

Northern Ireland

Social

Care

Council

The Standards for Practice Learning for the Degree in Social Work

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Part 1

Introduction to the Standards for Practice Learning for the Degree in Social Work

1.1 Introduction

The aim of professional social work training is to produce social workers who are safe, competent and effective and who can work in the real world of practice. Practice learning is therefore a core element of professional training that prepares social work students for entry into the profession.

Employers of social workers, in all sectors, are required to comply with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council Standards for Employers of Social Workers and Social Care Workers (September, 2017) including contributing to 'social work and social care education and training, including effective workplace assessment and practice learning'. They are also expected to collaborate with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the provision of the Degree in Social Work (the degree) to ensure a future workforce fit for purpose.

A partnership approach between academic and workplace staff is essential to support the integration of theory with practice, to promote the implementation of evidence-based practice and to ensure that there is coherence and progression between the academic and practice components of the course. Each student should have ongoing support from academic staff during each period of practice learning in the workplace.

All partners involved in providing the degree are individually (as organisations) and collectively (as course providers) responsible for the quality and effectiveness of practice learning. These partners include Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts, Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI), Youth Justice Agency (YJA) Education Authority (EA) and a range of voluntary organisations who provide mainstream social work services. The partnership arrangements are promoted and supported by the Northern Ireland Degree in Social Work Partnership (NIDSWP).

Course providers must ensure there are structures, processes, roles and responsibilities in place to deliver, monitor and promote quality and safety in the provision of practice learning. *The Standards for Practice Learning for the Degree in Social Work* (the standards) specify the level of performance required by all partners.

Organisation has a responsibility for ensuring the services they provide, including practice learning, meet the required standards. The standards set out in this document will continue to apply to practice learning arrangements in any revised organisational structures.

1.2 Purpose of the Standards

The key purpose of the standards is to ensure that every social work student is assured of access to practice learning opportunities that are appropriately resourced, planned and managed and that enable them to meet the specified learning outcomes for the degree and achieve the required standard of proficiency in social work practice.

1.3 The Standards

The standards have been developed to reflect the Principles of Practice Learning, the expectations of professional training at graduate level, the changing contexts of social work practice and expectations of social workers. The standards are designed to promote quality and consistency in practice learning provision yet to be flexible enough to allow for continued innovation, improvement and development in practice learning within the workplace.

The standards are part of the wider requirements for the degree and are intended to complement those requirements that have already been issued by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council as listed below:

The Northern Ireland Social Care Council Standards of Conduct and Practice for Social Workers (November 2015)

The Northern Ireland Social Care Council Standards for Employers of Social Workers & Social Care Workers (September 2017)

- The Northern Ireland Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work (October 2015)
- The Rules for the Approval of the Degree in Social Work (January 2012)
- Practice Learning Requirements for the Degree in Social Work (August 2010)
- The Northern Ireland Social Care Council Teaching, Learning and Assessment Requirements (March 2018)
- The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (Registration) Rules

The above documents are accessible on www.niscc.info

The standards are also intended to complement standards already issued or currently in development by Department of Health (DoH), the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA)

- DHSSPS Circular: HSS (SSI) Training 2/2005¹: Practice Learning Provision 2005/06;
- DHSSPS Circular: HSS (SSI) Good Practice in Consent – Social Work Students (22 September 2005)²;
- DHSSPS Quality Standards for Health and Social Care (March 2006)
- QAA Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education: Placement Learning;
- QAA Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education: Students with Disabilities.

Evidence of compliance with existing or new standards, such as quality standards, service standards or professional standards, will be evidence of organisational commitment to quality and good practice.

1.4 Principles of Practice Learning

The Principles of Practice Learning are set out in the Practice Learning Requirements for the Degree (June 2003) and should underpin all aspects of practice learning provision.

Practice learning must:

- Promote student learning while safeguarding the rights of service users;
- Support the development of confident and competent practitioners who take responsibility for their own learning and their continuing professional development; and
- Promote good social work practice.

1.5 Assuring Quality in Practice Learning Provision

The Northern Ireland Social Care Council is the regulatory body for social work training and has a statutory responsibility to set standards and to approve and quality assure social work courses. Practice learning, as an integral part of course provision, is subject to the Northern Ireland Social Care Council quality assurance arrangements.

Other regulatory bodies, such as RQIA and inspectoral bodies such as DoH, also play an important role in assuring the quality of services provided by HSC and other organisations. Protocols will be established between the Northern Ireland Social Care Council and these bodies to inform each other's regulatory and inspectoral activities.

¹And any subsequent updated versions.

²And any subsequent updated versions.

The standards will therefore inform a number of interlocking arrangements to ensure the consistency and quality of practice learning in the workplace for social work students including:

- The Northern Ireland Social Care Council will use these standards to confirm organisations as *Designated Practice Learning Providers for the Degree in Social Work* (Approval, Monitoring, Review and Inspection Arrangements for Designated Practice Learning Providers offering Practice Learning Opportunities Revised January 2017)
- The Northern Ireland Social Care Council will undertake annual monitoring of practice learning as an integral component of the degree course using these standards as the benchmark;
- The allocation of funding for practice learning to organisations will be dependent on compliance with these standards. Organisations will be expected to monitor their practice learning arrangements on an annual basis. The results of this self-monitoring will be scrutinised by the funding/commissioning bodies as part of the monitoring of practice learning funding;
- Course providers will monitor the standards of practice learning for individual students as part of the overall monitoring of course provision. The results of this self-monitoring will be reported on annually to the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (Approval, Monitoring, Review and Inspection Arrangements for Degree in Social Work Courses Revised January 2017.)
- HEIs and organisations will contribute to periodic regional reviews of practice learning in order to promote consistency in practice learning provision and reduce variations in the quality of provision within and between providers. The results of this review, including recommendations for improvements, will be shared with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council.

Performance review of HSC organisations can, as appropriate, consider the efficacy of arrangements for providing effective workplace assessment and practice learning as required in the Northern Ireland Social Care Council Standards for Employers of Social Workers & Social Care Workers (September 2017)

Meeting the standards is therefore essential for all involved in the provision of practice learning for social work students.

1.6 Format of the Standards

There are 15 standards. Each standard includes:

- A **standard statement** describing the level of performance to be achieved in relation to a specific aspect of practice learning;
- A **rationale** for the standard that explains why the standard is important;
- A series of **criteria** that provides further detail of what is expected.

The standards are organised in two parts. They will be discussed in Part 2 and Part 3 of this document as follows:

Part 2 - Standards for Course Providers (HEIs and Employer Partners)
Part 3 - Standards for Practice Learning Providers

Management arrangements, learning and assessment and quality assurance outcomes are included under Parts 2 and 3. Some standards overlap and this is intended to reinforce the shared responsibility of HEIs and social work employers in course provision for practice learning.

The standards and requirements are of relevance to: HEIs; academic staff directly responsible for practice learning; social work employers (including senior managers responsible for clinical and social care governance); workplace staff directly responsible for practice learning; social work students; service users; and carers.

The standards have equal significance.

1.7 Review of the Standards

Given the rapidly changing environment in which social work operates, it is important the standards do not become outdated. To prevent this, the standards will be subject to periodic review and update. The standards have been reviewed in March 2018 prior to the Periodic Review of the Degree in Social Work and reflect the outcomes of the Regional Practice Learning Strategy. They have been amended to reflect changes in the development of practice learning. The training of social workers who undertake the support and assessment of students undertaking practice learning will continue to develop and change in line with employer expectations about the competence of newly qualified workers

1.8 Overview of the Standards for Practice Learning for the Degree in Social Work (full details are in Part 2 and Part 3 of this document)

Part 2: Standards for Course Providers (HEIs and Employer Partners)

- 2.1 There is a regional agreement for providing high quality practice learning that is integral to the degree course and consistent with regional agreements.
- 2.2 There is a viable process to ensure the supply of sufficient practice learning sites and opportunities commensurate with the approved numbers of students and range of social work practice as defined in the Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work in NI and set out in the Northern Ireland Social Care Council Requirements for Practice Learning.
- 2.3 The equal opportunities policy and procedures for the degree include the practice learning component of the course.
- 2.4 There is a co-ordinated team approach to planning, managing, delivering and assessing a social work student's practice learning experience.
- 2.5 All students have clear information regarding each period of practice learning, what is expected of them and what they may expect from the opportunity.
- 2.6 Assessment arrangements for practice learning ensure consistency in assessment processes, application and outcomes.
- 2.7 There are quality assurance arrangements for the practice learning component of the degree which contribute to continuous improvements in practice learning arrangements.

Part 3: Standards for Practice Learning Providers

- 3.1 There is a system in place for planning, managing and quality assuring practice learning provision integral to strategic and service planning processes and in line with social care governance requirements.
- 3.2 Practice learning sites and opportunities are provided and developed by the organisation: to take account of the outcomes of the Practice Learning Strategy; to meet the Northern Ireland Social Care Council standards for practice learning; and to meet the commissioning requirements of DoH and/or the Northern Ireland Social Care Council.
- 3.3 There is an organisation-wide resource management plan to support the provision and development of practice learning.
- 3.4 The rights and safety of service users are promoted and protected.

- 3.5 There is a system to ensure each student placed with the organisation receives practice learning opportunities matched to their learning needs, appropriate to their level and stage of study and that promote good social work practice.
- 3.6 There are arrangements in the workplace to ensure each social work student has access to supervision and a range of support and guidance, including that of a social worker to facilitate student learning.
- 3.7 There are sufficient numbers of suitably trained and qualified social workers (including those in training) to provide workplace assessment for all social work students within the organisation.
- 3.8 There are quality assurance processes in place that inform the development and improvement of practice learning in the organisation and feed into course quality assurance arrangements and regional reviews.

Part 2

Standards for Course Providers

2.1 Standard Statement

There is a strategic plan for providing high quality practice learning that is integral to the degree course and consistent with regional agreements.

Rationale

The aim of professional social work training is to produce social workers who are safe, effective and competent, and who can work in the real world of practice. Practice learning in the workplace is therefore an essential and major component of a social work student's training and needs to be developed within a coherent regional framework. Collaborative arrangements, including the NIDSWP, aim to secure social work employers' commitment to the development of the next generations of social workers; to facilitate planning for a sustainable supply of high quality practice learning sites and opportunities for the future; and to promote equitable access to practice learning for students throughout Northern Ireland.

Criteria

Each course provider:

- 2.1.1 In conjunction with NIDSWP work together with employers to secure the commitment of each party to provide resources to support the delivery of a degree course and its practice learning component;
- 2.1.2 Collaborates, through the NIDSWP, to plan for and secure the required volume of practice learning sites and opportunities for agreed numbers of social work students;
- 2.1.3 Contributes to development plans to address known, or projected, shortfalls in practice learning provision regionally in line with planned student numbers.

2.2 Standard Statement

There is a viable operational plan to ensure the supply and allocation of practice learning sites and opportunities commensurate with the approved numbers of students and range of social work practice; as defined in the Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work and set out in the Northern Ireland Social Care Council Requirements for Practice Learning.

Rationale

Course providers are legally responsible for ensuring all students can access appropriate and relevant practice learning sites and opportunities to enable them to attain the required learning outcomes as set out in the Framework Specification and the Requirements for Practice Learning. (Rules for the Approval of the Degree on Social Work 6.10.5) Regional co-operation is essential to ensure equitable access for all students to quality practice learning sites and opportunities. Good communication and information are the basis for planning and allocation of practice learning. For information to be useful it needs to be accessible to those who need it and available in time to allow for action to be taken should there be any projected shortfall in supply.

Criteria

Each course provider:

- 2.2.1 Ensures information regarding annual demand and supply is available and shared regionally via NIDSWP at agreed points of the academic year;
- 2.2.2 Agrees action plans with specified responsibility and deadlines for securing any shortfall to meet projected demand;
- 2.2.3 Ensures each partner organisation has a nominated contact(s) responsible for co-ordination of practice learning and who can act as a representative at any regional planning, allocation or monitoring events in respect of practice learning;
- 2.2.4 Has access to up-to-date information about practice learning sites and opportunities that outlines how the experiences available will enable students to meet the learning outcomes as defined in the Framework Specification and the Requirements for Practice Learning;
- 2.2.5 Co-operates with agreed regional arrangements for the allocation of practice learning;
- 2.2.6 Secures sufficient practice learning opportunities commensurate with the approved numbers of students that enable the specified learning outcomes to be achieved.

2.3 Standard Statement

The equal opportunities policy and procedures for the degree include the practice learning component of the course.

Rationale

All students studying for the Degree in Social Work have the right to expect fair, equitable and transparent treatment in all aspects of course provision, including practice learning. No student should be unfairly treated, excluded or marginalised during practice learning.

Criteria

Each course provider:

- 2.3.1 Has policies and procedures that reflect the course commitment to equal opportunities, human rights and anti-oppressive practice;
- 2.3.2 Promotes and respects equal opportunities, human rights and anti-oppressive practice in all aspects of practice learning;
- 2.3.3 Ensures arrangements for practice learning, including allocation, provision and assessment of practice learning, comply with equal opportunity policies and take account of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, 1998;
- 2.3.4 Ensures the full participation of students with disabilities in practice learning to enable them to learn and develop their practice as social workers.

2.4 Standard statement

There is a co-ordinated team approach to planning, managing, delivering and assessing a social work student's practice learning experience.

Rationale

Course providers are expected to develop a curriculum that fosters the integration of values, knowledge and skills and enables students to transfer academic learning into practice situations. A partnership approach between academic and workplace staff is necessary to support the integration of theory with practice and promote the implementation of evidence-based practice and to ensure that there is coherence and progression between the academic and practice components of the course.

Academic Staff are responsible for working in partnership with workplace staff to plan, manage, deliver and assess student practice learning and to address issues of concern or underachievement. Academic staff have a responsibility to ensure any information regarding a student's academic record or previous experience, which could impact on his/her participation or progress in practice learning is shared in a timely way with workplace staff, student and relevant others.

Academic staff are also responsible for assuring that the student is receiving agreed practice learning experiences and supports and that their practice and performance is managed within the overall requirements of course provision.

Criteria

Each course provider:

2.4.1 Confirms academic staff are trained and qualified in line with the following the Northern Ireland Social Care Council Requirements;

- Hold a recognised social work qualification;
- Comply with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council registration requirements;
- Have a minimum of 2 years post qualifying experience following successful completion of AYE or equivalent⁴

2.4.2 Ensures that all relevant staff contributing to practice learning are briefed and updated on practice learning requirements and guidance from the Northern Ireland Social Care Council;

⁴Equivalent post qualifying experience for registered social workers with predecessor qualifications to the degree is 3 years.

- 2.4.3 Ensures academic staff and workplace staff work in partnership to plan, manage, deliver, assess and monitor practice learning;
- 2.4.4 Has agreed protocols for communication and co-operation between education institutions and organisations for matters pertaining to student performance and conduct, or any other reported problems concerning the quality of practice learning;
- 2.4.5 Ensures there are a minimum of two tripartite meetings involving academic staff, work-based staff and student to plan the student practice learning package and to monitor student progress. Additional tripartite meetings can be convened if necessary. It is expected that one tripartite will take place in the agency;
- 2.4.6 Ensures roles, responsibilities and supervision and support arrangements for students are agreed and recorded at the first tripartite meeting so each party, including the student, is clear about what aspects of the learning and assessment they are responsible for;
- 2.4.7 Has systems in place to address issues of concern or under-achievement.

2.5 Standard statement

All students have clear information regarding each period of practice learning, what is expected of them and what they may expect from the opportunity.

Rationale

Professional training aims to support the development of social workers who can ultimately be accountable for the quality of their work and take responsibility for their own learning as registered social workers. The requirements of the degree make students responsible, with supervision and support, for their practice and continuous professional development. In order to promote self-management by students and empower them to take responsibility for their learning, they need to have information about what is expected of them and what they in turn can expect, so they can participate fully in the process.

Criteria

Each course provider:

- 2.5.1 Provides a student handbook to include information on practice learning;
- 2.5.2 Provides students with appropriate guidance and support in preparation for, during and after any period of practice learning in the workplace;
- 2.5.3 Ensures the student is given clear written information about their role and responsibilities as a student in the workplace, including terms and conditions as a student in the organisation;
- 2.5.4 Ensures students are aware of their responsibilities as a registered social work student and as a representative of the course in the workplace;
- 2.5.5 Ensures the standards for practice learning are known to students, academic and workplace staff as they commence practice learning.

2.6 Standard statement

Assessment arrangements for practice learning ensure consistency, fairness and transparency in assessment processes, application and outcomes.

Rationale

Assessment of practice learning must ensure that each student is assessed to the required standard of proficiency, in order to assure the public and employers of the quality and safety of new recruits to social work. Assessment of practice learning at Level 3 endorses a student's fitness for practice as a newly qualified social worker and as such, is of singular importance in the assessment and award of the degree, which will confer eligibility to progress to the social work part of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council register.

Criteria

Each course provider:

- 2.6.1 Ensures all students are assessed in each period of practice learning by a suitably trained and qualified social worker, or by a social worker in training as an assessor of practice learning;
- 2.6.2 Ensures students are assessed against the learning outcomes of the six key roles in the Framework Specification and in a variety of situations as specified in the Practice Learning Requirements;
- 2.6.3 Has systems in place to ensure consistency, fairness and transparency in assessment arrangements;
- 2.6.4 Ensures assessment of student competence is based on a breadth of evidence that enables assessors to make a sound inference that students can perform competently in a variety of situations. Evidence should therefore include contribution from others, including feedback from service users on agreed aspects of student performance;
- 2.6.5 Ensures assessment of student competence at Level 3 includes an operational line manager's endorsement of the student's practice;
- 2.6.6 Ensures each student's practice in direct work with individuals and families is directly observed at least 3 times as part of the assessment process at both Level 2 and Level 3 in direct supervised practice;
- 2.6.7 Has systems in place to ensure the standardisation and moderation of assessment decisions.

2.7 Standard statement

There are quality assurance arrangements for the practice learning component of the degree which contribute to continuous improvements in practice learning arrangements across Northern Ireland.

Rationale

The Degree in Social Work was introduced in 2004, as part of the government's quality agenda to improve and maintain standards for those who use social care services by raising the standard of the education and training of social workers. Given the rapidly changing environment in which practice learning operates and the range of factors that influence supply and quality it is important that practice learning arrangements are monitored and regularly reviewed and updated to secure improvements and reduce variations in the quality of provision within and between providers.

Criteria

Each course provider:

- 2.7.1 Has procedures within which feedback on the quality and standards of practice learning can be received and appropriate action taken where necessary;
- 2.7.2 Has formal means of gathering feedback from academic and workplace staff, students, external examiners, service users and carers and relevant others about the practice learning experience;
- 2.7.3 Produces an annual monitoring report on practice learning provision;
- 2.7.4 Contributes to an annual regional review of the effectiveness of policies, procedures and plans in securing and delivering appropriate high quality practice learning opportunities for students across Northern Ireland;
- 2.7.5 Has an action plan to improve arrangements for practice learning arising from the regional review, recommendations in the annual monitoring report and recommendations from the Northern Ireland Social Care Council.

Part 3

Standards for Practice Learning Providers for the Degree in Social Work

3.1 Standard statement

There is a system in place for planning, managing and quality assuring practice learning as an integral part of strategic and service planning processes and in line with social care governance requirements.

Rationale

Each organisation is responsible and accountable for assuring the quality and safety of the services it provides to the public, including the services provided by social work students. As such, organisations need to ensure relevant staff are aware of their responsibility and accountability for work allocated to and undertaken by social work students. Practice learning provision is part of an organisation's corporate responsibility. Plans for securing a sustainable supply of practice learning sites and opportunities across the range of social work services in the organisation should be integrated into the organisation's planning processes, in order to ensure corporate commitment and accountability for the effective and safe delivery of practice learning.

Criteria

Each practice learning provider:

- 3.1.1 Has a system for planning, managing and quality assuring the provision of practice learning with clear lines of accountability through to the Executive Director of Social Work in HSC Trusts, or the equivalent senior manager in other sectors;
- 3.1.2 Ensures service planning processes incorporate plans for practice learning provision (including plans for plant and equipment) across the range of social work services in the organisation, based on the assumption of a permanently recurring student population to meet workforce needs;
- 3.1.3 Complies with the Quality Standards for Health and Social Care (DoH), the Standards for Employers of Social Workers & Social Care Workers (the Northern Ireland Social Care Council) and any other relevant standards;
- 3.1.4 Has procedures in place to co-operate with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council and course provider 'fitness to practise' procedures, in the event of any alleged misconduct by registered social work students that might call into question their registration with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council and/or continuation on professional training;

- 3.1.5 Ensures each student's practice and performance is supervised and managed within the organisation's social care governance arrangements;
- 3.1.6 Ensures each student is given clear information about the relevant legislation and the organisational policies and procedures they must follow in the workplace;
- 3.1.7 Ensures managers and all other relevant staff are aware of their responsibility and accountability for work allocated to and undertaken by social work students;
- 3.1.8 Has procedures in place for dealing with complaints, or reported problems about practice learning, that might prevent progress or satisfactory completion of a student's practice learning;
- 3.1.9 Has agreed protocols for communication and co-operation with education institutions, for matters pertaining to student performance and conduct, or any other reported problems concerning practice learning;
- 3.1.10 Ensures an ongoing supply of competent, trained and qualified staff to provide effective and safe workplace assessment and practice learning to the required standards and volume;
- 3.1.11 Has systems in place to support continuous professional development of staff involved in practice learning;
- 3.1.12 Has arrangements to ensure these standards are known to students and all relevant staff.

3.2 Standard statement

Practice learning sites and opportunities are provided and developed:

- **to take account of workforce need and regional agreements regarding student numbers;**
- **to reflect the range of social work settings provided;**
- **to meet the Northern Ireland Social Care Council standards for practice learning;**
- **and to meet the commissioning requirements of the HSC Board or its equivalent.**

Rationale

An ongoing supply of newly qualified social workers is necessary to meet current and future workforce and service needs. Investment in practice learning is an investment in the future workforce and will ensure newly qualified social workers will be available for recruitment across the range of social work services.

Criteria

Each practice learning provider:

- 3.2.1 Ensures an annual supply of practice learning sites and opportunities commensurate with service and workforce needs and as regionally agreed;
- 3.2.2 Maintains and updates annually, a record and profile of all practice learning sites and opportunities within the organisation and their availability to inform regional planning and allocation at the start of each academic year;
- 3.2.3 Maintains a record of staff who meet the Northern Ireland Social Care Council requirements. (See 3.7.1)
- 3.2.4 Develops practice learning sites and opportunities to reflect the full range of social work settings across programmes of care/service user groups in the organisation;
- 3.2.5 Where appropriate, has plans for developing, brokering⁶ and sustaining a range of practice learning opportunities across organisational boundaries;
- 3.2.6 Has good practice guidelines to ensure quality and consistency of practice learning throughout the organisation;

⁶Where services are subcontracted to other providers, consideration should be given to develop ways to include the provision of practice learning opportunities in contracts and service level agreements as well as specifying the support the commissioning organisation could offer in relation to practice learning provision from smaller provider organisations.

- 3.2.7 Has quality improvement and development plans for practice learning which reflect developments in service provision, changes in projected workforce needs or changes in practice learning requirements.

3.3 Standard statement

There is an organisation-wide resource management plan to support the provision and development of practice learning.

Rationale

There is significant investment in social work training to support the development of competent and confident practitioners suitable for entry into the profession. Organisations are responsible for making the most of resources allocated for practice learning to secure the volume and quality required in the most efficient and effective way.

Criteria

Each practice learning provider:

- 3.3.1 Has a process to determine the full range of resource requirements to support the provision and development of practice learning within the organisation;
- 3.3.2 Has an annual budget for practice learning;
- 3.3.3 Ensures management of resources to achieve economy, effectiveness, efficiency, probity and accountability;
- 3.3.4 Collaborates, where appropriate, with other organisations providing practice learning to make most effective use of resources;
- 3.3.5 Has systems in place to account for the use and management of funding for practice learning provided by DoH or the Northern Ireland Social Care Council;
- 3.3.6 Has a policy for maintaining the competence of social workers engaged in supporting and assessing practice learning which includes refresher training to maintain their competence in social work education and assessment (See 3.7.6).

3.4 Standard statement

The rights and safety of service users and carers are promoted and protected.

Rationale

Social care services need to be safe and effective. Avoiding harm to service users from the care that is intended to help them is an integral part of high quality care. The rights and interests of service users and carers must be promoted and organisations must work in partnership with service users and carers to empower them to contribute to the learning and development of social workers.

Criteria

Each practice learning provider:

- 3.4.1 Has effective and efficient procedures for obtaining valid consent to care;
- 3.4.2 Ensures that all students and their supervisors comply with Departmental guidance set out in 'Consent in Social Care' (2 July 2004) and 'Good Practice in Consent – Social Work Students' (22 September 2005);
- 3.4.3 Ensures each student's practice is supervised in line with the organisation's social care governance arrangements;
- 3.4.4 Ensures service users and carers are encouraged and supported to contribute to agreed aspects of student practice learning;
- 3.4.5 Has mechanisms to facilitate service user feedback on agreed aspects of individual student performance;
- 3.4.6 Has effective complaints and feedback arrangements, which are available to service users, carers, students and staff and which is used to inform and improve arrangements for practice learning.

3.5 Standard statement

There is a system to ensure each student placed with the organisation can access a range of practice learning experiences; to meet their learning needs appropriate to their level and stage of study and that promote good social work practice.

Rationale

The Degree in Social Work is a generic qualification and aims to help students acquire knowledge and skills that are transferable across social work settings and with different client groups. Practice learning opportunities should provide students with a range of experiences to allow students to understand and demonstrate transferability of knowledge, skills and values in practice, in addition to meeting the learning outcomes as set out in the Framework Specification.

Criteria

Each practice learning provider:

- 3.5.1 Ensures the student receives appropriate induction to the workplace, is clear what is expected of them by the organisation and what they may expect from the organisation and planned practice learning experiences;
- 3.5.2 Ensures a practice learning package is planned and co-ordinated to meet the student's learning needs and to facilitate the development and demonstration of competence in practice appropriate to the level and stage of study;
- 3.5.3 Ensures workplace facilities contribute positively to each student's learning and their ability to meet the required standard of proficiency and participate in the full range of associated professional activities expected of a practising social worker;
- 3.5.4 Ensures students have access to study facilities, computers and learning accommodation and learning materials appropriate to their needs;
- 3.5.5 Includes in their plans for practice learning, the provision/sharing of a range of resources, within and between organisations, including resources to support students with disabilities to achieve the learning outcomes and required level of proficiency.

3.6 Standard statement

There are arrangements in the workplace to ensure each social work student has access to supervision and a range of support and guidance appropriate to their needs, including that of a social worker to facilitate student learning.

Rationale

Supervision of practice should be in line with the organisation's social care governance arrangements to ensure protection of the public; effective and safe practice; and accountability to the organisation. This would normally be carried out by the line manager who is responsible for the day-to-day management of work carried out by her/his team, but may be delegated to a social worker who is trained, suitably qualified and responsible for the student's practice learning. In this instance the latter is accountable to the line manager for work being undertaken by the student.

The level of support and guidance required will vary depending on the needs of the individual student and their stage of development. As part of the range of supports, there must be access to a registered social worker who is trained and suitably qualified to facilitate student practice learning and who is responsible for planning, managing and monitoring the student's practice learning package and support arrangements.

Criteria

Each practice learning provider:

- 3.6.1 Ensures each student's practice and conduct is managed within the overall requirements of course provision;
- 3.6.2 Ensures each student is allocated to a registered social worker who is trained and suitably qualified to manage and facilitate the student's practice learning experience in the workplace;
- 3.6.3 Ensures each social work student at Level 3 will have a practice learning opportunity with a social work practitioner based on site
- 3.6.4 Ensures each social work student at Level 2 will have experience of working alongside other social work practitioners during the practice learning opportunity
- 3.6.5 Ensures arrangements are in place for the day to day supervision of the student's practice by an appropriate staff member, in line with the organisation's professional supervision policy and social care governance arrangements;
- 3.6.6 Ensures each student has an individual development supervision session of a minimum 2 hours per fortnight with a suitably qualified social worker up to the midpoint of Level 3 (this is in addition to professional case supervision and any other support activities);

- 3.6.7 Ensures, from the midpoint of Level 3 where a student is assessed as having progressed satisfactorily, that s/he is supported by a suitably trained and qualified social worker to use a range of professional and organisational supports and to take responsibility for her/his own learning and continuing professional development in anticipation of their future status as a registered social worker;
- 3.6.8 Ensures opportunities for students to learn from and contribute to the learning of others during practice learning;
- 3.6.9 Monitors the student experience on the reliability and effectiveness of the supervision, support and guidance received and feedback to course provider as part of annual monitoring.

3.7 Standard statement

There are sufficient trained and appropriately qualified and experienced social workers, including those in training, to provide workplace assessment for all students.

Rationale

Fundamental to the future quality of service provision are the decisions regarding the competence and suitability of social work students to progress from one level of practice learning to the next and ultimately to graduate as qualified and accountable practitioners who are fit to practise. Assessment at Level 3 confers eligibility to register on the social work part of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council register and as such is of singular importance in the assessment and award of the degree. Assessors of student practice learning are accountable for their decisions about students' fitness for practice and it is the quality of these decisions that protects the public from incompetent practitioners.

Criteria

Each practice learning provider:

3.7.1 Ensures each student's practice learning is assessed by a social worker who meets the following the Northern Ireland Social Care Council criteria:

- Holds a recognised social work qualification;
- Complies with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council registration requirements;
- Has a minimum of two years post-qualifying social work experience following successful completion of AYE or equivalent⁸;
- Holds a recognised qualification in supporting or assessing practice;
- Or is in training and under supervision for a recognised qualification in supporting or assessing practice and is verified by an experienced assessor;

3.7.2 Ensures staff are supported in carrying out their assessment responsibilities, including opportunities for standardisation, supervision, continuous professional development and sharing of best practice;

3.7.3 Ensures mechanisms are in place to facilitate first line managers' contribution to the assessment of student competence in the workplace at Level 3;

3.7.4 Ensures mechanisms are in place to facilitate the contribution of others to the assessment of student competence in the workplace, including

⁸Equivalent post qualifying experience for registered social workers with predecessor qualifications to the Degree is 3 years, including evidence of commitment to their own professional development.

the onsite supervisor where appropriate, and feedback from service users on agreed aspects of student performance;

- 3.7.5 Ensures that social workers who are qualified to assess practice normally work with a minimum of 2 students in every 5 year period, in order to maintain their competence;
- 3.7.6 Maintains the continuing competence of social workers engaged in supporting and assessing practice learning, including the provision of refresher training. (3.3.6)

3.8 Standard statement

There are quality assurance processes in place that inform the development and improvement of practice learning in the organisation and feed into course quality assurance arrangements and regional reviews.

Rationale

Given the changing environment in which practice learning operates and the range of factors that influence the supply and quality, it is important that practice learning arrangements are monitored and regularly reviewed and updated to secure improvements and reduce variations in the quality of provision within and between providers.

Criteria

Each practice learning provider:

- 3.8.1 Ensures each student's practice learning package and progress are monitored in an ongoing way;
- 3.8.2 Reviews the experiences of contributors to practice learning including students, academic and workplace staff, service users and carers for each period of practice learning;
- 3.8.3 Ensures practice learning arrangements meet the Northern Ireland Social Care Council requirements including the provision of practice learning sites and opportunities that facilitate students' development and demonstration of the requirements in the Framework Specification;
- 3.8.4 Produces an annual monitoring report on practice learning provision which is available to the course provider(s) and to the Northern Ireland Social Care Council;
- 3.8.5 Contributes to an annual regional review of the effectiveness of policies, procedures and plans in securing and delivering appropriate high quality practice learning opportunities for students across Northern Ireland;
- 3.8.6 Has an action plan to improve arrangements for practice learning arising from the regional review, recommendations in the annual monitoring report and recommendations from the Northern Ireland Social Care Council; notifies the Northern Ireland Social Care Council immediately of any material information that may compromise the quality or safety of practice learning provision.



**For further information about Standards for Practice Learning
for the Degree in Social Work**

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