
	Credit	25 ECTS
	NFQ Level	Level 6, 25 ECTS
	Recommendation <i>Satisfactory OR Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions OR Not Satisfactory</i>	Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions

Section B. Expert Panel

Name	Role	Affiliation
Dr Perry Share	Chair	Institute of Technology Sligo
Dr Conor Mc Guckin	Subject Matter Expert	Trinity College Dublin

Section C. Programme Profile Information (as supplied by provider)

Brief synopsis of the programme
<p>The programme aims to provide a focused suite of skills relevant to social care, allied to relevant academic knowledge. Learners will gain a grounding in professional care skills such as hygiene, infection control, first aid and patient handling. They will also learn the principles of professional social care practice, rooted in ethical and human rights principles, with particular emphasis on meeting the Standards of Proficiency outlined by CORU. Additionally, training will be provided in important administrative skills such as needs analysis, risk assessment, report writing and care planning. These are essential skills not only for those working as Care Assistants or in support roles, but also as a basis for potential progression to qualification as a Social Care Worker.</p> <p>It has been designed for those who wish to acquire the skills and knowledge required for an applied setting in a role as a Social Care Assistant or Support Worker and/or for those may use this special purpose award qualification as a possible 'stepping stone' to a L7 qualification, reskilling or upskilling in the area of applied social care skills. Learners will develop knowledge and understanding of social policy and law as it applies to social care in Ireland and elsewhere. The academic information will be allied to the practice of social care (as, for example in the human-rights based approach running through each of the modules). In this way, learners will gain a sound basic understanding of how policy informs the caring professions.</p> <p>The Certificate in Social Care Skills (Level 6, 25 ECTS) programme is comprised of three modules (Professional Practice 1: Introduction to Care Skills and Support, 10 ECTS; Social Care in Practice, 5 ECTS; Social Policy and Law for Social Care 1, 10 ECTS) which are drawn from the parent programme of the BA (Hons) in Applied Social Care (Level 8, 240 ECTS).</p>
Target learner groups
<p>The programme is for learners wishing to pursue a career in the caring professions and is intended to provide a firm grounding in relevant theory and practice in the relevant areas. Particular emphasis is paid to the applied dimension with a number of skills-based aspects, which will train learners in professional best practice. Graduates will therefore be employable in a number of fields including care for the older person and children, in residential, home and community settings, care for those with intellectual physical and sensory disability, as well as in homeless and addiction support services.</p> <p>The programme is aimed at those who wish to work as Social Care Assistants or in other supporting roles within the caring professions and at those who may wish to progress to further study at Level 8 where they can qualify as Social Care Workers.</p>
Rationale for Programme
<p>Social Care provision is a fast evolving sector in particular during the current pandemic. It addresses the non-medical needs of people who experience disadvantage, marginalisation or who have special needs (disability). 'Social Care recipients' are those people who have health or similar dependency problems. This may include dependent children, adults, people with disabilities, elderly people with particular support needs and those with specific conditions such as Alzheimer's disease. Although researchers acknowledge that care is often received through home services or in the community, services are also provided in specific care institutions such as, residential care settings for children/teenagers; nursing homes; transitional housing.</p> <p>A number of factors have contributed to the increasing need for qualified social care practitioners. For example, a report in 2014 by Nursing Homes Ireland (NHI) highlights the following points:</p>

- The CSO projects the very old population will rise 'dramatically' in years ahead and represent up to 28% of the total population by 2046, compared with 12% in 2011. The over-65 population is growing by approximately 20,000 each year while the over-85 population is growing by 4% annually.
- Approximately 22% of persons aged 85+ years require the continuous care of nursing homes. This group is forecast to increase by 46% to 2021.
- The BDO report Health's Ageing Crisis: Time for Action, published February 2014, projected requirement for up to 8,000 nursing home beds by year 2021.
- Private and voluntary nursing homes are key employers and make a very significant contribution to the local economy. There are over 22,000 beds in the private and voluntary nursing home sector, accounting for more than 80% of the country's long-term care beds.
- The private and voluntary nursing home sector is essential for the future provision of long-term residential care in Ireland.
- The ESRI has projected from 2007 to 2021 additional requirement for 13,324 long-term residential care places - 888 per annum.
- The Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland (CARDI) confirms ESRI projections and anticipates the number of persons requiring nursing home care will increase by at least 59% (12,270 places) between the years 2006 - 2021.
- The ESRI projects the population aged 65+ with severe disabilities will increase by 56% to 2021 from 2006 levels.

(NHI, 2014)

These figures which relate to just one area of professional practice further demonstrate the challenges and opportunities facing the social care professions in the Ireland of the future. Government publications such as the National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan have indicated the intention to develop support and advocacy services for those with disabilities to a standard commensurate with European and International best practice. Such initiatives speak to the opportunity for institutions such as DBS to become centres of excellence for education and training specifically designed to meet these challenges.

The economic dimension of the Social Care sector is one of the most dynamic in the EU. Employment in these sectors accounts for almost 10% of total employment in the EU and is continuously growing. In light of the need for an adequate Social Care labour supply across all member states, including Ireland – to meet the ageing demographic challenge, encourage economic growth, and support the sustainability of social protection systems – the Social Care sector offers excellent employment opportunities for the foreseeable future. The proliferation of private-sector care providers has provided increased employment opportunities - a number of DBS students have gained employment with these organisations but impending regulation will restrict opportunities for students without an applied qualification.

DBS has traditionally offered a BA (Hons) in Social Science at Level 8 and a BA in Social Studies at Level 7 which both include modules of interest to those wishing to work in social care (such as Introduction to Social Care). In 2018, the BA and BA (Hons) in Applied Social Care were first offered and the first graduations will take place in 2021. Interest in the programme continues to grow and new student numbers in September 2020 grew impressively with projected CAO applications for 2021 healthy also.

However, it has been noted by employers and observers in the caring professions that, while the regulation of the protected role of Social Care Worker by CORU will undoubtedly enhance the quality of education and training (with a Level 7 degree the minimum requirement), no such regulatory environment exists for care assistants and other supportive roles. This means that the standard of training for such roles has been inconsistent. Management within the HSE have noted

their concern that those working on the ‘front line’ of the professions do not always meet the required standard. A number of reports on poor practice in residential care units (as well as in home care environments) have stressed the need for appropriately trained staff. The proposed micro credential programme, therefore, with its combination of social care theory and practice, would provide the learner with an opportunity to obtain the practical skills and knowledge base to take up such positions in the sector. There is considerable advantage that the modules being offered here are extracted from a validated parent programme which has been ‘tried and tested’ over a period with adjustments made as required through user, lecturer and external feedback.

Employers within the caring professions have stressed that job applicants need to demonstrate not just a depth and breadth of knowledge of social care and law, but also an understanding of the principles of professional practice allied to experience and expertise in applying these principles in practical care setting. This has become even more evident during COVID 19. In the past much emphasis has been placed on the acquisition of skills through work placement. Feedback suggests that many organisations were unhappy that the burden for this training rested so heavily on them. The current pressure on the professions means that organisations have even less time to spend on training and at least some of this needs to be provided by educators. There are a large number of social care qualifications on offer in a number of institutions but the proposed micro credential will offer a combination of social care practice and knowledge of social care legislation which has been identified as critical by the Irish government and employers in the caring professions. Not only will the learners acquire the knowledge and principles of social care practice and required knowledge of legal and ethical implications but they will also learn how to apply it to a real life scenario comparable to the kind they will face when working in the sector. As part of a team they will need to lead and accommodate others’ opinions and interests and bring forward a solution that is both workable and ethical and, most importantly, has the service user at the centre. Delivery of modern day services is about working in multidisciplinary teams and advocacy for, and safety of the service user.

In addition, the micro credential would offer a potential first step for those who wish to progress to a role as Social Care Workers. For many, this course of study would allow them to decide whether they are suited to the profession before committing to study at a higher level.

Evidence of learner demand

The programme is designed for those who wish to gain a qualification with a view to progressing to work in the caring professions, whether with those with mental or physical disabilities, children in residential care, the elderly, people who are homeless or those dealing with the challenges of addiction.

The social and health services are listed on the government critical skills occupations list (2020) as there is a shortage of knowledge and practical skills which are important for the Irish economy. In light of the current pandemic there is a growing need for social care practitioners qualified in social care needs of elderly, children, young adults and people with special needs.

Private and voluntary nursing homes are key employment providers with over 24,000 staff employed throughout Ireland. An equivalent number of jobs – approximately 24,000 – are facilitated by the 440+ private and voluntary nursing homes. With clearly defined, departmental coordinated strategy, developed in partnership with the sector, 900 direct new jobs could be created by the sector per annum, with up to 10,000 additional new jobs created over the next 10 years (NHI, 2016).

The opportunities exist for qualified and properly trained graduates in a variety of social care settings, including residential and homecare and services for people with physical and intellectual disability. Recruitment agencies active in this sector e.g. CPL have indicated that there are

employment opportunities in the areas of Social Care- Disability and Residential Care, Family Support Workers and Access Workers and Residential Social Care Assistants (February 2021). A recent report (Employment Guidelines for the Home Care Sector: The Workers' Perspective; Report 2015) indicated that there are approximately 12,000 workers employed directly by the HSE and voluntary sector, with an additional 6,000-8,000 in the private home sector – although this figure could be underestimated. A number of recent advertisements (February 2021) demonstrate the demand for social care practitioners; for example Nua Healthcare, providing residential care, community outreach and day services to adults and children, are currently seeking Assistant Support Workers & Social Care Assistants and Supported Living Assistants. Additionally, there is a need for social care professionals in the residential child care placements and assistance placements as the number of families and children coming into centres have doubled as a result of the current pandemic (RTE News, 2021). For example, Daffodil Care are advertising a number of positions for residential social care practitioners ranging from Dublin to Meath and Cork. Also, there are several vacancies advertised by TUSLA (February, 2021). According to indeed (February, 2021), there are over 300 roles for social care workers available in Ireland, and over 380 jobs in residential social care in Ireland, for example: Nursing Home Social Care Worker, Social Care Assistant, Social Care Practitioner, as well as Homecare Assistants. The typical roles can be found here:

<https://www.activelink.ie/vacancies/deadlines>

<http://www.daffodilcare.ie/vacancies.php>

<https://cplhealthcare.com/jobs/>

<https://www.nuahealthcare.ie/careers-form>

<https://www.tusla.ie/about/careers-in-tusla/>

Duration and Enrolment

	First Intake Date	Duration (months)	Cohorts / Intakes per Annum	Enrolment i.e. learners per Intake	
			Maximum	Minimum	Maximum
Full-Time		3 (12 weeks)	5*	5*	300**
Part-Time		6 (24 weeks)	5*	5*	300**

* Minimum total enrolment of 5 per intake across all intakes.

** The maximum of 300 will be across both FT and PT. This will not be an even distribution and will depend on the learner demand for each mode.

Panel Commentary on Section C: Programme Profile Information

This should set out the panel's views on the adequacy of the case made by the provider for the approval of this programme as a viable, stand alone offering for the target learner group. The panel should take into account the proposed rationale, evidence of market demand, learner numbers, entry criteria, and marketing information. The information on objectives, MIPLO's and marketing information, rationale, should also be checked.

Where the proposed award is at a different NFQ level to that of its parent programme e.g. where the programme is taken from Stage 1 of a validated Level 8 programme, the panel should check the MIPLO to Level Indicator mapping for consistency.

The following Validation Criteria as they apply to this programme should be applied.

Criterion 3. *The programme concept, implementation strategy, and its interpretation of QQI awards standards are well informed and soundly based (considering social, cultural, educational, professional and employment objectives)*

Criterion 2: *The programme objectives and outcomes are clear and consistent with the QQI awards sought*

Criterion 11: *Learners enrolled on the programme are well informed, guided and cared for.*

Criterion 12: *The programme is well managed*

The headings below are indicative only and can be removed

Rationale, Learner Demand, Viability:

The provider sets out a strong rationale for the proposed Special Purpose Award (Certificate in Social Care Skills). The new offering is taken from a recently introduced parent programme – BA (Hons) in Applied Social Care (Level 8, 240 ECTS).

In terms of the underpinning rationale for this new offering, the provider has developed a nuanced and researched understanding of the requirements of employers in the sector. They have also identified a convincing rationale for why learners would want to engage in such an offering – from those wishing to enter the sector, to those already in the sector who wish to have their knowledge and skills recognised, to those who will see this offering as an exciting opportunity to develop a career in the area by progressing from this offering to the parent programme on offer from this provider, or cognate programmes elsewhere. The provider commits to full recognition of the modules should they be RPL'd into the parent programme: 'The graduate of this Certificate in Social Care Skills ... micro-credential programme will be exempted from relevant modules in the DBS BA and BA Hons Applied Social Care programme'. This is commendable and reflects the principles of the ECTS framework.

There are 25 ECTS of learning derived from the parent programme. No particular rationale is identified for the selection of modules and this could be spelt out more clearly. In addition, did the provider consider the possibility of a 30 credit offering, that could provide an exemption from a full semester of learning? This may be more easily managed and more attractive to students. We do not have the full parent programme available to view, so cannot assess the potential of a 'full semester' approach.

Learner demand is, understandably, not fully defined as yet. Whilst initial work by the provider has identified a need for such an offering in the market, it is perhaps speculative to propose a cohort of students that ranges from 5 to 300. If there were 300 students enrolled across both full- and part-time modes, and across each of the course presentations, a question arises as to whether these learners would be treated as separate cohorts with their own unique 'course identity', or whether they would be educated in a more congregated manner.

The submission identifies that the parent programme has not had a graduating cohort as yet. In considering the relative newness of the parent programme (first graduates in 2021), a query arises as to whether every aspect of the programme (eg module alignment, module content) is operating as originally envisaged in the validation process (the proposal suggests, understandably, that amendments have been made). Is there any implication of this potential process for the modules that have been selected for this new offering?

Proposed Award - consistency with NFQ: *(refer to the mapping of the programme MIPLOs to the relevant NFQ standards)*

The MIPLOs map onto the relevant NFQ standard (Social Care Work) at the appropriate Level 6 – ie they are foundational and introductory, with a focus on key foundational knowledge and skills. The award in itself will not provide the learner with the full range and competencies of a graduate of a level 6 major award in Social Care Work: in particular it will NOT ‘meet(ing) the Standards of Proficiency outlined by CORU’ and this claim must not be made in relation to the programme.

Learner Interests: - (Information, QA, Supports, Benefits / Skills accruing from programme):

The programme objectives are to:

1. Provide learners with modules combining academic depth with appropriately rigorous skills training in the area of social care.
2. Equip learners with the knowledge, skills and competencies which will enable them to function as a professional, effective and accountable social care practitioner.
3. Facilitate learner knowledge of professional social care practice and the roles of the social care professional.

As outlined above, the programme provides an introduction to the knowledge, skills and competencies for social care practice. Key skills include: person-centred planning, basic law, safeguarding, skills of daily living, infection control, report writing and a knowledge of basic principles of care and communication.

It is important to note, with reference to objective 2 above, that the qualification *in no way* confers the professional status of a social care practitioner within the context of CORU registration, and it is essential that this is made clear to programme applicants and graduates.

While the occupational roles of ‘social care assistant’ and related terms (‘project worker’, ‘support worker’ &c) may exist, these have no regulatory standing in Ireland and care should be used in relation to any reference to the legally protected term of ‘social care worker’ or social care practitioner in any materials related to the programme.

It is noted that there is no placement or work experience within the delivery of this microcredential. This does place limitations on the capacity to link theory to (actual) practice and to support reflective practice. It is likely that at least a proportion of participants in the programme will (have) be(en) in the workforce, some in caring or service roles, or have acted as carers in the home, and every opportunity should be taken to link academic content to existing workplace and caring experience.

The supports to online learners are well described.

Section D. Programme Content, Delivery and Assessment

Summary of specifications for programme staff <i>e.g. Lecturer, instructional designer, learning technologist, and others involved in design / delivery / assessment of programme.</i>		
Role	Profile	WTE
Lecturer	Lecturing staff will have a minimum of a Level 8 Honours Bachelor's degree in Applied Social Studies or equivalent qualification in the following areas: psychology, counselling, social science, social studies, health studies, health care, social care, addiction studies, nursing. law, applied social care disciplines. Where industry experience is desirable, holders of Level 6 qualification who are exceptionally qualified by virtue of significant professional experience at senior level may also be considered.	0.3
Course Director	The Course Director for this programme will have a minimum of a NFQ Level 9 Postgraduate Diploma or Masters qualification in Human, Health or Social Sciences or related areas along with programme management/ academic leadership experience.	0.3
Administration and Support Staff	Such as Library, Admissions, Student Experience, Finance etc. Experience and qualifications relevant to role. Experience and qualifications relevant to the role.	0.64

Mode(s) of Delivery					
The proposal sets out a plan for both face-to-face and classroom delivery of content in either a full- or part-time modes of delivery.					
The proposal also notes that:					
Mode	Proportion (% of Total Directed Learning)		Staff/Student Ratios		
Classroom (on site) Mode	307 of 625 = 50% FT		1:150 max for classroom on instances of cross-listing		
Blended Learning (Multimodal)	219 of 625 = 35% PT		1:35 for online synchronous		
	246 of 625 = 39% FT/PT				
The different delivery modes are summarised below. It is noted that for on-demand asynchronous delivery hours are defined as the expected time on average for a learner to work through content. One unit of on-demand content is defined as content that takes a learner on average an hour to work through.					
	Classroom Synchronous	Directed Asynchronous	On-Demand Asynchronous	Independent	
Face-to-face classroom	177 FT 89 PT	130 FT 130 PT		318 FT 406 PT	
Blended (multimodal)	34 FT/ PT	39 FT/ PT	130 FT/ PT	43 FT/ PT	379 FT/ PT

Assessment Strategy

Teaching and learning (including formative assessment) strategy

Teaching and learning techniques will include appropriate strategies from the following selection:

- Classroom lectures, face to face in classroom , and Online through Zoom, Panopto or equivalent, to include lecturing foundation content, all-class discussions, small group discussions and group work, (if online facilitated by break out rooms).
- Flipped Classroom work
- Participation in discussions and contribution to collaborative work
- Case study work

Formative Assessment in this module: Each piece of Continuous summative assessment will receive detailed feedback as to how the work could be improved.

All course material will be provided on Moodle including lecture notes, continuous assessment specification, practice exercises, online presentations and screencast demonstrations where applicable.

Panel Commentary on Quality Assurance of the Programme

This should set out the panel's views on (1) how the provider has quality assured the programme development process and (ii) how it proposes to quality assure the programme when validated

The following Validation Criteria as they apply to this programme should be borne in mind.:

Criterion 12: *The programme is well managed.*

Criterion 6: *There are sufficient qualified and capable programme staff available to implement the programme as planned.*

Criterion 7: *There are sufficient physical resources to implement the programme as planned.*

Criterion 8: *The learning environment is consistent with the needs of the programme's learners*

Criterion 10: *There are sound assessment strategies*

The headings below are indicative only and can be removed

QA of programme development process:

This new offering has been well considered and is drawn from a recently validated Level 8 programme. The submission of this proposal draws heavily upon the evidence presented for the validation of that Level 8 programme – for example, market analysis. The new market analysis for this offering appears to be more anecdotal than researched: commentary and understanding of employers' needs rather than any formal process/focus group(s) of employers or potential students.

The provider has a strong Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement perspective and this new offering would be well understood in terms of these important processes.

This new offering is presented as 25 ECTS. A query arises as to whether a 30 ECTS offering would have been more acceptable to a learner.

QA of Programme Resourcing (Human and ICT) and Resilience:

The proposal notes the appointment (WTE pro rata) of a Lecturer, Course Director, and administrative support for the offering. It is not clear if the students on the various iterations and modes to be presented are to be fully taught and coordinated by only these staff members. Clearly if enrolments are c. 300 this is very different scenario than if they are 5. It would be useful to have information on the implications of scaling up.

This is linked to the query of whether these students would be treated as a separate cohort(s) to the students registered for the parent programme at Level 8. That is – would students on this programme be taught alongside colleagues from the Level 8 programme at the same time? Would there be an opportunity for students on this offering to develop their own learner identity?

There is mention of online/synchronous/hybrid/face-to-face/classroom teaching – some further clarity could be provided regarding the management of the students enrolling on this offering and the teaching plan (is/are some/all of the modules anticipated to be provided online/hybrid?). If the intention is to now teach these modules (or some of them) online, this is a deviation from how the parent programme would likely have been presented for validation.

If there is an aspiration to now offer these modules in a hybrid or fully online mode, then some philosophy of online engagement is needed – for example, a philosophy of Active Distance Learning (ADL) or Active Blended Learning (ABL). Whilst Moodle and other platforms have some VLE affordances, they are, by and large, document/material storage systems.

QA of Assessment

The assessment tasks appear appropriate. There is an excellent variety of assessments, including cases study, skills demonstration, portfolio, essay, report and online forum. This will allow for the development of a variety of aspects of assessment literacy. **The variety, with no type of assessment repeated, does provide a challenge in provision of effective feedback to learners, who will need to be able to apply and develop skills across diverse assessment tasks. This is a challenge that should be addressed by the programme team.**

There is reference to building on the Learning to Learn module (Module 2, MIMLO3) but this is not part of the proposed programme. Given that many of those entering this microcredential will be re-entering education, it would make a lot of sense to include this module: it may be crucial in development of academic/assessment literacy. This should be considered by the programme team.

Part 2. Overall recommendation to QQI

2.1 Programme:

Select one	
	Satisfactory (meaning that it recommends that QQI can be satisfied in the context of unit 2.3) of Core policies and criteria for the validation by QQI of programmes of education and training;
X	Satisfactory subject to proposed special condition (specified with timescale for compliance for each condition; these may include proposed pre-validation conditions i.e. proposed (minor) things to be done to a programme that almost fully meets the validation criteria before QQI makes a determination);
	Not satisfactory.

Reasons for the overall recommendation

1. The rationale and demand niche for the programme is clear and the majority of academic QA issues are addressed satisfactorily. It is clear that the programme is positioned as a stepping-stone to further study in the social care field. The qualification in itself will have no professional or regulated status.

Any other observations:

1. CORU Standards of Proficiency: These are mentioned but the offering would need to be careful to not overstate what can be achieved in the course regarding the Standards. It would be crucial to alert learners to these and that participation on the course introduces these only. **It must be made clear that no professional status or rights attaches to completion of the microcredential.**
2. It would be useful to understand how the course will be advertised to applicants. In relation to this, it would be useful to see how the new offering is being conceptualised and communicated to these applicants.
3. As noted, there is some clarity required regarding the modes of module delivery – especially for the module related to the development of skills. It is understandable that learners on the parent programme may have had to migrate to an online mode for this module during recent public health requirements, but what is the plan for how this module will be offered to the learners on this new offering?
4. As noted, if there is an aspiration to offer this course as hybrid and/or online, then some further submission would be required regarding this – unless the parent programme has already made a convincing rationale for this type of delivery through the validation process.
5. The variety of assessment tasks, with no type repeated, does provide a challenge in provision of effective feedback to learners, who will need to be able to apply and develop skills across diverse assessment tasks. This is a challenge that should be recognised and addressed by the programme team.

Special Conditions of Validation (directive and with timescale for compliance)

1. On any advertisement of this programme, it must be made very clear to applicants that this qualification in no way fulfils the requirements of the professional position or title of social care worker/practitioner. Graduates will not be able to use any legally protected title in this area. **Timescale:** on advertisement/promotion of any initial and subsequent offering.

Declarations of Evaluators' Interests

The evaluators have no interests in the programme being proposed or in connection with the provider.

This report has been agreed by the evaluation panel and is signed on their behalf by the chairperson.

Panel chairperson: Dr Perry Share

Date: 2nd June, 2021

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Perry Share', written over a light blue horizontal line.

2.2 Disclaimer

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