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Standards and audit for practice learning opportunities:

A QUALITY PROCESS



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foreword

FOR STANDARDS AND AUDIT FOR PRACTICE LEARNING

High quality practice learning for social work students, delivered in a range of relevant settings, is essential to providing our communities with the competent, confident and valued workforce capable of delivering excellent social services for the future. The Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE) and the policy paper Confidence in Practice Learning set out what social work students need to achieve through their practice learning. It is important then, that we all work to a clear set of standards and establish an agreed way to measure the effectiveness of each practice learning opportunity.

Ensuring that our students receive the practice learning they require is the responsibility of all those involved in social work education and training. Setting standards for practice learning means we are clear about what we must contribute towards and expect from, that experience.

The Standards for Practice Learning and the accompanying audit tool promote a collaborative approach to planning, managing and reviewing practice learning opportunities and offer a common approach to establishing and maintaining quality.

They can be used by established or new providers and with traditional or innovative approaches to practice learning provision.

Publication of this pack is the beginning of an ongoing process and will form part of the overall quality assurance process for social work education and training. We are sure that you will find the contents helpful and the process a useful one. Your comments on the pack are welcome.

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quality of practice learning

Introduction

The SPLP has developed a set of Standards and an Audit Tool to assure quality for practice learning opportunities.

Standards for practice learning opportunities are a way of setting down what is good practice for all the people involved in requesting, providing and monitoring practice learning opportunities for social work degree students.

The audit tool is designed to allow all those involved to check if good practice is being followed.

Promoting a quality approach to the development and monitoring of practice learning opportunities.

The importance of ensuring and monitoring good quality practice learning opportunities must be an aim for all involved in the identification, development and delivery of learning opportunities whether established or new. Quality, quantity and diversity are essential. Confidence in Practice Learning (Scottish Executive 2004) states that quality assurance is the responsibility of all those involved, e.g. Quality Assurance Authority, Scottish Social Services Council, universities, employers and the Institute.

The SPLP has developed an audit tool designed to help all those involved in practice learning with quality assurance of the practice learning opportunities available to students.

Requirements

To qualify as a social worker in Scotland from 2004 students must gain an honours degree or a post-graduate equivalent.

The Scottish Requirements for Social Work Training 2003 form the basis for ongoing approval and monitoring by the SSSC of social work courses and specify what programme providers must do about entry requirements and teaching, learning and assessment requirements.

Practice learning requirements

A key aspect of teaching, learning and assessment is the need for students to have the practice learning they require to meet the Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE), specifically 200 days, 160 of which need to be in direct supervised practice.

The Framework for Social Work Education in Scotland (the Framework) notes the importance of practice learning as an essential element of the new qualifications. New programmes must work towards improving standards by producing social workers who are:

- » competent to work across a wide range of settings
- » confident in what they know and can do
- » clear about their professional identity and that of other professionals
- » flexible and adaptable
- » committed to continuous improvement
- » responsive to change in a positive way
- » able to contribute to the development of the profession.

Underpinning values

The Framework also emphasises the importance of the strong ethical base for social work and the need for social workers to operate within accepted codes of professional conduct. Specifically to:

- >> maintain and promote the dignity, safety, choice, privacy and potential of people who use services and balance these with consideration of the needs of others for protection
- >> treat everyone equally and value their distinctiveness and diversity
- >> maintain public trust and confidence in social services.

The Framework relates these principles to the National Care Standards and also to the Code of Practice for Social Service Workers.

Precepts and standards in practice learning

The Quality Assurance Authority for higher education (QAA) safeguards standards within higher education qualifications and across different professions. This includes setting standards for placements, or in social work, practice learning opportunities, which specify the responsibilities of universities and what students can expect from a practice learning experience. This recognises that while universities have the primary responsibility to provide appropriate practice learning opportunities, they can only do so through adequate planning and preparation with those who provide learning opportunities.

Quality assurance through partnership

The QAA guidance on practice learning opportunities notes that an effective learning opportunity will be one in which not only are intended learning outcomes clearly defined but one in which the responsibilities of the university, provider and student are made explicit.

This is consistent with the Rules for Social Work Education 2003 which emphasise the responsibility of the universities but note also the need to work in partnership to achieve that. Similarly, it recognises that the responsibility of the universities to secure sound assessment of academic and professional awards can only be achieved through a clear sense of how different roles and responsibilities contribute to that process.

The audit process is designed to be used by all those involved in each learning opportunity. The QAA have developed broad rules of conduct, known as precepts, which clarify and specify how each party to the practice learning opportunity - student, university and provider - will contribute to the quality of a practice learning experience.

These precepts can be applied across a range of higher educational provision and have, for example, formed the basis for the NHS Education for Scotland (NES) report, "The Development of Quality Standards for Practice Placements, 2003".

Towards a quality audit tool for practice learning

A set of standards based on the QAA precepts 2-8 have been developed. Precept 1 has an internal university focus.

It is envisaged that these standards will offer a template for universities to use for quality assurance, fulfilling their QAA responsibilities and including student and provider issues.

Used as a guide to good practice the standards have the capacity to form the basis for:

- >> a general audit of new and existing practice learning opportunities, including new providers
- >> a focused audit of particular settings and processes
- >> a post-audit of all practice learning opportunities
- >> a shared and standardised approach
- >> an underpinning link to the agreements between service providers and universities
- >> a link to the quality assurance processes held by the SSSC, of the degree programmes
- >> a link to other internal university quality processes
- >> a related standard for those who choose to pursue the recognition of excellence in practice learning through the Practice Learning Qualifications (Social Services)
- >> a link and common approach to the inter-professional provision of practice learning opportunities.

A staged approach

Discussions with stakeholders suggest that an effective and potentially shared audit tool should:

- >> relate to the agreed precepts and standards and therefore be relevant
- >> be reasonable in terms of time and energy consumption
- >> be accessible and understandable
- >> be inclusive of all parties to the audit
- >> be readily analysed
- >> carried out in stages providing a pre, mid and post practice learning audit
- >> provide a summary of issues for possible action.

The audit tool offers a quality approach to practice learning opportunities.

It is intended to work across a diverse range of settings, services and approaches to practice learning, including creative and developmental models.

It will assist a focus on the most essential aspects of quality in practice learning.

developing quality standards for practice learning opportunities

Precept 2

Institutions should have in place policies and procedures to ensure that their responsibilities for practice learning opportunities are met and that learning opportunities during practice learning are appropriate.

Standard

Institutions should ensure that providers have:

- » Established service level agreements.
 - » The capacity to offer learning opportunities consistent with appropriate outcomes within the Framework
 - » The capacity to offer a working and learning environment consistent with health and safety legislation.
 - » The capacity to support the student to work within the SSSC Codes of Practice.
 - » The capacity and willingness to work in partnership with the university to support the student.
- » Service level agreements in place prior to the the beginning of learning opportunities.
 - » Evidence of a joint approach to the identification, audit, allocation and preparation of practice placements.
 - » Evidence of adherence to health and safety legislation.

Indicators

Precept 3

Institutions should be able to assure themselves that providers of practice learning opportunities know what their responsibilities are during the period of practice learning. Such responsibilities will be about:

- >> provision of learning opportunities
- >> their role, where appropriate, in the assessment of students
- >> the health and safety of students.

Standard	Indicators
Provision of Learning Opportunities	
<i>Institutions should ensure that a provider has:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">>> A service level agreement (or is part of one).>> Knowledge of the Framework and specifically the SiSWE and related values.>> Knowledge of the SSSC Codes of Practice.>> Information about an individual's learning needs.>> Support from the university.>> An opportunity to contribute to monitoring processes.>> Guidance about a working/learning agreement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">>> Service level agreement in place prior to the commencement of the learning opportunity.>> Evidence of knowledge of the SSSC Codes of Practice.>> Named link to the university.>> Participation in pre-commencement briefing/training.>> Participation in meeting prior to commencement of learning opportunity.>> Joint creation of learning agreement.>> Evidence of participation in monitoring.>> Evidence of guidance about whistle-blowing or similar procedure.
<i>Providers have a responsibility to:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">>> Provide learning opportunities which uphold ethical, anti-discriminatory practice.>> Have knowledge of the Framework including the SiSWE.>> Have knowledge of the SSSC Codes of Practice.>> Identify and provide practice experience consistent with the SiSWE and stage of learner.>> Provide support/supervision appropriate to stage of learner.>> Ensure the supporter/supervisor undertakes appropriate training, (e.g. Practice Learning Qualifications (Social Services), PLQ (SS)).	

Standard	Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >> Participate in monitoring of standards. >> Contribute to a learning agreement. >> Provide policy guidance about dangerous or unsafe practice. 	
<p>Role, where appropriate, in the assessment of students.</p>	
<p><i>Institutions should ensure that a provider has:</i></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >> Clear guidance about their role in assessment. >> Standards in assessment including guidance about fair and equal access. >> Guidance on timescales. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >> Named assessor with appropriate training. >> Assessment documentation. >> Reference to assessment processes and timescales within the learning agreement. >> Reference to assessment within monitoring processes. >> Reference to involvement of service users and carers in assessment within working agreement.
<p><i>Providers have a responsibility to:</i></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >> Work within the assessment standards. >> Identify person/s with primary responsibility in assessment. >> Ensure participation in training/briefing. >> Provide time to undertake assessment and related processes. >> Provide fair and equal access to assessment. >> Work within assessment timescales. >> Ensure the involvement of service users and carers in assessment. 	
<p>The health and safety of students</p>	
<p><i>Institutions should ensure that providers have:</i></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >> Clear guidance about what is required in respect of the health and safety of students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >> Reference to health and safety within the service level agreement. >> Checklist of health and safety issues covered. >> Evidence of compliance within monitoring.
<p><i>Providers have a responsibility to:</i></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >> Be aware of any particular health and safety issues related to students. >> Be working within general health and safety requirements. >> Ensure that students are covered for insurance purposes. 	

Precept 4

Prior to practice learning opportunities institutions should ensure that students are made aware of their responsibilities and rights.

Standard

Indicators

Prior to placement students should have:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">>> An appropriately approved practice learning opportunity.>> Appropriate preparation for direct practice.>> A named and appropriately trained practice teacher and/or link worker.>> Access to appropriate health and safety guidance.>> Access to the codes of practice.>> Access to the Framework including the SiSWE.>> Knowledge of their right to be treated in accordance with applicable legislation (e.g. disability legislation)>> Preparation which ensures they are safe to carry out practice learning. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">>> Evidence of a partnership approach to the identification, allocation, preparation and monitoring of practice learning opportunities.>> Orientation to the practice learning opportunity managed between the university tutor and practice teacher.>> To be welcomed to the practice setting and provided with information and an induction programme. |
|---|--|

Students have a responsibility to:

- >> Have knowledge of, and adhere to, the SSSC Codes of Practice and its expectations in terms of behaviour.
- >> Have knowledge of the SiSWE.
- >> Alert the institution and provider to any problem which may prevent completion of the learning opportunity.
- >> Participate in assessed preparation for direct practice.

Precept 5

Institutions should ensure that students are provided with appropriate guidance and support for, during and after practice learning opportunities.

Standard

Indicators

Prior to and during a practice learning opportunity students can expect to have:

- >> A learning agreement negotiated with their practice teacher and in agreement with the university tutor, within 15 working days.
- >> Support and supervision to assist learning and the achievement of agreed outcomes.
- >> A team approach to their support.
- >> Access to a range of teaching and learning opportunities and resources.
- >> Feedback which is regular and consistent and contributes to the achievement of learning outcomes and summative assessment.
- >> Evidence based assessment which is fair and objective.
- >> Ongoing support from the university.
- >> Timely completion of assessment documentation.

Students have a responsibility to:

- >> Provide ongoing feedback to practice teachers/link workers about learning needs and progress towards learning outcomes.
- >> Prepare for and participate in the supervisory process.
- >> Contribute to the completion of assessment documentation.

- >> A named practice teacher and/link supervisor with appropriate qualifications/training and experience to support and assess a student.
- >> A named tutor within the university.
- >> A meeting with the practice teacher within the first few days of the placement to agree learning outcomes and opportunities and to initiate the learning agreement.
- >> Regular review of learning needs achievements and opportunities.
- >> Experience gained as part of a team.
- >> Availability of appropriate specific learning opportunities.
- >> A practice setting which facilitates the student to work to the SSSC Codes of Practice and, where appropriate, work to the National Care Standards.
- >> Agreed submission dates for all documentation.

Standard	Indicators
<i>Practice teachers/link supervisors should have:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >> The agreement and support of their organisation, manager and team. >> Adequate information about the student and his/her broad learning needs. >> Assurance that the student has been prepared for direct practice and is committed to the achievement of learning outcomes. >> Assurance that the student will come prepared to work within the SSSC Codes of Practice. >> The support of university colleagues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >> Written information about the student. >> Knowledge of the students' learning needs. >> Adequate preparation time prior to student arrival. >> Induction material available. >> Evidence of appropriate training undertaken.
<i>Practice teachers/link supervisors have a responsibility to:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >> Directly or indirectly provide support, supervision, teaching and assessment opportunities. >> Provide feedback and guidance to the student. >> Contribute to a fair and objective assessment of student performance and competence. >> Allocate appropriate time to the above. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >> Appropriate reference within learning agreements. >> Accessible systems to deal with student issues. >> Agreed accessible formal complaints procedure. >> Agreed accessible and shared quality audit. >> Evidence of feedback linked to quality processes of provider. >> Agreed assessment guidelines.
<i>After a practice learning opportunity students, university tutors and practice teachers have a responsibility to:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >> Evaluate the learning environment and the student experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >> Evidence of a partnership approach to the provision of learning opportunities.
<i>Service providers have a responsibility to:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >> Establish a process within a quality framework which ensures that student issues are addressed. >> Ensure that the views of service users and carers are part of the quality framework. >> Consider how quality standards relate more widely to the needs of its staff group in relation to learning environment and resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >> Evidence of an agreed structured approach to support and supervision. >> Evidence of an agreed and structured approach to assessment. >> Evidence of evaluation/monitoring feeding into quality/performance processes. >> Evidence of an action approach to continuous improvement.

Precept 6 - Staff Development

Institutions should ensure that their staff who are involved in practice learning opportunities are competent to fulfil their role.

Standard

- » Ensure staff have a knowledge of the Framework including the SiSWE.
- » Ensure staff have knowledge and adhere to the SSSC Codes of Practice.
- » Ensure staff have knowledge of basic standards in respect of practice learning requirements (see precept 3).

Indicators

- » Access to relevant training/development time.
- » Participation in evaluation.
- » Participation in joint training as appropriate (e.g. regarding preparation of practice teachers).

Precept 7

Institutions should ensure that there are procedures in place for dealing with complaints and that all parties are aware of and can make use of them.

Standard

- Students and providers should have:*
- » Access to an agreed complaints procedure.
 - » Access to an agreed quality audit.
- Students and providers have a responsibility to:*
- » Contribute to the audit of the practice learning opportunity.

Indicators

- » Accessible and transparent systems to deal with student issues.
- » Agreed, transparent and accessible formal complaints procedures.
- » Agreed, transparent, accessible and shared quality audit.
- » Evidence of feedback linked to quality processes of the provider organisation.

Precept 8 - Monitoring and Evaluation

Institutions should monitor and review the effectiveness of their policies and procedures in securing effective practice learning opportunities.

Standard	Indicators
<i>Institutions should ensure that university staff:</i>	
» Maintain both formal and informal contact with the progress of the practice learning opportunity.	» Evidence of agreed communication processes between university staff, student and practice learning staff.
» Review student progress.	» Evidence of agreed formal review visits about the progress of the student.
» Ensure the evaluation of the practice learning opportunity.	» Evidence of how this is recorded.
	» Evidence of an agreed audit inclusive of all parties.
	» Evidence of how audit is fed back to quality processes for both university and provider organisation.