

Executive summary

The purpose of this paper is to outline how many Practice Educators, within The organisation are needed in the next three years; to meet the projection to recruit xx Newly Qualified Social Workers from students who have completed a final placement within The organisation.

There are xx active Practice Educators and xx Practice Educators who haven't supported a student for more than two years. The organisation need xx Practice Educators in order to meet the demand of xx Newly Qualified Social Workers. To achieve the recruitment of xx Newly Qualified Social Workers, we need to deliver at least xx student placements. This will allow a buffer for any students failing or gaining employment elsewhere.

We need to train a further xx Practice Educators by September 2021 in order to achieve a consistent number of xx Practice Educators each year. This figure needs to include more Social Workers (qualified for a minimum of 2 years) or experienced Social Workers as most of the current Practice Educators are in management's roles. There is also a trend for Practice Educators to leave or progress to management roles. It is more difficult to have a student if you are in a management role because they don't routinely carry cases. You need to be matched to a Workplace Supervisor or an experienced Social Worker who acts as case holder with the student. Due to the responsibilities of the management role there are other competing demands attached to the role: which can impact on if you have a student or not.

In order to become a qualified Practice Educator, Social Workers need to qualify for a minimum of two years and complete the Practice Educator Professional Standards (PEPS) Stage 1 and Stage 2 course. Whilst completing the PEPS stage 1 course, the Social Worker will undertake the Workplace Supervisor role with the student. To meet the demand outlined above for xx placements, The organisation needs to continually recruit another xx Workplace Supervisors by September 21. There are currently xx Workplace Supervisors on PEPS Stage 1 training, and they will complete the course by July 2021. There are xx on the waiting list for PEPS Stage 1 for March 2021 and 1 for PEPS Stage 2 for March 21. To meet the demand, we will need xx Workplace Supervisors to support the Practice Educators. This number will allow a buffer and natural attrition. The target set is currently being met. The PE Strategy needs to support the ongoing recruitment of Workplace Supervisors to sustain a consistent number of xx. If appropriate, they will then progress to PEPS Stage 2.

To achieve this number, we need to ensure there is more accolade, status and recognition of the Practice Education role (this is in line with the recent Staffordshire University Teaching Partnership research). The current honorarium payment needs to be reviewed. This money is funded from the student daily placement fee. Currently, all Practice Educators including those undertaking PEPS Stage 2 receive an honorarium. We propose this payment is ended for those in training as we are funding the course and used this money to increase the daily rate for the qualified Practice Educators. As an incentive for a qualified Workplace Supervisor; we

propose the introduction of a nominal fee of £xxx per day, as there is not currently a payment. Senior management approval needs to be sought for this proposal. Without Practice Educators, the organisation will be unable to recruit Social Workers from student placements. It is increasingly difficult, particularly during the current Pandemic to recruit willing volunteers to undertake the Practice Educator role.

In order to achieve equality for Practice Educators and Workplace Supervisors within the organisation: the PE strategy needs to be consistent. The number of student placements may differ according to the business need in relation to the number of Newly Qualified Social Workers required.

Practice Education (PE) Strategy Paper for xxx

The purpose of this paper is to outline a clear strategy in relation to how many Practice Educators, the organisation needs in the next three years in order to recruit the number of Newly Qualified Social Workers required. This will meet the projection to recruit xx Newly Qualified Social Workers from students who have completed a final placement within the organisation. Our aim is to also achieve a sufficient number of high-quality statutory placements linked to work force planning. The expansion of the BA Social Work Apprenticeship Programme needs to be considered and forward planning needs to take place for an increase in the number of Practice Educators required.

This paper will make recommendations for a proposed PE strategy in relation to Practice Educator status and recognition which will need to be agreed by Senior Managers. It will outline the current PE offer, PE and student data, and an analysis of this, which includes recent research completed by Staffordshire University on behalf of the West Midlands Teaching Partnership. The West Midlands Teaching Partnership has a funding criteria requirement by the DFE that all xx partners;

- Provide quality placements in statutory settings (every student is to be guaranteed at least one statutory placement, although two placements are prioritised within funding applications).

Social Work England (2020) state that:

“The learning environment must provide education and training opportunities that enable students to develop their skills and knowledge across all areas of social work, gain required experience in practice settings and meet the professional standards in supportive, supervised and safe settings”

On Practice Educators they are clear on the following;

“Practice Educators are on the (SWE) register and have the relevant and current knowledge, skills and experience to support safe in effective learning”.

“Practice Educators are expected to have completed a training course on Practice Education that is aligned to the PEPS and that is relevant to the level of students they are working with (such as students on placement 1 or placement 2).”

The Practice Educator Role

The Practice Educator role is central in 'gatekeeping' the profession and acting as both a mentor and an assessor to the student.

There are two Practice Education models; a Practice Educator and a Workplace Supervisor (WPS) or a Practice Educator who takes full responsibility for the student. A significant number of the current Practice Educators are in management positions and as a result are not case holders; therefore, a WPS is needed to case hold and co work with the student.

The Practice Educator and/or WPS are responsible for undertaking the pre-placement interview, planning the induction, completing supervisions, case allocation and direction (in consultation with the team manager), a minimum of two direct observations, formative and summative reports, attendance at placement and review meetings. The Practice Educator has full responsibility for assessing and supporting the student against the Professional Capability Framework (BASW PCF).

If a Practice Educator is working with a struggling student, this is additional work and requires close collaboration with the Higher Education Institute (HEI)/University and the SW Academy. This can have an emotional impact on the Practice Educator as evidenced in the following quote:

"I think that it's an extremely emotional, gut wrenching kind of experience (failing a student in practice. I don't think it feels good on any level". (cited in Finch 2017). If a PE was to fail a student, the Team Manager, PE Faculty lead and HEI/ University will work closely to offer support.

PE Data

There are currently xx qualified Practice Educators across the organisation, xx of whom have not had a student during the past two years. This is predominantly due to the responsibilities of management roles and workload. Therefore, xx Practice Educators have supported and assessed students in the last two years. A number of these Practice Educators have supported more than one student per year and some managers are supporting both a Social Work Apprentice and a BA student. The management team and the Social Work Academy team regularly act as a Practice Educator for students.

Maintaining PE Currency

The PEPS (BASW) state that for a Practice Educator to maintain currency, they must take responsibility for supporting a student at a minimum of every two years.

If a qualified Practice Educator has not supported and assessed a student for two years, their PE qualification may be considered lapsed. However, if a Practice Educator has not had an opportunity to take on a student, they can maintain currency through other Practice Education activities, such as:

- organising and supporting placements
- providing teaching and learning opportunities
- observing other Practice Educators
- evidence of report writing
- supervising and supporting NQSW'S

The PE Faculty lead contacts all Practice Educators in jeopardy to alert them that their currency is about to expire to ascertain if they can act as a Practice Educator for a student. There is also an opportunity via the West Midlands Teaching Partnership (WMTP) for lapsed Practice Educators to attend training courses to refresh and update their skills and knowledge.

Retention of PE's

Part of the PE faculty role is to contact PE's who are in jeopardy of losing their PE Currency. The process entails checking the database to find out if there are any PE's in jeopardy and then contacting them via phone or email to warn them and suggest they have a student before their two years are up. They would be prioritised in having a student, to enable the PE currency can be maintained.

Anecdotal evidence from the last year and the rationale given suggests that the barriers/reasons given for not having students are as follows:

- Change of job role to a specialist team.
- Not having capacity due to job role.
- Extremely busy role as a manager.
- On a secondment so unsure of future.
- Part-time role and unable to have a student.
- In the thick of Covid-19 so unable to have a student at the moment.
- Retiring or leaving employment.
- Has a Social Work Apprentice student so unable to support a 70 or 100-day student.

Practice Educators in training

The SW Academy Practice Education Faculty Lead (Pete Walker) is responsible for recruiting Practice Educators at both PEPS Stage 1 and 2. There is a clear process for Social Workers interested in PEPS Stage 1 and 2. It is expected that the practitioner will discuss and seek written agreement from their manager. An application form must be completed followed by an interview from the PE Faculty Lead to assess suitability to the Practice Education role. Social Workers must be qualified for a minimum of two years before completing PEPS Stage 1 (PEPS guidance - BASW 2019).

The PE training is currently provided by the University of Birmingham. From March 2021, the University of Worcester will deliver PEPS Stage 1 and in September, they will deliver PEPS Stage 2.

The following outlines the two PE Stages based on the PEPS:

- Stage 1 - Practice Educators at this stage will be able to supervise, teach and assess Social Work degree students up to, but not being solely responsible for, the final assessment prior to qualification. Stage 1 Practice Educators supervising final placement students will need to have their decision ratified and overseen by PEPs 2 qualified Practice Educator mentor or assessor (Workplace Supervisor role).
- Stage 2 - Practice Educators at this Stage will be able to supervise, teach and assess Social Work degree students up to, and including the final placement. These Practice Educators will have the authority to recommend, based on appropriate evidence, that Social Work learners are fit to practise at the point of qualification (Practice Educator role).

All Practice Education training is based on the PEPS, which was refreshed last year (BASW 2019).

“We fully support the refresh of the Practice Educator professional standards (PEPS), it is important that as a profession we set high standards of practice education and support future generations of Social Workers in their education and career pathways”.

Lyn Romeo, Chief Social Worker Adults. (currently on sabbatical).

Practice Educators currently in training

There are **xx candidates** in PEPS Stage 1 and **x candidate** in PEPS Stage 2.

The Practice Education Faculty Lead is responsible for promoting PE Stage 1 and 2 courses. This is achieved by attending team meetings, sending out promotional flyers and contacting practitioners who have expressed an interest. The number of placements requests from HEI's is aligned with how many candidates are enrolled on the Practice Educator course. Whilst candidates are undertaking PE Stage 1 and 2, mentoring is offered by the PE Faculty lead. Candidates are entitled to three sessions, which will encourage practitioners to manage their own learning, in order to maximise their potential to develop their skills, knowledge and values in relation to their Practice Educator role. They will be assessed whilst delivering a supervision session with their student and feedback is provided for the candidate's University portfolio.

Current Practice Educator Offer

The current offer for all Practice Educators is:

Practice Educators in training

- Induction session to support placement planning for each Student cohort
- Monthly PE drop-in sessions facilitated by Practice Education Faculty Lead
- Access to PE Faculty Lead for consultation
- Mentoring provision to PE Stage 1 and 2 candidates
- Direct Observation of their Practice to assess capability against the PEPS domains
- Access to the Practice Education Toolbox
- PE Stage 2 are paid an honorarium subject to successful completion of the course.

Qualified Practice Educators

- xx weekly Community of Practice sessions, based upon key practice themes, mapped against the PEPS and the Social Work England CPD standards
- Collaborative PE sessions with the local HEIs
- Regular Master Classes funded by the West Midland Teaching Partnership
- Opportunity to attend Practice Assessment Panel at HEIs
- PE Yammer Group, which includes reflective models and research
- PE's are paid an honorarium for having a student

The following student placement data was analysed, to inform our proposal:

University/College	Adults
2018	xxx
2019	xxx
2020	xxx
Grand Total	xxx

As the table highlights, there has been a slight decrease in the number of student placements since 2018. There are a number of reasons for this decline: there were changes in Social Work Academy, PE left the service and the outbreak of Covid-19 in 2020. As detailed above PE have provided rationale for why placements were not provided.

Below is a current split of the number of Practice Educators within The organisation, matched against Job Title.

Job Title	Number of PEs
Senior Best Interest Assessor	x
Urgent Care Team Manager	x
Area Manager	x
Social Worker Level 2	x
Team Manager	x
Management roles	x
Social Worker Level 3	x
Grand Total	xx

This evidences that the majority of Practice Educators are in management positions and therefore have to work with WPS's in order to support the student. In order to support the workforce strategy, there needs to be an increase in the number of Social Workers qualifying as Practice Educators.

Social Work Apprenticeships – University of xxxxx

The University of xxxxxx commenced the delivery of the Social Work Apprenticeship BA (Hons) Degree programme in March 2019. This is an opportunity for existing employees to achieve the Social Work qualification over three years, whilst completing 'on the job' training. It is a popular programme and there has already been a lot of interest for the next cohort.

In Cohort 1, there are **x students (x on maternity leave and due back in March 2021)** whom commenced the programme in March 19. Due to Covid, the programme was suspended for six months and year two restarted in September 20.

In Cohort 2, there are **x students** who commenced in September 20. In order to support the **xx Social Work Apprentices**, there are **xx Practice Educators**. This includes x PE's from the SW Academy supporting x SW apppprentices. As the programme expands, the number of Practice Educators needed for Cohort 3 will increase. The next planned cohort is September 2021. The time committment required from the Practice Educator is three years which is different to 70 and 100 day placements. This has an impact on the Practice Educator's availability to support other student placements. The Practice Educators are paid an honorarium twice a year from the Apprentice levy (see table below).

Cost Allocation	Price per Apprentice (£)
Subcontracted Services Costs	xxxxxx per annum per apprentice = £xx, xxxx for six apprentices
Payment Schedule	xx payments of xxxx per annum or pro rata thereof for the period of time the PE has supported the apprentice and payable on receipt of a purchase order

Funding received from HEI's and Universities for Students

The current funding we receive from HEI's and Universities is £xx per day per student placement. From this funding, we pay an honorarium to PEs of £xx per day (gross) per student placement. Placements cover either 70 or 100 days. The funding is also used to pay for the PEPS stage 1 and 2 courses. If there is any funding left, the Social Work Academy liaises with the PSW regarding the remaining spend which is used for PE resources and Masterclasses.

Workforce Planning

The Social Work Academy devised an NQSW recruitment process in liaison with Social Work Opportunities. Students who are on track to pass their placement at the mid way point will receive information about current ASYE vacancies from Social Work Opportunities. A Social Work Opportunities representative attends student forums to discuss application forms, preparation for interview, and the recruitment process.

It is important to plan for the number of NQSW's required and link this to the number of student placements across the different Social Work programmes. This also includes completion dates for the Social Work Apprentices who will become the organisation directorate NQSW's.

Retention rates of students placed within Adult Services who gained employment by Adult Services.

In terms of students who have had placements), a considerable number gain employment and complete the ASYE.

As detailed in the table below, a significant number of NQSW's are still working for the organisation.

Placements within the organisation			
Year	No of placements	Still employed by WCC	% on retention
2017	xx	xx	xx%
2018	xx	xx	xx%
2019	xx	x	xx%
2020	xx	xx	xx%
Grand Total	xx	xx	xx% - overall

Conclusion

To achieve the target number of NQSW's, we propose the following PE Strategy:

- 1. A further xx Practice Educators need to be trained by September 2021 in order to achieve a consistent number of xx Practice Educators each year.**
This figure needs to include more Social Workers as most of the current Practice Educators are in management's roles. There is also a trend for Practice Educators to leave or progress to management roles.
- 2. To support the ongoing recruitment of Workplace Supervisors to sustain a consistent number of xx per year.** If appropriate, they will then progress to PEPS Stage 2.
- 3. There needs to be an increased recognition of the Practice Educator role.**
HEIs and employers could work together to raise the recognition and accolade associated with training to become a Practice Educator. This would need to be a systemic recognition and appreciation of the complex work undertaken. For those working in a Social Work role and undertaking Practice Education Training simultaneously, time should be given for effective supervision and assessment of the student. This may include workload relief of some form, or group supervision and learning for the student with a qualified Practice Educator.
- 4. Change current honorarium payment for Practice Educator in training.**
Currently PE's in training for Stage 2 receive £xxxxx (gross payment) for a 100-day placement and £xxx for a 70-day placement, once it has been verified that they have passed their course. Workplace Supervisors do not receive any payments. The proposed change is that those at Stage 2 do not receive any payment as we are funding the course.

Payment once qualified proposal:

- PE qualified (PE Stage 2) will receive £xxxx (for 100-day placement) or £xxx (for 70 days placement) instead of £xxxx or £xxx.
- WPS (PE Stage 1) once qualified, will receive xx% of the honorarium fee. 100-day placements would be £xxx, and 70-day placements would be £xxx

Currently, all PE costs are funded by HEI/Universities placement fees. Hence having no additional cost to the organisation.

- 5. Practice Education embedded in career progression. It would be desirable to have PE Stage 1 and 2 before considering a management role or a Team Manager role.** The Social Work recruitment and retention strategy will continue to support the development of the organisation workforce through the Practice Education courses by providing Social Workers with essential experience managing and supervising students enabling some to consider promotion into management or management posts.
- 6. Introduce a practice standard that every team supports a minimum of one student per year.** Increased support to be given to managers from the Social Work Academy for a whole team around the student approach. To emphasise the value of having students and assuring and monitoring quality of student placement. To continue to build capacity by having one Workplace Supervisor at stage 1 and one Practice Educator at stage 2 per team. This model will also support recruitment and retention of at least one NQSW per team.
- 7. To maintain and review the PE Database.** The Social Work Academy monitors the currency of the Practice Educators on a PE database following receipt of a completed honorarium, which details the start and finish dates of a placement. In turn, this alerts the PE Faculty Lead of those Practice Educators who are in jeopardy of losing their PE currency. To develop a PE Refresher Course to PE's who haven't supported a student for more than two years. To regularly check with Social Work Opportunities to ascertain if any of the Newly Appointed Social Workers have PE Stage 1 and/or Stage 2.
- 8. To continue with the current PE offer which includes regular PE Communities of Practice.** It was recommended by the recent Staffordshire University research funded by WMTP to have regular "*Communities of Practice*' to include all partners, can support and enhance the practice learning experience for all stakeholders" PE Communities of Practice which is already well established in ASC on a six weekly basis. Feedback is regularly sought by the PE Faculty Lead from Practice Educators to continually improve the PE offer.

By making the key changes as proposed, this will encourage more Social Workers to embark on the PE Stage 1 and 2 courses as a recognised career pathway. It will be advantageous to the organisation to meet the demands of the Universities and HEI's student placement requests as there is clear link to the recruitment of Newly Qualified Social Workers. If Workplace Supervisors receive a proportion of the honorarium, this will promote equality and fairness when placements are provided and aid the recruitment of WPS's long term. By increasing the honorarium for qualified Practice Educators, this will support the retention and extra work the role requires and will act as an incentive for qualified Workplace Supervisors.

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This document remains the property of the Worcestershire Social Work Academy. Any data or information used by other agencies or organisations needs to be referenced to the original source.

References

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An Evaluation of Practice education across the West Midlands Teaching Partnership.

BASW:

[BASW Webpage on Practice Educator Professional Standards](#)

