  

**Promoting Practice Learning**

**for**

**Social Work Students**

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**Guidance for Placements**

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**Roles and Responsibilities**

There are several parties involved in the placement process:

* Senior managers
* The agency’s placement coordinator
* The practice educator
* The practice educator’s manager
* A work base supervisor (sometimes)
* The rest of the team
* The tutor
* The student

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| **Role** | **Responsibilities** |
| Student | * Committing to learning
* Developing expertise as a social worker
* Demonstrating competence
* Providing a service
* Acting as an accountable representative of the agency
* Attending meetings with the tutor and practice educator
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| Tutor | * Providing support to the placement process
* Providing academic support to the student
* First point of contact should problems arise
* Involvement in the assessment of student’s academic work
* Attending meetings with the student and practice educator
* Quality assuring the placement
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| Practice Educator | * Preparing for and structuring the placement
* Attending meetings with the student and the tutor
* Facilitating the student’s learning
* Providing supervision
* Ensuring the student is working in accordance with agency policy and procedures
* Making an assessment of the student’s competence and providing a report
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| Offsite Practice Educator | * A practice educator from outside the placement
* Working closely with someone in the placement, known as the on-site or work base supervisor
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| On-site Supervisor | * Responsible for the day to day management of the student and their work
* Working in partnership with the off site practice educator
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| The Rest of the Team | * Offering ‘shadowing’ opportunities
* Co-working with the student
* Direct observation of practice
* Input into the assessment
* Support for the practice educator
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| Line Manager | * Identifying an appropriate practice educator
* Supporting the practice educator
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| Agency Practice Learning Coordinator | * To match students to appropriate placements
* To work in partnership with local social work programmes
* To provide training for practice educators
* To offer support to practice educators
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| Senior Managers | * Agreeing the overall level of placement provision – West London’s Placement Guarantee
* Ensuring that systems are in place to support that provision
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**Summary of Tasks Carried Out by Practice Educators**

* Reading the student’s placement application

## Initial meeting with student

* Preparing for the placement
* Planning an induction programme

## Formal “Practice Learning Agreement Meeting”

* Allocating appropriate work to the student

## Supervision

* Facilitating learning
* Supporting students to link theory to practice, including anti-oppressive practice
* Supporting students to reflect on their practice

## Assessment

## Formal observation of the student’s practice

## Mid-way meeting

## Mid-way report

## Final meeting

## Final report

* Making a recommendation

Most practitioners will have transferable skills and knowledge that will enable them to be effective practice educators and the next section will expand all of these aspects of practice education. Training for the role is arranged via the practice learning coordinator in your agency.

Most practitioners who take on the role of practice educator thoroughly enjoy the experience. It is an opportunity to think about one’s own practice, including values and theory – students ask questions!! It is also an excellent opportunity to develop new skills, such as supervising, mentoring and managing.

**Structure of Placements**

This section provides some more detail about the tasks that the practice educator is required to carry out during the course of the placement.

***Placement Application***

Students complete a placement application for each placement, in which they summarize their previous experience and identify transferable skills and knowledge. They also outline their learning needs.

The agency’s practice learning coordinator uses this form as a basis for matching students to appropriate and available placements. Potential practice educators are provided with copies of the forms, to enable them to gain a sense of how the placement might best meet the student’s learning needs.

Students’ contact details are on the form and the practice educator should make contact to arrange an initial meeting.

***Initial Meeting***

This is a relatively informal meeting that takes place prior to the intended placement start date.

The purpose is to ensure that the placement is appropriate and will meet the student’s learning needs

The practice educator can tell the student about the work of the service, including special areas of interest or expertise. It may be useful to provide the student with written information about the service.

The start date should be agreed and the placement coordinator informed that the placement has been set up.

At this stage the practice educator should seek to ensure that team members have an understanding of their role in relation to the students. This will not only be helpful for the student but may also assist the practice educator to identify their own sources of support.

***Preparation***

The practice educator should now be preparing for the student’s arrival, e.g.

* identifying where they will sit
* PC access
* arranging for an ID badge
* obtaining a diary
* putting together an induction programme for the student.

It would be useful to discuss with the team manager, in advance of the placement starting, the policies and procedures students need to be aware of at the early stages of the placement, whilst remembering that being presented with a host of seemingly dry policies can be overwhelming for any new starter.

It is quite reasonable to ask a student to do some preparation themselves before the placement starts, usually in the form of reading in relation to the service. Practice educators may have a reading list of literature specific to their service that they can provide, or the social work programme may be a source of information

***The Induction Programme***

The purpose of an induction programme is to give some structure to the student’s introduction to the agency. Some settings may have a standard induction plan for students but it is important to treat each student as an individual and tailor that induction depending on how much the student already knows about the agency’s work and related services.

Generally, an induction will include:

* information about the work of the service
* basic introductions to other staff
* information about the layout of the building
* door-codes
* admin systems
* one-to-one meetings with certain staff
* shadowing
* joint visits
* reading time

This early stage in the placement affords an opportunity for the practice educator and the student to discuss what the student’s learning needs are and how they will be met on placement. It is also a chance for the practice educator to be clear about what their expectations are from the student.

***The Formal Placement Agreement***

This is the first of (usually) three formal meetings that involve the student, the tutor, the practice educator and, when appropriate, the workplace supervisor. They are collectively, sometimes, referred to as three-way meetings.

The placement agreement is effectively the contract that underpins the placement. Its purpose is to clarify the aims and objectives of the placement in order to meet the learning needs of the student, so that the student can learn to be an effective social worker.

***Allocating Appropriate Work***

It is the responsibility of the practice educator to identify work that will meet the student’s learning needs, but this is best done in consultation with the team manager in order that they have some oversight of the student’s work.

The work allocated should support the student in addressing their learning needs and be a representative selection of the work of the agency. It is helpful to take into account the student’s knowledge, experience and learning style when allocating pieces of work.

The work undertaken should be within the capacity of the practice educator to supervise, so that carefully considered evaluation of the student’s performance is feasible.

***Supervision***

Some practice educators refer to practice teaching or practice learning sessions, others use the term practice tutorial. This handbook, however, will continue to talk about supervision as this is the term that people are most familiar with.

Referring to the agency’s supervision policy is a good starting point, as it should ensure that the student is being treated equitably within the agency and receiving supervision to the standard usually provided.

The first supervision is an opportunity for both parties to discuss what they expect from supervision and to draw up a supervision contract. (Please see app….. for an example)The following statements are general guidelines for effective supervision of social work students

* Formal supervision should take place on a regular basis – the expectation is once a week (or pro rata) for 1½ to 2 hours. As the student becomes more independent, it may be possible to reduce the supervision to fortnightly.
* Supervision should be protected time, showing a commitment to the process. If supervision is cancelled, it should be rescheduled at the earliest opportunity.
* Effective supervision is a shared process, with each party bringing prepared agenda items. Some practice educators also prefer to share the process of recording the sessions, with each taking it in turn to make notes. *(Note: it may be useful for the practice educator to make their own additional notes about the student’s ability to reflect in supervision and about any tasks that either party may be required to carry out)* As with any written record, it is good practice for both parties to agree that notes are a true record and sign to that effect.
* Supervision is not just about case management, it is a forum for education. It is in supervision that practice educators can support students to reflect on or analyse their practice. (Please see the section on facilitating learning)
* One role of the practice educator is to assess the student against the National Occupational Standards. It is useful to consider these regularly in supervision, looking at how the student’s competence can be evidenced.

***Facilitating Learning***

Students are on placement to learn how to be a social worker and it is the job of the practice educator to support that learning. The first element of the learning process is for the practice educator to provide practice learning opportunities that will meet the student’s learning needs, taking into account the student’s experience, knowledge and learning style.

It is unrealistic to expect that students will be competent at undertaking the work of the agency immediately. Learning is usually incremental and developmental – students are allowed to make mistakes, learn from them and improve their practice.

Reflective practice is a requirement of social work education – students need to be able to demonstrate that that they understand what informs their practice, looking at theories and their own values. The supervision session (practice tutorial) is the forum where the student can be supported to reflect on, or analyse, their practice. This will include looking at values and ethics; legislation and policy frameworks; linking theory to practice.

***Assessment***

Students are assessed against the Key Roles of the National Occupational Standards for Social Work. These can be found on the Skills for Care website - follow the link on the homepage.

Sources of evidence that can be used to support the practice educator’s assessment of the student are often agreed at the placement agreement meeting and will usually include:

* Joint working (with either the practice educator or another colleague)
* Written pieces of work by the student e.g. assessments, case recordings
* Formal observation
* Informal observation
* Supervision notes
* Peer feedback
* Service user feedback
* Workplace supervisor feedback
* The student’s learning journal
* The student’s ability to self-evaluate e.g. during supervision; in their journal; after a piece of work
* The student’s placement related work for university

***Formal Observation of Practice***

It is a requirement of the degree in social work that each student be formally observed in practice on at least three occasions. This should be undertaken by the practice educator on at least two of those occasions but a colleague (possibly the workplace supervisor) can carry out the third. It is usual to have had one observation of practice by the mid point of the placement and this will normally be agreed at the placement agreement meeting.

***Mid Way Meeting***

Each placement requires a formal mid-way meeting (sometimes referred to as a midway review), so that the student’s progress to date can be evaluated. The date for this will usually be agreed at the first formal meeting.

The meeting will look at whether the student’s learning needs are being met and at how the student is demonstrating their ability against the NOS. There should be planning for the remainder of the placement, including how to meet any identified gaps in learning.

The midway meeting is also an opportunity to confirm that the level of teaching input and supervision is meeting the student’s needs.

***Mid Way Report***

Each programme requires a mid way report, which will provide a formal record of the student’s progress. Programmes usually have a pro forma for the structure of the report.

The mid way report will provide written evidence to the programme that the student’s learning needs are being met and at how the student is demonstrating their ability against the NOS. There should be planning for the remainder of the placement, including how to meet any identified gaps in learning and how any specific problems are being addressed.

***Final Meeting***

The final meeting should be used to revisit the student’s learning needs and determine if they have been met.

The practice educator’s recommendation as to whether the student has passed the placement will be confirmed.

The meeting should also be used to discuss and confirm the student’s ongoing learning needs, either in relation to the next placement or in relation to practice as a newly qualified social worker.

Arrangements for the completion and submission of the final report and portfolio should be clarified at this meeting.

There is a quality assurance aspect to this final meeting – an opportunity to review and reflect upon the arrangements for the placement, identifying successes and areas for development.

***Final Report***

The final report should provide evidence to support the practice educator’s recommendation of either ‘pass’, ‘fail’, refer or ‘defer’ – the programme’s placement handbook will clearly outline the criteria for each recommendation. Again, there will be a pro forma available.

***Making a Recommendation***

The placement experience plays a significant part in training social work students to become reliable professionals, who can be trusted to work with vulnerable adults and children. It is the responsibility of the practice educator to make a professional recommendation about the student’s ability to practise as a social worker, or to proceed to the next placement.

Any concerns about the student’s professional capabilities should be initially addressed through supervision. The tutor should also be informed of any unresolved problematic situations and will advise the practice educator of the programme’s procedures, in relation to concerns about students. These procedures are set out in the programmes’ placement handbooks, which practice educators are advised to read. It is also advisable for the practice educator to consult with their line manager and the agency’s practice learning coordinator, for advice and/or support.

 **Support for Practice Educators**

Most practitioners who take on the role of practice educator thoroughly enjoy the experience. It is an opportunity to reflect on and analyse one’s own practice, including values and theory – students ask questions!! It is also an opportunity to develop new skills, such as supervising, mentoring and managing and is clearly a valuable aspect of continuing professional and personal development.

Although the student is coming into a team, it is the named practice educator who has responsibility for the student and it can feel like quite an isolated role. Practice educators should give some thought to who will support them through the placement.

***Line Manager***

It is usually through the practice educator’s own supervision, with their line manager, that it is identified that they are ready and willing to take on the role of practice educator. Practice educators should be able to discuss the progress of the placement/student in their own supervision, although some line managers will be more familiar with practice education than others and may want to direct the practice educator to other sources of support.

***Team Members***

Team members who have already acted as practice educators may be in a position to act as a mentor for a new practice educator. It would be useful to establish this in the planning stages of the placement and confirm with the line manager that this is appropriate. The support available may be on an ad hoc basis, or be in a more formal process, akin to supervision.

Other team members, who don’t have practice educator experience, may also be sources of support, offering the practice educator an opportunity to talk things through. Again it is helpful to establish this prior to the placement starting.

Some team members, whether experienced practice educators or not, might be willing to take on a role more directly related to the student, such as ‘shadowing’ at the start of the placement; co-working opportunities; direct observation; input into the assessment of the student.

***‘Buddying’***

As the demand for placements and practice educators has increased, some teams are developing their approach to supporting new practice educators. There have been a number of successful examples of ‘buddying’, whereby an experienced practice educator and a new practice educator share the practice education. The experienced practice educator is able to support and teach the new practice educator, with a view to them undertaking the role independently in the future.

***The Agency Practice Learning Coordinator***

The agency practice learning coordinator may be able to offer a range of support, such as individual discussion about the role of the practice educator; advice re the process; advice re difficulties; a ‘sounding board’; feedback on reports; attending the practice educator support group.

***Practice Educator Support Group***

Most of the West London boroughs provide a practice educator support group - a useful forum for sharing good practice; discussing anxieties; keeping up to date; networking (and there are usually pastries provided!)

**Practical Considerations**

There are some practical issues that should be addressed before the placement starts:

* Car insurance
* CRB checking
* Health & safety risk assessment
* ID
* Insurance
* IT

***Car Insurance***

If students are required to use their own cars during the placement, they must ensure that they have business insurance cover. It is the responsibility of the practice educator to verify that this is in place.

***CRB***

There is liaison between the programmes and the agency in relation to criminal convictions. Any student who declares any conviction goes through a rigorous process that satisfies the programme and partner agencies that the person is suitable for social work training.

All students undergo a Criminal Records Bureau check prior to placement. This is arranged by the programme and the agency is informed that the check has been done. The programmes legally cannot provide copies of the check but students may be asked to show their own copy to the practice educator.

***Health and Safety***

Students are to be regarded as any new employee in relation to health and safety and this should form part of their induction.

In the event of the student being considered vulnerable e.g. having a disability, having a medical condition or being pregnant, a new risk assessment should be undertaken.

***ID***

As representatives of the authority, students must have a valid ID. The practice educator will be able to organise this.

***Insurance***

Students are covered by the borough’s Public Liability Insurance whilst on placement.