

Regional Social Work Awards **2026**

Friday 4th December 2026, Belfast City Hall

Shining a Light
on Excellence in
Social Work



Hosted by

HSC Belfast Health and
Social Care Trust
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Nominations are now open!

‘Shining a Light on Excellence in Social Work’

**Information and guidance for those applying to the
Regional Social Work Awards 2026**

**PLEASE READ ALL THE INFORMATION IN THIS BOOKLET BEFORE YOU START
YOUR APPLICATION FOR THE REGIONAL SOCIAL WORK AWARDS 2026.**

Closing date for applications is 5.00pm on Tuesday 30th June 2026.

About the Awards

Social work is a unique profession because it empowers individuals, families and communities, working alongside them to address social issues and promote positive change. Through advocacy, support and practical help, we hold close to our social work values every step of the way. The Regional Social Work Awards 2026 are an opportunity to celebrate this commitment by 'Shining a Light on Excellence in Social Work', recognising the everyday impact of social workers across Northern Ireland.

Social work in Northern Ireland is shaped by the region's distinct history, meaning the profession often works within and responds to the out-workings of a post-conflict society. Northern Ireland is like nowhere else in the islands of the UK and Ireland, with a unique culture and social challenges. In this context, social workers play a crucial role in promoting wellbeing, strengthening communities and championing social justice, and these Awards provide a platform to bring that excellence into view.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the significant challenges faced by the people of Northern Ireland, we are a resilient society with a strong sense of fairness, identity and social justice. The Regional Social Work Awards 2026 aim to 'Shine a Light on Excellence in Social Work' across all sectors, recognising outstanding practice and the positive difference it makes to people's lives. The Awards also celebrate the tenacity and creativity of individuals and teams who keep showing up, day after day, to support, advocate and deliver meaningful change in their own unique way.

This year there will be six awards drawing on the theme of 'Shining a Light on Excellence in Social Work'. Applications for all awards must be made online. Details of the awards categories, guidance on how to apply and a link to the online application form is available in this information booklet.

Shortlisted finalists will be invited to the Regional Social Work Awards 2026 ceremony which will be held on Friday 4th December in Belfast City Hall.

Summary of the Social Work Awards 2026 categories

Further detail on the judging criteria for the award categories is included on pages 6-9.

Advice on how to apply and a link to the online application form are included on page 4.

1. **Beacon of Light Award** – nominations can be made for an individual social worker at any stage of their career who leads with care and compassion. This award is an opportunity to recognise leadership at all levels.
2. **Bright Spark Award** – nominations can be made for an individual social worker who is within their first two years of practice at the time of applying (inclusive of the AYE year). This award recognises a social worker whose practice evidences the positive attitude and attributes of a newly qualified social worker.
3. **Constellation Award** – nominations can be made for a team of social workers, or for social workers who work together as part of a multidisciplinary team. This award recognises a team of social workers whose practice evidences the positive characteristics of a motivated team.
4. **Lighting the Way Award** – nominations can be made for an individual social worker, or a team of social workers, or for social workers who work together as part of a multidisciplinary team. This award recognises an individual / *team of social workers with a commitment to having learning and development at the heart of their practice.
5. **Torch of Co-production Award** – nominations can be made for an individual social worker, or a team of social workers, or for social workers who work together as part of a multidisciplinary team. This award recognises an individual / *team of social workers who are working alongside people with lived experience to create an outcome that benefits all.
6. **BASW NI Legacy of Light Award** – nominations can be made for an individual social worker who currently in practice, or who as retired and recently left the register. This award recognises a social worker who has made a lasting contribution to social work.

*Please note, social workers in a social work team or social workers who work together within a multidisciplinary team are eligible for the team awards. A maximum of six social workers can be included to represent a team nomination. Non-social work qualified team members cannot be included as part of a team nomination.

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Who can enter

- The awards are open to all social workers registered with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (SCC) and practising in Northern Ireland. Social workers from all sectors are eligible for nomination (statutory, community and voluntary, independent, private, education, justice, probation and training sectors).
- The BASW NI Legacy of Light Award is open to social workers in the service or those who have retired and may have recently left the Register.
- Applications are welcome from individual social workers / *teams in all areas of social work; you do not have to be working in a unique project to submit an application.
- A maximum of six social workers can be included to represent a team nomination. Non-social work qualified team members cannot be included as part of a team nomination.
- Applicants nominated for the Regional Social Work Awards in previous years can only be included in the 2026 Awards if their application has a different practice focus.

How to apply

- **Applications for all awards must be made online.** After you have read all of the guidance information, click on the following link to access the Regional Social Work Awards 2026 online application form: <https://consultations2.nidirect.gov.uk/hsc/social-work-awards-2026-application-form>

- **Separate applications** must be completed for each nomination an organisation is submitting.
- **The online application is split into four sections** (proposer details, social worker nominee details, statement of the individual/team achievements and the endorser declaration). It is recommended to gather this information together before starting the online application (further detail is included on pages 10-12).
- The application must include a **statement of why the nominee should be considered for the award**, linking this to the award criteria provided on pages 6-9. This statement is limited to 7,000 characters, which is equivalent to approximately 1,000 words with spaces. The form will automatically cut off at 7,000 characters. Supplementary material cannot be added to the application.
- The application must include **contact details** for the person making the nomination.
- The person making the nomination must provide daytime **contact details for the social worker(s) being nominated and their SCC registration number**. Correct registration numbers must be provided for all the social workers nominated in the application. **Applications without correct registration numbers will be rejected.**
- The application must be **endorsed by a senior person** authorised to represent the organisation. Endorsers must confirm that the nominee and their employer have consented to the nomination being submitted and ensure no breaches of service user or carer confidentiality are contained within nominations before signing and submitting the application. **Applications without correct endorsements will be rejected.**
- The **'save and return' option on the online form** allows it to be edited and also for it to be transferred from the person creating the application to the person endorsing the application. This option is available at the bottom of each section of the form; 'save and return' creates a unique log-in for each application which must be shared with the organisation's approved endorser to enable them to log in to the application to check, approve and submit the form.
- Content can only be added to the applications up to the point it is submitted. **An application cannot be edited once it has been submitted.**

A checklist has been included on page 12 to help you gather all the information that will be needed for your application. Please review this checklist before filling in the online application.

Timeline – June-December 2026

- Online applications will be open until **5.00pm on Tuesday 30th June 2026**. Late or incomplete applications will not be accepted.
- **September and October** - Judging panels will meet to review all the applications and shortlist the three finalists for each award category.
- **By the end of October** - all applicants will be notified of the outcome of their submission and shortlisted finalists will receive an invitation to attend the awards ceremony.
- **October and November** - shortlisted finalists will be asked to participate in a short film to promote their work/project. This film will be used to promote the awards and will be shown at the award ceremony.
- **Friday 4th December 2026** - the awards ceremony will be held to celebrate 'Shining a Light on Excellence in Social Work' in Northern Ireland at Belfast City Hall.

Judging criteria for the Social Work Awards 2026

There are six award categories in the 2026 Regional Social Work Awards (criteria are listed in detail overleaf). The judging panels will be chaired by senior representatives responsible for promoting high standards of social work in Northern Ireland. Panel members will include service users, social workers, social work academics and members of BASW NI.

In all the award categories, the judges will be looking for evidence of the individual or team's achievements as it corresponds to the award category and criteria. The application must demonstrate what is excellent about their social work practice and the positive impact on individuals, groups or communities they work with. Quotes and testimonies from service users, carers and other professionals strengthen a submission but should not be the whole submission.

Awards criteria

| | Award Name: | Nomination Type: | Award Criteria: |
|----|------------------------------|--|---|
| 1. | Beacon of Light Award | <p>Individual Award</p> <p>Nominations can be made for an individual social worker at any stage of their career and in any role – an opportunity to recognise leadership at all levels.</p> | <p>Submissions for this award should evidence how this person leads with the values of care and compassion. Examples should include one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leading self: leadership capability to intentionally behave and communicate in ways that facilitate change. • Leading with others: harness the intelligence and resourcefulness of the people they work with to achieve positive change and inspiring others. • Leading practice: supporting excellent practice and developing excellent practitioners through fostering innovation, learning and evaluation. • Leading the profession: contributing to the future evolution of the profession to meet current and future challenges. <p>(The Social Work Leadership Framework NI, 2022)</p> |
| 2. | Bright Spark Award | <p>Individual Award</p> <p>Nominations can be made for an individual social worker who is within their first two years of practice at the time of applying (inclusive of the AYE year).</p> | <p>Submissions for this award should evidence the positive attitude and attributes of this recently qualified social worker</p> <p>Examples should include one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passion: for the profession and the role of social work in making a difference in people's lives. • Professional Curiosity: practice that questions 'how we do things' and identifies areas for improvement and innovation. • Development: willingness to learn and develop self and others. • Partnership: working with and for those who use services; connecting with communities and other professions and agencies to bring about change. |

| | Award Name: | Nomination Type: | Award Criteria: |
|----|-------------------------------|---|---|
| 3. | Constellation Award | <p>Team Award</p> <p>Nominations can be made for a team of social workers or social workers working together within a multidisciplinary team.</p> | <p>Submissions for this award should evidence the positive characteristics of a motivated team.</p> <p>Examples should include one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrates exceptional teamwork through trust and shared responsibility. • provides hope, advocacy, and compassionate support to individuals and families during their most challenging times. • works together to create collaborative solutions to complex challenges; working with communities and organisations to innovate. • fosters a culture of mutual support, compassion, kindness, resilience and encouragement that strengthens both team members and the people they work alongside. |
| 4. | Lighting the Way Award | <p>Individual or Team Award</p> <p>Nominations can be made for an individual social worker, or a team of social workers, or social workers working together within a multidisciplinary team.</p> | <p>Submissions for this award should evidence the nominee(s) commitment to having learning and development at the heart of their practice.</p> <p>Examples should include one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enables: makes a difference to the development of others. • Encourages: promotes a vibrant, continuous learning culture. • Innovates: takes a unique approach to learning and development and research to ensure social workers are knowledgeable, skilled and confident. |

| | Award Name: | Nomination Type: | Award Criteria: |
|----|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| 5. | Torch of Co-production Award | <p>Individual or Team Award</p> <p>Nominations can be made for an individual social worker, or a team of social workers, or social workers working together within a multidisciplinary team.</p> | <p>Submissions for this award should provide examples of the nominee(s) working alongside people with lived experience to create an outcome that benefits all.</p> <p>Examples should include how the TORCH approach to Co-production (DoH, 2021) has underpinned practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Together – bringing the talents and knowledge of everyone together • Opportunities – creating opportunities and addressing issues • Relationships – inclusive and meaningful • Change – real, positive change should result • Hear – not just listen but hear what has been said – by everyone |
| 6. | Legacy of Light Award | <p>Individual Award</p> <p>Nominations can be made for an individual social worker who has made a lasting contribution to social work.</p> | <p>This award celebrates a social worker who has made an exceptional contribution in their professional role. Submissions for this Award should provide examples of the long-lasting impact made by the social worker in ‘leaving their mark’.</p> <p>Examples should include one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Championing best practice in the nominee’s area of social work expertise. • Demonstrating innovative and creative approaches to social work practice. • Contribution to education, training and the development of others. • Publishing research. • Making a difference to the lives of children, families, or individuals through dedicated and compassionate practice, working with service users. • Demonstrating an enduring commitment to the promotion of social justice through campaign activities or social work practice. |

Further guidance

Please read this information before commencing an award application:

- 1. 'Save and return' - starting, pausing, transferring and submitting the application**
The online form must be saved to allow it to be edited and also for it to be transferred from the person creating the application to the person endorsing the application. The 'save and return' option must be activated at the bottom of Section 1 on the form to create a unique login for each application. 'Save and return' enables the person creating the application to make edits up to the point of transfer to the Endorser. The unique log-in must be shared with the organisation's approved endorser to enable them to log in to the application to check, approve and submit the form. Please note: content can only be added to the applications up to the point it is submitted. An application cannot be edited once it has been submitted.
- 2. Section 1 Information - Details for the social worker(s) nominated for the award.**
The information required includes the nominee name(s), Social Care Council registration number, their job title, daytime phone number, email address, employing organisation and the address where they are based for work.
- 3. Section 2 Information - Details for the person proposing the social worker(s) for the award.** The information required includes the proposer's name, daytime phone number, email address, role in which they have contact with the nominee(s) and proposer's work address/contact address.
- 4. Section 3 - Statement of evidence to support the application –** This is a descriptive piece to evidence how the nominee(s) meet the criteria for the award. It is recommended to include testimony from service users and those who have experienced the nominee(s) practice. This statement is limited to 7,000 characters, which is equivalent to approximately 1,000 words with spaces. The form will automatically cut off at 7,000 characters. Supplementary material cannot be added to the application.
- 5. Section 4 Information –** Details for the person authorised to submit the nomination. All applications must be approved by the organisation employing the nominee(s) and they must consent to being included in the nomination. (**Legacy of Light Award** varies from this. Further detail is below). The information required from the person endorsing the nomination includes the name, contact details and organisation details for the endorser. It also includes completing an affirmation that all the material included on the application is correct and that all nominee(s) are eligible to be included on the application. The endorser must confirm that no breaches of service user or carer confidentiality are contained within the application.
- 6. Legacy of Light Award – This award is open to practising and retired social workers.** Managerial endorsement from an employing organisation is not mandatory for

this nomination. However, the final endorsement section must be completed to confirm that the nominee is aware of and has consented to being nominated for the award.

7. **Previous applicants/recipients are welcome to reapply** - Previous winners/recipients are only eligible to reapply if their application has a different practice focus.
8. **Multiple applications** – An individual or team may only be entered for one category once. Organisations can enter more than one category; however, each submission must be entirely separate and on an individual entry form. Duplicate nominations will be disqualified. Where a person/team is nominated more than once to a category, nominators will be asked to select one nomination.
9. **Consent** - By submitting this application, the proposer consents on behalf of all those involved in the application that they will meet the conditions of entry.
10. **Management of data** – All information provided on this application will be managed jointly by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (as the holder of the Citizen Space data) and the Regional Social Work Awards 2026 management team (Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Workforce Learning and Development Service). All data will be held securely and used solely for the management and promotion of the awards.
11. **Publicity** - By entering the Social Work Awards, entrants agree to take part in any publicity and to the contents of their submission being used in media releases.
12. **Further advice** – if you require advice on making a nomination, or have a query about the management of the Social Work Awards, please email the BHSCT planning team at RegionalSWAwards@belfasttrust.hscni.net. If you require technical assistance with submitting the online application, please contact the Social Care Council team at businesssupport@niscc.hscni.net

Application checklist

Listed below is a summary of the information needed in each part of the application. Please ensure that you have gathered the information needed before starting the online application.

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <p>Section 1 – Proposer details. These details are for the person proposing the social worker(s) for the Award. The information required includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Name✓ Daytime phone number✓ Email address✓ Role in which they have contact with the nominee(s)✓ Work address or contact address |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <p>Section 2 – Nominee details. These are required for every social worker included in the nomination and includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Name✓ Social Care Council registration number,✓ Job title✓ Daytime phone number✓ Email address at employing organisation✓ Address where they are based for work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <p>Section 3 - Statement to support the application. This is a descriptive piece to evidence how the nominee(s) meet the criteria for the Award. The response sections for this statement is limited to 7,000 characters (approx. 1,000 words with spaces) and cannot be exceeded. Supplementary material cannot be added to the application. It is recommended to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Brief description of where the nominees' works✓ How they meet the criteria for the Award✓ What makes their practice excellent✓ How they have contributed positively to people's lives✓ Quotes and testimonies from service users, carers and other professionals will be helpful in evidencing this nomination. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <p>Section 4 – Endorser details. These details are for the person authorised to approve/submit the nomination (in most cases, this will be a person within the line management structure). Access to the online form must be shared using the unique log-in provided through the 'Save and return' option on the online form.</p> <p>Before approving the application, the Endorser must confirm that the application has been approved by the organisation employing the nominee(s), check that no breaches of service user or carer confidentiality are contained within the application and that consent has been sought from nominees to being included in the nomination. (This will not apply in the case of retired social workers who are nominated for the Legacy of Light Award). The information required includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Endorser Name✓ Job title✓ Organisation this person represents✓ Organisation address✓ Daytime phone number: (Required)✓ Email address (Required) |