



Direct Observation

There are many reasons why direct observations are necessary; protection of service users, maintenance of professional standards and gatekeeping entry to the profession. Observation and assessment of practice takes place throughout the placement on two levels, *naturalistic* and *planned*.

Both can be used to inform the overall assessment of a student's capability but the latter is a purposeful way of gaining clarity on learning achievement; identifying new learning needs; recording progress towards professional capability and providing evidence that meets the placement assessment requirements.

Planned Observations

Each student must be formally observed in practice on a minimum of **two occasions at Level 5** and **three at Level 6**. It is a requirement to have one observation completed for discussion at the mid-point review meeting.

All observations must be face to face with a service user/service users or carer/carers including adults, children, young people, their parents, foster carers (prospective or approved) or adopters. All observations should be a minimum of 30mins and preferably longer. To recognise future skills required by the Knowledge and Skills Statements for Child and Family Social Work and mapped against the PCF in the 2018 revision, if the placement involves working with children and young people, one of the observations **MUST** be with a child or young person.

Considerations when planning direct observations

There are a number of tasks undertaken by social workers which would provide valuable evidence as to the capability of students. These tasks include, but are not exhaustive to:

- responding verbally to duty desk or other telephone calls
- chairing agency and multi-agency meetings
- attending and presenting to court or panel forums
- making presentations to team or other colleagues.

However, the requirement that students are involved in face to face communication with the service user(s), carer(s) or family in person must be noted. Whilst the examples provided above provide useful opportunities for informal observations they should not be used for formal direct observations **unless** the role requires the student to facilitate the voice of the service user being heard and responded to, e.g. a child in need meeting. The only other exception would be in situations where an urgent home visit to the service user is needed in response to a duty desk call and where there is evidence of the crisis intervention planning took place.

Due to ethical, confidentiality and accountability issues raised in court and quasi court forums (e.g. strategy meetings, case conference/safeguarding forums, mental health review tribunals, fostering panels, giving verbal evidence at court) formal direct observations are not permitted. Informal observations and feedback from others involved can be used to inform the final Practice Educator report.

Who undertakes a planned observation?

The observation must be undertaken by the Practice Educator on at least two occasions but a third (at Level 6 only) may be undertaken by the Placement Supervisor. Whilst direct observations form part of the learning process, this is also a formative assessment point with a clear decision made on whether the student's performance is considered to be satisfactory or unsatisfactory, measured against expected standards of performance for the stage of their professional development detailed in the relevant level of the Professional Capability Framework (BASW, 2018).

Where a student's performance is considered unsatisfactory in a direct observation, a further additional opportunity should be arranged. Where a student is considered to have performed unsatisfactorily in two consecutive direct observations a training team meeting under Stage 2 of the Placements in Difficulties guidance should be arranged.

Purpose of observation

Primarily, the contact must be to benefit the service user(s) and only secondly it is to be used to observe the student in practice.

The written, signed informed consent of the service user /carer must be gained before the direct observation takes place. This should include clarity on how confidentiality issues will be addressed, both within the observation and within the portfolio. The student should ensure that the service user is aware that the report will be placed in an on-line portfolio and may be seen by Practice Educators, Link Tutors, members of the Practice Assessment Panel, members of the Module Board of Examiners and the External Examiner. All of these individuals are bound by professional codes of confidentiality.

Consideration should be given to ethical and legal issues where a service user/carers may have difficulties in making an informed decision to participate. Due regard to the Mental Capacity Act (2005) should be made. In particular that capacity is decision-specific and therefore best practice guidance, e.g. best methods in communication, best time of day, best location, assistance from someone known to the service user, preparatory help, information and guidance to participate in and make the decision, must be followed. Students must ensure that they have covered the following:

- Asked themselves 'what is the actual decision in hand?'
- Identified what information relevant to the decision is required and recorded this.
- Asked the service user or carer that question in an appropriate manner and recorded the response.
- Explained which aspect(s) the service user is unable to understand, retain use or weigh (*noting that it is not always necessary that every element is understood but that the salient factors are (MCA Guidance Note, 39 Essex Street)*).

Signed service user/carers consent forms **must not be included in the portfolio**; they should be kept by the Practice Educator, or on service user records where required, and provided if requested.

Justification as to why an observation is taking place in the 'best interests' of a service user who has been assessed as lacking capacity to make the decision must be made explicit.

Material should not be used where the consent of the service user has been sought and refused.

Planning an observation

In order for the observation to be constructive and reduce any anxiety, it is essential that planning for the direct observations is discussed during supervision. Not only should this consider diversity within the practice being observed but should address the core principles for ensuring a safe direct observation, e.g. if and when the observer should step in, and one in which learning takes place. Consideration as to how and when verbal and written feedback will be provided to the student should be clarified.

Obtaining service user feedback is an important aspect of planning for a direct observation. The student and Practice Educator should select their planned observations carefully to ensure that service users are willing to provide this feedback.

However ALL names (service users/carers, any other individuals, agency,) within the students on-line writing and observers direct observation report must be kept confidential. Pseudonyms or initials should not be used to avoid the risk of using the true name inadvertently and therefore breaching confidentiality.

Reference should simply be made to 'the service user, child, mother etc.', the carer' or 'the nurse'. Any specific identifying facts should be removed: e.g. that a service user has a job which may easily identify them, such as being a vicar of a named parish or that the family has red-headed triplets. However, it is permissible to talk about the age, gender and ethnicity of the service user and an indication of their need, e.g. Learning Disability and general diagnosis, but not unusual which may more easily identify them.

Undertaking the observation

The student will complete the '**Case Summary**' and **Preparation, planning and objectives**' sections in the Direct Observation section on Mahara in preparation for their direct observations, printing these off for discussion with the observer.

The case summary should provide information about the service user (can include demographic information such as age, gender, ethnicity and disability where appropriate) and the context of their situation e.g. they live at home, or are in a residential or nursing home. The student should evidence applicable legislation and policy (national and local) governing their role and responsibility.

In the preparation, planning and objectives section the student should provide an explanation of their chosen model of assessment or method of intervention supported by theory, research and literature. This should be properly referenced (e.g. Trevithick, 2012). They should provide a clear explanation of the purpose, objectives/aims/goals and sought outcomes they intend to achieve. The student should be explicit about the skills and values they will use to demonstrate anti-oppressive practice to the observer.

Prior to the observation taking place, the observer should discuss with and establish the student's verbal understanding of their plan in order that the student can develop their ability to justify their professional judgement and decision making. The student should print off their written work to inform this discussion. The observer should also determine the level of 'reflection for action' undertaken by the student to ensure that the intervention is informed

by earlier informal or formal feedback (e.g. previous direct observation, supervision discussions,) and identified development needs.

Completing Direct Observation Form

The observer is responsible for completing this form.

Service user feedback should be gained by the observer on completion of the observation. The observer should recognise that there will inevitably be some limitations to the feedback received but try to be creative in how this is gathered.

Questions the observer might want to ask the service user are listed below:

Did you understand what to expect?

Has the student always been on time or let you know if they were going to be late?

Do you feel they listened to you?

Did you feel that they understood your point of view?

Do you feel that they acted on your suggestions?

Did they provide sufficient information to help you make a decision?

Did they help you to understand the options/choices available to you or how you could take more control of the situation?

Did they provide you with feedback?

Using the Direct Observation form, the observer should confirm, or contest, that the student has demonstrated the knowledge, skills and values outlined in the plan and record any others that they observed to a satisfactory standard, **making reference to the Professional Capabilities Framework (BASW, 2018) (e.g. PCF1)**. The observer should also comment on whether the student achieved their objectives/aims/goals. Whilst it is important that the feedback includes what has been done well, areas for further development should also be identified.

Once completed, an electronic copy should be provided to the student no less than five days after the observation has taken place. During the next supervision session or at a time agreed there should be an opportunity for the content to be discussed. Following the discussion the student should then be provided with a signed hard copy.

A PDF copy of the signed form should be uploaded to the relevant section of the portfolio on Mahara within two weeks of the observation taking place to allow for the student to complete their critical reflection.

Critical reflection

The final element of the direct observation is for the student to critically reflect on and analyse their intervention in response to the observer's and service user's feedback, using the relevant section on the Direct Observation page on Mahara. They should explain their thinking, understanding and feelings and clearly identify how they will incorporate the feedback into their practice and address any development need identified.

Questions the student might want to ask themselves:

What is the quality of the feedback?

What could have influenced this?

What went well?

Were there any surprises for me in this observation?

Did I achieve my plan and outcomes?

How did/will I use the outcomes from my interaction with the service user/carer?

What key points have I learnt from this experience and feedback?

What might I do differently as a result of the feedback?

How do I intend to address any areas for development?

What support do I require?

The last element required on the Direct Observation pages is a reference list of all the literature used.

Direct observation

Student's name	
Name of observer	
Role of observer	
Date of observation	
Setting of observation	
Observation no:	1 [] 2 [] 3 [] Additional []

Observer to complete after the direct observation. Observer to ensure that they refer to the direct observation guidance on p54-57.

Service user feedback (to be sought by the observer)

Holistic summary of the student's capability at the relevant level of the Professional Capabilities Framework (guidance 500 words)

Summary of the student's use and application of theory/methods/ models

Areas for further development

Recommendation for this observation	Satisfactory [] Unsatisfactory []
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Observer's signature:

Date: