OPENING STATEMENT TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH AFFAIRS:
Dr Breda McTaggart (10/04/2019)

INTRODUCTION
On behalf of the Institute of Technology Sligo I wish to thank you for the invitation to address this Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs to discuss issues pertaining to the recruitment and retention of social workers, with a particular emphasis on whether there are adequate social work course places in third level colleges to meet the recruitment needs of the social work profession in Ireland. I will like to introduce you to my colleague, Ms Brenda Feeney, who is a registered Social Worker and the Course Director of the Masters in Social Work in the Institute of Technology Sligo.

The Institute of Technology Sligo is a higher education provider who develops and delivers programmes of learning to over 6,500 students at undergraduate, masters and doctorate level. It is a leader in online learning, is research active across all areas and has, at its core, a focus on the development of its region and its citizens.

The Department of Social Sciences in IT Sligo is one of the largest Departments in the Institute of Technology Sligo. It caters for the learning needs of over 650 students at undergraduate and postgraduate level. In 2015 the team and I carried out a review of our regions educational and employment needs. From this review we developed and sought validation for a number of awards at undergraduate and postgraduate level, inclusive of a Masters in Social Work. The Masters in Social Work award is the first Social Work award to be delivered in an Institute of Technology. The award has been developed in response to student requests for this award within the Northwest region, a national shortage of social workers, a number of policy documents, which advocate widening access in education and the need to meet an employment and skills shortage.
短缺社会工作者

等待名单对社会工作者的需求存在于所有服务领域，包括：儿童和年轻人；老年人照护；和残疾领域。即使经过持续的招聘和保留驱动，所有领域。现实是，这一趋势可能会继续，因为对社会工作者的需求没有被毕业生（215-250）的供应所满足，而社会工作者在特定岗位的保留被承认具有挑战性。因此，所有领域都有大量的职位空缺。

社会工作提供于技术学院

技术学院斯莱戈和社科学科反映出非传统高等教育空间，我们的学生往往是高等教育的第一代，许多人都在奖学金。开始在社会科学系的学生努力完成课程并获得资格，使他们能够为自己、家人和他们工作和生活的社区争取更好的生活机会和结果。但是，由于学院在特定学习空间的缺乏，社会系担心我们正在为学生群体提供对需求的教育机会。2016年，我们决定通过引入包括社会工作硕士学位在内的奖项来改变这一现状。

现状

项目团队和我于2016年开始这项工作，2018年我们寻求并获得授权，在2018年9月，我们的项目开始了，并且和一群充满雄心壮志和兴奋的学生一起。他们正在接受他们的第一次专业学习实习。由于这是一个新的领域，这个问题是否我们应该提供社会工作领域。答案是，社会工作是一个受《健康和社会护理专业人员法案》2005年监管的职业，因此所有项目都必须由专业监管机构进行审查和评估。
CORU. The Masters in Social Work has made an application to CORU and we will be reviewed by our professional regulator in Autumn 2019.

**CHALLENGES**

There are a small number of challenges when developing and implementing a Social Work award, they are not insurmountable but are worth noting as we try and work collectively to resolve the ongoing issues of social work recruitment and retention. These include:

a) Educational providers are dependent on the goodwill of services to accept and supervise students for professional placement learning opportunities. It is a significant challenge to secure even a small number of placements and is prohibiting increasing our student numbers.

b) Students on newly developed Professional Regulated Programmes commence without the assurance that the programme will be successful as part of the validation process. This has a personal and financial risk for potential students and does impact on the numbers applying and the numbers we recruit.

c) Any changes to the offering of an approved programme e.g. going from full-time to a part-time delivery model requires a new validation process. If one of the offerings is unsuccessful both may be impacted by this. This is because the specific award title i.e. Masters of Social Work and the academic institute is recorded on the Approved Qualifications Bye-Law.

d) As is normal for all students who wish to return to full-time studies there are costs implications, both in terms of fees and maintenance. Students who were in employment in the previous year may be above the threshold of grant funding for year one, hence the financial burden is increased in year one. Suggestions of Funded Bursaries would be welcomed, provided it does not impact on a student securing grant funding.

**ISSUES OF RETENTION**

While recruitment is one part of the social work shortage puzzle, retention is the other; this was discussed by the Irish Association of Social Workers to the Joint Committee on the 27th March 2019. We would support suggestions put forward by our colleagues and reiterate the importance of quality supervision, streamlining of work practices and manageable caseloads
as key factors in any successful retention strategy. We would add that recruitment and retention strategies need to co-exist as one impacts directly on the other.

IN CONCLUSION
We acknowledge that this is a complex, multifactorial problem and consequently any sustainable resolution will require many different and interrelated strategies. The team and I had, and have, a responsibility to its (potential) students and its region to provide appropriate education and learning opportunities, to the required standard, in an area where employment needs exist, social work is one of these areas. We welcome the opportunity to be part of any resolution strategy.