Practice Placements Guidance

Last updated 19 February 2020

Contents

Introduction

Purpose

This guidance supplements the social work qualifying education and training standards 2020. In particular, this guidance is relevant to standard 2 which is about the learning environment. The following provides more detail on what practice placements should consist of and makes suggestions for what a good practice placement might look like. It aims to help education providers understand how they can comply with our standards. We recognise that providers have different curricula and structures and this guidance respects these differences.

We recommend that you read the following documents alongside this guidance:

1. **Education and training standards guidance**
   This provides general guidance on our qualifying education and training standards.
2. **Guidance on the assessment of social work students**
   This provides guidance against standards 4.8, 4.9, 4.10, 4.11 and 4.12 and additional guidance against 3.9, 5.4, and 5.8.

This guidance is primarily for providers of social work courses and organisations that provide practice learning placements for social work courses. Social work students may also want to familiarise themselves with this guidance as it provides information about their placements.

Format of this guidance

Our requirements around placements are addressed under standard 2 of the qualifying education and training standards, which is about the learning environment:

> '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'.

In order for providers to meet standard 2 with respect to placements, we set requirements which detail our expectations. This guidance is structured against each of these requirements.

We also set requirements that are relevant to placements in other parts of the standards which are about course governance, management and quality (3.2, 3.3 and 3.5), curriculum and assessment (4.3 and 4.6) and supporting students (5.4). This guidance also includes those requirements.

Practice settings

> 2.1 Ensure that students spend at least 200 days (including up to 30 skills days) gaining different experiences and learning in practice settings. Each student will have:
>
>   i.   Placements in at least two practice settings providing contrasting experiences.
>   ii.   A minimum of one placement taking place within a statutory setting, providing experience of sufficient numbers of statutory social work tasks involving high-risk decision making and legal interventions.

It is important that students gain experience in practice settings that prepare them to register with us and practise as social workers.

Days spent in practice settings

Students must spend at least 200 days in practice over the course of their course. Up to 30 of these days can be allocated to students developing their skills for practice, also known as 'skills days'. It is mandatory for students to attend all placement days, including any skills days (where these are provided).

Placement patterns may vary across course providers, but usually a student's final placement will consist of 100 days and will take place in their final year of study. A placement day is usually taken to mean no less than 7 hours (plus a lunch break), but exact hours and working patterns may vary depending on the placement provider.

Statutory placements

A statutory placement is one which takes place within a statutory setting that meets the following definitions, and which requires students to carry out tasks that involve high-risk decision-making and legal interventions:

A statutory placement is one which:

- Takes place in a local authority setting or settings delivering delegated statutory functions on behalf of the local authority.
- Involves a sufficient amount of work on either s17 and s47 cases (under the Children Act 1989) or on delivering requirements of the Care Act 2014 and Mental Capacity Act 2005.
- Requires case records to be updated by the student, under appropriate supervision.

'High-risk decision-making' is defined as those decisions which balance care vs control and rights vs risks, and which involve appropriate knowledge, understanding and application of

the law in relation to areas such as mental health sections, deprivation of liberty, best interest assessments, child protection planning, and court proceedings.

By 'sufficient numbers of statutory social work tasks', we mean that students must be involved in enough statutory tasks to enable them to experience and understand the realities of high volume, high-risk work within a statutory environment. We do not set a minimum number of statutory tasks. Instead we will consider this within the overall context of the placements you provide. All students must undertake at least one placement which meets this definition of statutory. All placements should help prepare students for the statutory aspects of social work.

Private, voluntary and independent sector (PVI)

We recognise that some organisations within the private, voluntary and independent sector (PVI) offer placements that deliver statutory work and that they provide valuable learning experiences for students. A placement at a PVI can be defined as being in a statutory setting if:

i. The local authority has delegated a statutory function to the PVI; and

ii. There is opportunity at the PVI for students to be directly involved with children and families who are subject to s17 and s47 (under the Children Act 1989); and/or

iii. There is opportunity at the PVI for students to be involved in delivering requirements of the Care Act 2014 and Mental Capacity Act 2005, such as:

    a. Carers' charities which have been commissioned by the local authority to undertake carers' assessments;

    b. Advocacy organisations that employ individuals to work as independent mental capacity advocates;

    c. Hospices that require individuals to undertake Mental Capacity Act assessments; and/or

iv. There is opportunity at the PVI for students to be involved in court-ordered work or work with offenders.

In addition to the above, a placement in a PVI should require case records to be updated by the student, under appropriate supervision.

Shared placements

You may wish to consider placements that are shared between an organisation that meets the statutory setting or delegated statutory setting criteria, as set out above, and an organisation that does not. This can be a good way of offering a wider variety of learning experiences and building relationships between different organisations for the benefit of people with lived experience of social work. In this model, students would spend time in both settings. This is also known as a 'hub and spoke' model. The placement needs to be

overseen by a single practice educator to ensure appropriate learning opportunities and consistent development for the student. Workplace supervision needs to be available in both settings to support the student to practice safely.

Contrasting experience

In order to ensure that students gain broad experience, their placements should offer different, contrasting learning opportunities. For example:

- A student could work in child protection for one placement and with children with different needs (such as in a children's disability team) for their other placement.
- A student could work with children in one placement and with adults in their other placement.
- A student could work in a local authority setting in one placement and in the voluntary sector for their other placement.

Consent

People with lived experience of social work should be informed that students are present within the service delivery setting. This could be done through posters, leaflets or written correspondence such as emails or letters. This should include informing people with lived experience of social work about their right to refuse to take part in student learning without prejudice to their care.

When students are directly involved in caring for people, for example observing or taking part in meetings, specific consent should be obtained from the person to ensure they are comfortable having a student present. The consent process should include providing information about how the student will be supervised. Ideally, the process of obtaining consent for the student's presence should be obtained without the student being present so that the person does not feel pressured to give consent, and so as not to upset the student.

Gaining skills to meet the professional standards

> 2.2. Provide practice learning opportunities that enable students to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to develop and meet the professional standards.

It is important to ensure that the placements provide suitable learning opportunities that allow students to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to develop and meet the professional standards.

You should have documentation that sets out administrative and practical information about the placement and what the student should expect to do and learn during the placement. You may wish to consider including the following:

- The names of the staff involved in the placement, including their contact details.
- Practical and administrative information about the placement, including the main policies that the student needs to be aware of and/or abide by (this could be linked to the induction for the placement which is covered in more detail under 2.3 below).
- The learning objectives for the placement.
- The structure in place that will enable the learning outcomes to be met, for example a timetable setting out when and how students will have access to practice learning opportunities to enable them to achieve the learning outcomes.
- Any significant dates and targets that the student needs to be aware of or meet.

This document could form part of the agreement you have with placement providers which is covered in more detail under 3.2 below.

Placement content

Placement content will vary between providers, but it is important that you have plans and documentation to support your agreements with placement providers that show how and when students will have learning opportunities which allow them to:

- Undertake appropriate social work tasks safely and effectively.
- Apply theoretical, evidence-based learning to their practice.
- Work towards meeting the professional standards.
- Manage complex work and deal with risks.
- Work in a non-discriminatory manner.
- Build relationships with colleagues, including those from other professions.
- Build relationships with people with lived experience of social work.

It is also important that practice educators and placement supervisors use this documentation to support and monitor students, and that students use it to guide their own learning.

Some common learning opportunities during a placement are listed below. The level of responsibility that students will have when undertaking these opportunities will vary depending on their skills and experience. More details about students' responsibilities are listed below in 2.4.

- Formal assessment processes, including observation, gathering of information, analysis, application of appropriate theory, reporting and development of recommendations.
- Formal processes considering risk and/or safeguarding for child protection, for practice in mental health or with vulnerable adults.
- Presentation of outcomes of formal assessment processes, including analysis of risk and proposed recommendations, at panels, meetings and courts.
- Opportunities to reflect on, discuss and analyse appropriate use of authority.
- Identification and assessment of ethical dilemmas in practice and any personal and professional implications or conflicts.
- Application and understanding of legal frameworks relevant for social work practice.
- Application and understanding of key policies, for example data protection, consent and confidentiality, and understanding how organisational policies impact on service delivery to people with lived experience of social work.
- Liaison and joint working with statutory services and other agencies and professionals, such as Children's Services and Mental Health Services, and analysing and managing any tensions that arise.

- Communicating and engaging with and supporting people with lived experience of social work.
- Managing and resolving conflict and challenging behaviour.
- Accessing resources with and on behalf of people with lived experience of social work, for example benefits that they are eligible for.
- Signposting and referring people with lived experience of social work to other services and organisations, for example health services and housing services.
- Working with people with lived experience of social work who are subject to legal orders, such as looked-after children or people with community sentences.

You may also find it helpful to refer to the section on page 6 of the Professional Capabilities Framework for Social Work in England, published by the British Association of Social Workers in 2018, which describes the capabilities that students should demonstrate at the end of their first and last placements.

Induction

2.3. Ensure that while on placements, students have appropriate induction, supervision, support, access to resources and a realistic workload.

Induction is a key aspect of ensuring that students are able to safely undertake placements. You should expect placement providers to offer a full induction to all students and you may wish to include this requirement in your agreements with placement providers, which are covered in more detail under 3.2 below. Induction could include:

- Familiarisation with the main learning environment/s.
- Meetings with practice educators and other staff who will be supporting or interacting with students.
- Provision of a structure chart for the placement organisation.
- Granting access for students to records and IT systems, as appropriate.
- Provision of information about the relevant policies that the students need to comply with and where to find them, such as:
    o information systems use
    o data protection
    o health and safety
    o consent
    o confidentiality
    o how to report sickness and other absence
    o dress code
    o behaviour in the workplace
    o reporting concerns
    o whistleblowing
- Provision of information about the delivery of the placement, such as timetables and learning locations if the placement includes more than one learning environment.

Social work supervision

Students must be supervised appropriately during their placement to ensure the safety of people with lived experience of social work and their own safety. Appropriate social work supervision is also key to ensuring that students get a good learning experience and can access appropriate learning opportunities.

The learning and development of each student on a placement should be overseen by a named practice educator who is a registered social worker. More guidance on the practice educator role can be found under 2.6 below. A student's practice educator has overall responsibility for ensuring that students are appropriately supervised during their placement. The practice educator should determine the degree of social work supervision required, particularly if a student requires any special arrangements for their supervision, or needs a greater amount of supervision than is generally provided.

In some cases, the day to day monitoring and supervision of a student during placement may not be provided by the practice educator but by a work-based or on-site supervisor (who may or may not be a registered social worker), defined as someone who works in the placement setting and who will be in frequent contact with the student. Where a work-based supervisor is used, the student must also have an allocated practice educator who remains responsible for supporting the placement and assessing the student. A work-based social work supervisor may therefore offer task-based supervision and tuition, whereas the practice educator may focus on supporting the student to make links between theory and practice, reflect on the work undertaken and consider their ongoing learning needs and professional development.

You may find it helpful to set out in your agreement with placement providers the role and responsibilities of work-based supervisors (further detail on agreements can be found under 3.2 below), which might include:

- Having a role in the student's induction and helping them settle into the placement setting.
- Working closely with the student, providing feedback on their progress and supporting their learning.
- Understanding the learning outcomes for the placement (and ideally the whole course, for context) and the learning needs of the student they are supervising.
- Understanding the Professional Capabilities Framework for Social Work in England.
- Liaising with the practice educator if any concerns about a student arise.
- Being clear about the difference between social work supervision and management oversight, and who is providing which.

Access to resources

Students should have appropriate access to resources to allow them to undertake learning opportunities during the placement. This includes access to IT systems, records and relevant documentation. Students should also have access to any appropriate learning resources within the placement environment, such as books and journals. Students should have an appropriate space to work, such as at an allocated desk or area in an office environment.

Workload

An appropriate workload for the student should be agreed between the practice educator and the work-based supervisor. The student's workload should be reviewed regularly to ensure it is meeting the student's learning needs.

Placements should be the equivalent to a working day for a full-time member of staff in the placement setting. However, students are not part of the normal staff team so should not be asked to cover staff shortages or absences or respond to pressures being experienced in the team/setting, unless doing so is consistent with meeting their learning needs. Allocation of all workload for students should not, therefore, be determined by the volume of work within a team/setting but should be at the professional judgement of the practice educator/work-based supervisor and appropriate to the student's level of capability and agreed learning needs.

Students' responsibilities

2.4. Ensure that on placements, students' responsibilities are appropriate for their stage of education and training.

It is important that practice-based learning does not cause a risk to people with lived experience of social work. You should ensure that students work within a scope of practice that is appropriate to their level of skills and experience.

The level of responsibility that students have when undertaking learning opportunities will vary depending on whether they are doing their first or final placement and the stage they are at within that placement. A student's responsibility should gradually increase, under appropriate supervision, as their knowledge and skills develop. The level of supervision and responsibility given to a student should be tailored to that individual and their needs.

Ensuring safety

2.5. Ensure that students undergo assessed preparation for direct practice to make sure they are safe to carry out practice learning in a service delivery setting.

It is important to ensure the safety of people with lived experience of social work who meet students during placements. People's safety must not be put at risk by students' performance, health or conduct. It is also important to ensure that students are aware of how they should communicate and interact with people with lived experience of social work before their placement commences.

You will have carried out a criminal record check with the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) as a part of your admissions process (or for students on apprenticeships or other employment-based routes, ensured that a valid DBS check is held by the employer). However, placement providers may have criminal records check requirements that are different to your own and may decide a further DBS check is necessary for some or all students for them to undertake the placement safely.

If a placement provider does not feel a student is safe to undertake the placement as a result of their DBS check (despite the student passing the DBS check to be admitted to your course), then an alternative placement for that student should be identified. In this instance, you may also wish to consider whether your requirements for criminal records checks at admission are appropriate and safe for students entering a social work course.

If the DBS check carried out by the placement provider reveals additional/new information about the student, you must consider their suitability to continue the course in accordance with standard 5.3 (see education and training standards guidance for further information).

Students should be made aware of the expectations of being present in an employment and service delivery setting. Expectations could include:

- Following the required policies and protocols.
- Maintaining good time keeping and being punctual.
- Following instructions and being able to receive feedback from practice educators and other staff.
- Being courteous to practice educators and other staff.

Before starting placements, you must assess each student's preparedness to safely undertake practice learning. Assessing students' preparedness could include the following:

- Testing students' knowledge of the theoretical learning they have completed so far on the course, for example through a written examination.
- Testing students' basic understanding of the professional standards for social workers through observed small group discussions, reflective essays, presentations or research projects.
- Observing students in simulated service delivery settings engaging with people with lived experience of social work, for example through role play scenarios.
- Asking teaching staff for their views on each student's preparedness and discussing any areas of concern.
- Checking that the student does not have any health conditions that could impact on them safely undertaking the placement. You may need to consider making specific arrangements for students with health conditions or reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities to enable them to safely undertake the placement.

You may also find it helpful to refer to the section on page 6 of the Professional Capabilities Framework for Social Work in England, published by the British Association of Social Workers in 2018, which describes the capabilities that a student should demonstrate to show readiness for direct practice.

Roles and responsibilities of practice educators

> 2.6. Ensure that practice educators are on the register and that they have the relevant and current knowledge, skills and experience to support safe and effective learning.

Practice educators should be registered and practising social workers. The role and responsibilities of the practice educator are set out in the Practice Educator Professional Standards (PEPS) for social work refresh published by the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) in July 2019[1]. 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 student they are working with (i.e. students on placement 1 or placement 2).

It is important that you have a shared understanding with employers of the role and responsibilities of practice educators and the time that they need in their working day or week to effectively carry out the role and promote the value of this role with employers. You should work with employers to ensure that practice educators are sufficiently skilled and experienced and maintain currency in their practice in order to effectively carry out the role of practice educator, and that their role as practice educator is included in their appraisals. We expect that all new practice educators are trained and that this is followed up with regular refresher training and support. We understand that it is the responsibility of the employer providing the placements, rather than you as education provider, to train practice educators. You will therefore need to have agreements in place with your placement providers for this training to be provided.

You should check that practice educators are supported and trained and able to keep their practice up to date and meet the standards for continuing professional development for their registration. We suggest that this form part of the process by which you evaluate your placements. There is more detail on evaluation and how practice educators could be included in this at 3.4 below.

You should consider engaging directly with your practice educators for a range of purposes including:

- Providing training in the curriculum, including assessments, and the expected learning outcomes for students whilst on placements.
- Providing training in teaching competencies, such as communication, giving feedback and principles of equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Supporting their continuing professional development.

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[1] British Association of Social Workers (2019) Practice Educator Professional Standards

- Advising them about local and national support networks and how to access them.
- Engage them in the development and management of the course and individual placements.
- Bringing all your practice educators together centrally to allow individuals to network and share advice and experiences.

You may wish to consider establishing mentorship schemes for practice educators, particularly for those new to the role or to your course.

You may wish to consider supporting and encouraging recognition and reward for practice educators. This could include teaching awards, academic promotion and formal education course and qualifications.

Dealing with concerns

2.7. Ensure that policies and processes, including for whistleblowing, are in place for students to challenge unsafe behaviours and cultures and organisational wrongdoing, and report concerns openly and safely without fear of adverse consequences.

You should check that the appropriate policies and processes are in place at your placement providers and you may wish to consider referencing them in your agreements with providers (further detail on agreements can be found at 3.2 below). Students should be told about these policies and procedures at induction.

You should support students to raise concerns. You should make sure that students know who to report their concerns to, and how these concerns will be considered and acted on. Your policies should be designed to make sure that students are not penalised for raising concerns.

Other support for students may include:

- Training on raising concerns and the importance of being open when things go wrong.
- Dedicated reporting or communication methods for students to raise concerns.
- Advice from members of staff when situations arise which may be cause for concern.

Challenging unethical practice and reporting concerns is a key element of the professional standards for social workers. However, some students may find it difficult to challenge unsafe behaviours and cultures and organisational wrongdoing. Educators, practice

educators and placement supervisors should be mindful of this and be aware of the need to support and encourage students to take appropriate action if necessary. Course provider and placement provider policies should set out the processes and the support students can expect to receive if they raise concerns or whistle blow.

The appropriate way to deal with a concern is likely to depend on the nature of the concern and where it originates from. For example, it may be best for the course leader or other managers at your organisation or placement provider to deal with a concern. Your process should make sure that, where necessary, the concern will be forwarded to another appropriate person or organisation, such as a regulator.

Agreements with placement providers

3.2 Ensure that they have agreements with placement providers to provide education and training that meets the professional standards and the education and training qualifying standards. This should include necessary consents. Ensure placement providers have contingencies in place to deal with practice placement breakdown.

You should have formal, written agreements with your placement providers. You could consider including the following in your agreements:

- Naming specific individuals at your organisation and at the placement provider who are responsible for organising the placement and are the point of contact for any questions or issues that arise, and the roles and responsibilities of these individuals.
- Setting out the induction processes for students.
- Setting out the arrangements for student access to the placement provider's IT systems, including specifying who is responsible for ensuring that students understand and comply with relevant protocols relating to the use of the provider's IT systems.
- Emphasising the importance of students being integrated into the team at the provider setting and having opportunities to work with other professions.
- Emphasising the importance of students obtaining practical experience during their placement that allows them to apply their theoretical knowledge.
- Specifying how the funding for the placement should be used within the placement provider organisation.

- Specifying the process by which you or the placement provider can raise concerns about how the placement is being run, the content of the placement or the behaviour of participants, and how concerns will be addressed.
- Specifying the process by which disagreements between practice educators and course providers and/or higher education institutions about whether a student should pass or fail a placement will be resolved.

Health and wellbeing of students

3.3 Ensure that placement providers have the necessary policies and procedures in relation to students' health, wellbeing and risk, and the support systems in place to underpin these.

You should ensure that placement providers have safety policies and procedures in place that allow you to identify and deal with risks to the health and wellbeing of students, and that these policies and procedures are identified in the agreement with the placement provider (see 3.2 above).

Policies and procedures that are relevant to students' health, safety and risk may include, for example:

- Lone working.
- Aggression from people with lived experience of social work, colleagues or others.
- Mental health and stress.

You should also ensure that students are supported to raise concerns about their health, wellbeing and risk whilst on placement. For example, you should make sure that students are aware of policies and procedures in relation to raising concerns, and that details of these policies and procedures are included in the placement agreement (see 3.2 above).

Monitoring, evaluation and improvement

> 3.5 Ensure that regular and effective monitoring, evaluation and improvement systems are in place, and that these involve employers, people with lived experience of social work, and students.

You should evaluate your placements and the effectiveness of your agreements with placement providers as part of your quality management processes. These processes should identify any weaknesses or concerns with individual placements, which should be discussed with the placement provider and steps taken to rectify the issues.

When reviewing placements, you could consider evaluating:

- The quality and quantity of teaching, supervision and feedback provided by practice educators and placement supervisors.
- The availability of resources such as IT systems and research and reference material.
- The personal support available to students whilst on the placement.
- The development opportunities and training available to practice educators at the placement setting.
- The ability of students with specific requirements, for example a disability, to access learning opportunities during the placement.

You could collect data for evaluation by:

- Using the quality assurance benchmarking statements and monitoring tools as set out in Quality Assurance for Practice Learning (QAPL), published by the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) in 2012.
- Surveying students.
- Analysing portfolios or logbooks used by students to record their learning whilst on the placement.
- Surveying practice educators and other staff involved in supporting and teaching students during the placement.
- Reviewing induction materials, policies and procedural documents provided to students during the placement.

You should also include people with lived experience of social work in your processes for the monitoring, evaluation and improvement of placements. This could include, for example:

- Obtaining the views of people with lived experience of social work who have interacted with students in the practice setting.

- Involving people with lived experience in the review of placements, or the design of new placement models or opportunities.

For more information about the effective involvement of people with lived experience in social work education, please see education and training standards guidance, section 4.2.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

4.3 Ensure that the course is designed in accordance with equality, diversity and inclusion principles, and human rights and legislative frameworks.

You should keep in mind equality, diversity and inclusion principles as you organise placements. You should have clear guidance for students and placement providers on any areas where a student's culture or religion may conflict with usual practice or rules when on placements, for example dress code.

Learning with and from other professions

4.6 Ensure that students are given the opportunity to work with, and learn from, other professions in order to support multidisciplinary working – including in integrated settings.

Placements are a key opportunity for students to work with and learn from other professions – including in integrated settings. Your agreements with providers (referenced in 4.2 above) could include emphasis on this requirement. Your documentation setting out when and how students will undertake learning opportunities during placements should include identification of opportunities that will allow them to work with other professions (for more information about placement content see 2.2 above).

Reasonable adjustments

5.4 Make supportive and reasonable adjustments for students with health conditions or impairments to enable them to progress through their course and meet the professional standards, in accordance with relevant legislation.

You should inform placement providers if a student has specific requirements in relation to their placement. You should ensure that reasonable adjustments are made for students with disabilities to enable them to have the same opportunities to undertake placements as other students.

For more information on making reasonable adjustments for students, please see 5.4 under education and training standards guidance.

Further information

We have provided a range of guidance materials supporting the standards for education and training:

- Education and training standards guidance.
- Guidance on the assessment of social work students.
- Guidance on practice placements for social work students.

All our standards and guidance are available on our website.