



Placements in Difficulties

The majority of placements proceed smoothly. Nonetheless, occasionally short or longer term complications, concerns or difficulties may arise which can provoke anxiety or distress for the student or those supporting them. In such situations students **must not** disengage from the placement of their own choice or decision. It is important that these procedures are followed in all circumstances.

Placements can experience difficulties for a number of reasons:

- personal - for example changes to the health or personal circumstances of the student, P.Ed or PLACEMENT SUPERVISOR,
- administrative – delays in obtaining access to computer systems or processes, the availability of incoming work impacting on learning opportunities, staffing or organisational changes,
- relational – unhelpful or inadequate supervision; breakdown in relationships.
- conduct – the attitude or motivation of the student to learn, or behaviour, both personal and professional, incompatible with expected standards,
- performance – where the student is consistently not meeting the required capability or may be considered unsafe to work with service users/carers,
- safeguarding – when the student or their immediate dependents are the subject of a social care investigation
- DBS - when new information or a change in circumstances arises.

The following documents should be used to identify the nature and seriousness of any concern:

- Professional Capabilities Framework End of First or End of Final/Qualifying Level (BASW, 2018)
- Standards of Proficiency (HCPC, 2017)
- Guidance on Conduct and Ethics for Students (HCPC, 2016)
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2015)
- The Care Act 2014 Statutory Guidance for Implementation (2014) Chapter 14, Safeguarding.
- The University's Fitness to Study and Fitness to Practice Procedures (2017)

Power Dynamics

It is acknowledged that there is a power dynamic imbalance in the practice learning environment. The following chart provides an indication of the key elements which members of the training team should be aware of during this process.



Considerations of power dynamics in the Practice Learning Environment

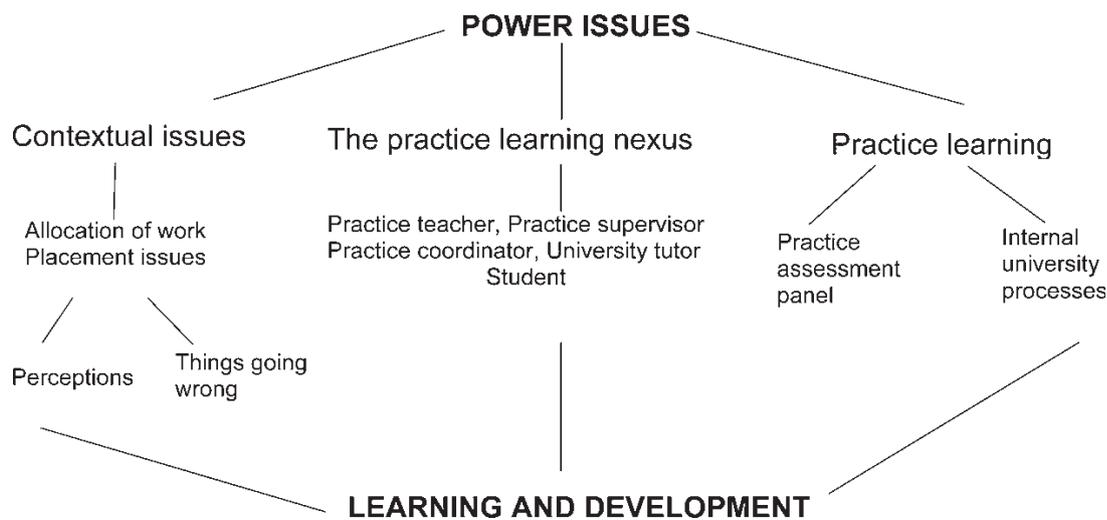


Figure 1 Significant issue in disrupted placements (Parker, 2010 p989)

‘An awareness of power issues and the disruption process helps us understand some of the processes of resistance, challenge, struggle and outcomes expressed by students. But it fails to offer transformative actions. Perhaps, here, the concept of empowerment—contested and problematic but much used in social work—is assistive. Empowerment concerns the use of one’s own and collective power ‘to challenge or undermine the disadvantages experienced by being a member of a marginalised group’ (Thompson, 2008, p. 105). In the field of social work practice education, the commitment to this process requires a collective effort from students, practitioners and academics to challenge abuses of power identified and experienced and to synthesize from the interplay of various force fields (HE requirements, professional standards, social work values and human rights) a more inclusive and supportive system for determining actions in disrupted placements. Developing awareness of and acknowledging issues of power is important, as is creating open and honest relationships in which power differences and impacts are acknowledged. Identifying obstacles to power sharing and increasing student competence, humanizing relationships and working collectively to resolve placement issues are important (Walker et al., 2008).

Ref: Parker, J. (2010) *When Things Go Wrong! Placement Disruption and Termination: Power and Student Practice Perspectives*, British Journal of Social Work (40) 983-999

Principles

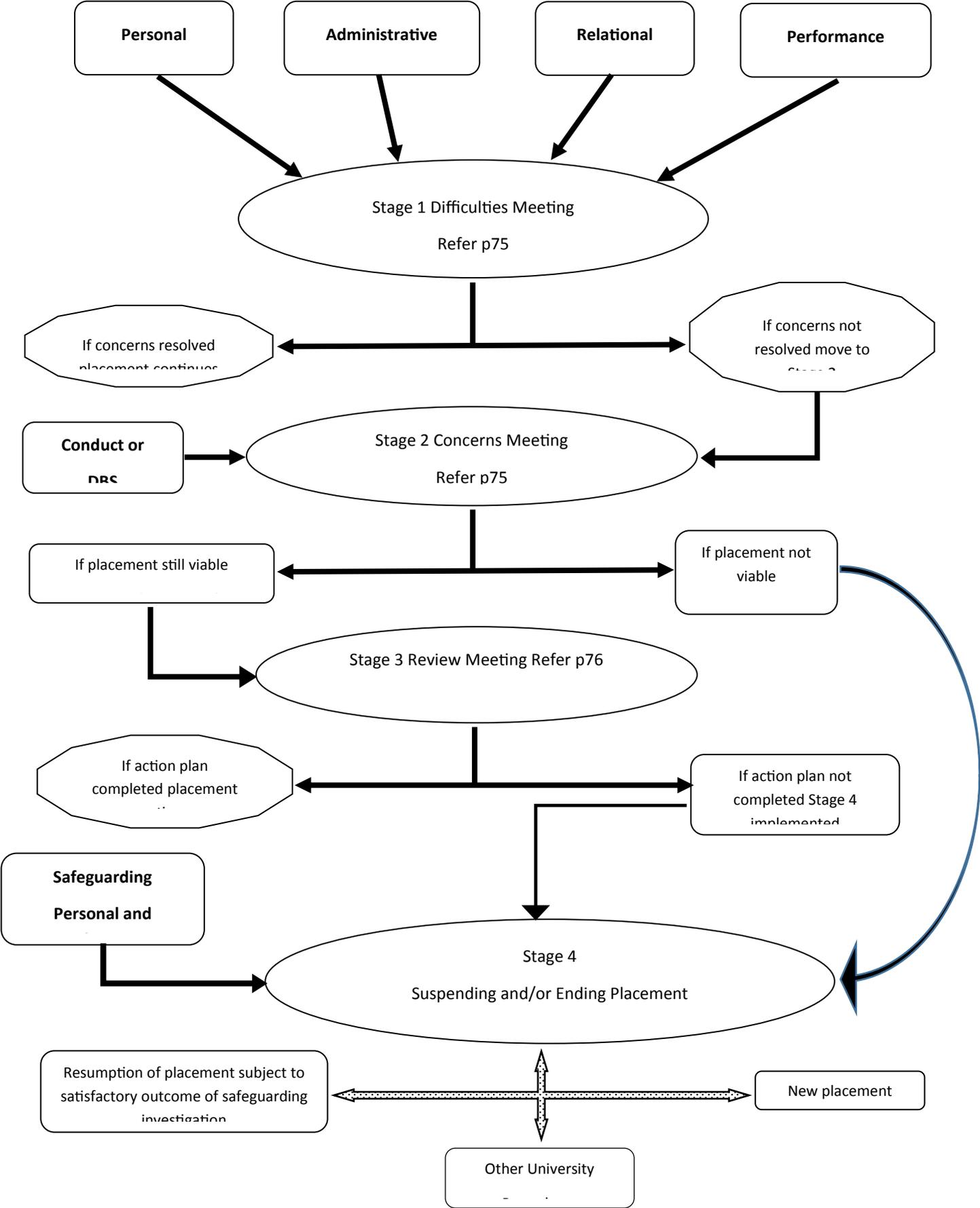
The principles underpinning this guidance and process are:

- All students should be provided with opportunities to meet their identified and agreed learning needs, including learning from minor errors, mistakes or initial under-performance.

- Students have the right to be informed of any concerns in a timely and appropriate manner.
- Students should be provided with the opportunity to improve through an agreed action plan and timescale in areas of minor consistent underperformance or poor conduct.
- Where serious professional misconduct concerns exist the placement may be suspended immediately by either the placement or the University, pending the outcome of further investigation. This may subsequently lead to termination of the placement without completion of Stages 2-4.
- Where safeguarding or allegations management investigations are instigated or when new information surfaces regarding DBS suitability the placement **must** be suspended immediately by either the placement or the University, pending the outcomes of further investigations. This may subsequently lead to termination of the placement without completion of Stages 2-4.
- In all cases where placements are suspended or terminated for issues related to professional misconduct or safeguarding the University will provide support to the student. Those who may be involved during the period of suspension will include the MT, PT, Placement Co-ordinator, CL and Student Services (note that it is the student's responsibility to access this support). During this time the student may wish to seek guidance and support from the Student Union.
- The University may subsequently be required to invoke Fitness to Practice procedures.

The following flow chart and guidance captures what should happen to address the nature of the concern at the relevant stage of the process. When these procedures are invoked, it is not necessarily a systematic process. The stages do not need to be sequential, as this will depend upon the seriousness of the circumstances which have led to the procedures being invoked.

PLACEMENT IN DIFFICULTIES FLOWCHART



Stage One – Difficulties Meeting

A stage one meeting between the student, Placement Supervisor and Practice Educator should always take place where there has been a change in personnel involved in supporting the placement and there are no other concerns. This meeting should focus on reviewing the Practice Learning Agreement and the evidence collated to date. An informal action plan may be used to ensure that all are aware of the actions and outcomes required and by whom to ensure that the placement completes successfully.

A stage one meeting to address any capability or conduct concern will normally be a supervision meeting between the student and the Placement Supervisor or Practice Educator. There may be a need to hold a three way supervision but due consideration should be given to the power dynamics and emotions that this may invoke. The person(s) raising the concern(s) should have clear evidence to support their area(s) of concern.

The following questions should be considered (Finch, 2017, p.72):

1. Are the expected standards (organisational or professional) set and clearly documented?
2. Does the practitioner (student or PLACEMENT SUPERVISOR/P.Ed) understand the standards?
3. In what ways are the standards not being met?
4. What are the reasons for the standards not being met?

Any conversation needs to be **courageous** (Beddoe and Davys, 2015 adapted and cited in Finch, 2017, p. 71) recognizing that:

- conversations are associated with some sort of emotion;
- participants may feel ashamed, apprehensive, uncomfortable, angry and embarrassed;
- conversations may become conflicted, by introducing different ideas, values or behaviours;
- conversations may cause conflict and hurt;
- conversations may have an impact on relationships.

An informal action plan should be agreed making clear the actions and outcomes required by the student and/or Placement Supervisor or Practice Educator including dates for completion. These should be recorded on supervision or separate notes. Every effort should then be made to provide the learning opportunities to achieve them. Subsequent supervision sessions must note the outcomes, improvement or non-improvement. If improvement is achieved and sustained, no further action is required.

Stage Two - Concerns Meeting

If there has been a change in personnel supporting the student and there are connected concerns about student capability or conduct, **or** the difficulties relating to

the concern(s) addressed under stage one continue, **or** the concerns have escalated, these must be communicated to the Link Tutor. Anyone (the student, Placement Supervisor or Practice Educator) can request a concerns meeting. The Link Tutor should liaise with all involved to convene the meeting, normally within 7 working days of notification. All members of the training team will attend. The Link Tutor will chair the meeting, retaining neutrality about the evidence to be submitted.

The individual raising the concern will provide a written report outlining the concern and the steps taken to date. Those attending the meeting will consider the report and the student will have a right to respond.

If it is considered that the student is not meeting the expected professional capabilities and standards set by BASW and HCPC and the consensus is that, whilst there may be significant problems, there are no immediate concerns about the viability of the placement, a SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely) action plan will be drawn up with clear expectations and outcomes assigned to the respective individuals. **The student must be advised that non achievement of the action plan may result in the ending of the placement and/or a fail recommendation.** The action plan will be agreed prior to the meeting ending and a hard copy, together with a written record of the meeting, sent to all concerned within two working days by the Link Tutor. It is the responsibility of the Practice Educator to document and record achievement against the action plan. A date for Stage 3 Review will be set for 4 weeks later.

In some circumstances a placement may be deemed non-viable. Examples of this include where there is a lack of or inappropriate learning opportunities; poor quality placement supervision or practice education; prolonged sickness or absence of any party; a significant breakdown in communication or relationships between the student and the Placement Supervisor or Practice Educator and where oppression has occurred. If, after reviewing the evidence, it is agreed by all that the placement has become non-viable the placement will be ended. The Link Tutor should move to Stage 4 Termination.

Stage Three - Review Meeting

This meeting will be held to review the student's progress 4 weeks after the stage 2 meeting and can take one of two forms. These are:

1. Actions on Form I successfully completed

Where the concerns were about student capability and/or conduct the agenda for the meeting should provide the student with the opportunity to evidence they have made clear and significant progress against the agreed action plan outcomes. The Practice Educator will confirm, or otherwise, the evidence against each action on the plan. Where the judgement of the Practice Educator is that the student has met the requirements of the action plan the meeting will be chaired by the Link Tutor, who will take notes. In the event that a Mid-point Review meeting has been delayed due to the Stage 3 meeting this should be held immediately after the Stage 3 Review Meeting.

2. Actions on Form I not successfully completed.

If it is considered appropriate by all parties, the Module Tutor may be invited to attend. Where the judgement of the Practice Educator is that the student has not met the requirements of the action plan they must provide sufficient evidence **using the Final Report** as far as possible to confirm that the student has FAILED the placement. The student shall have the right to respond.

If it is considered by all that the student is not meeting the relevant level of the Professional Capabilities Framework, the meeting will move to Stage 4. **It should be noted that the placement cannot be extended where the student is not meeting the level of capability or conduct required.** The Link Tutor will provide a written record of the stage 3 meeting within 2 working days.

Stage Four – Ending Placement

Either the Link or Module Tutor chairing the meeting should discuss and secure an agreed date of leaving, based on a plan of what the student needs to complete to ensure a smooth handover of casework and hand in any equipment. The student should collect all the placement paperwork completed to date (signed attendance record, any direct observation(s) and other paperwork, any feedback received. The Placement Supervisor should ensure that the student transfers any cases appropriately and returns agency equipment (key fobs etc.) The Practice Educator is responsible for providing their completed and signed report to support their professional judgement of the student's unsatisfactory performance to date. The Link Tutor will provide a written record of the stage 4 meeting within 2 working days. The student will submit their portfolio at the due date unless an alternative placement can be secured within a short timeframe.

Securing an alternative placement

Non-viable placements of termination based on health grounds

In these instances, every effort will be made to support the student to complete their practice placement experience within the allocated time scale. This is to enable the student to meet the deadlines for the submission of work in preparation for the Module Board of Examiners and Award Board processes.

This will be dependent on the availability of an alternative placement and the length of placement needed, although in the majority of cases placements will need to start again. Where an alternative is not immediately available, a meeting will be arranged between the student, University Placement Co-ordinator, Module Tutor and Course Leader to identify an appropriate timescale to enable the student to progress at the earliest opportunity within the academic time-tabling. This **may** not be until the following academic year and may result in the student only completing one module in that academic year due to progression requirements. In this instance students will need to contact Helpzone for advice and information on the financial impact.

Stage 3/4 Review and Ending meetings

Where a Stage 3 meeting has decided that the student has not demonstrated capability there is no entitlement to an immediate alternative placement.

The Module and Link Tutors will meet with the student separately, to agree the completion, as far as can be achieved, and submission of the assessment tasks for the module (e.g. analysis of practice and portfolio). Where it is not possible for the student to complete an analysis of practice it will be for the Module Tutor to decide if the student has to produce a piece of academic work, up to 1500 words, which requires them to reflect on their learning and experience. This reflection is not submitted as part of the assessment process to meet the learning outcomes but will be read and will receive feedback in accordance with University and module processes.

The Module Tutor will arrange for submission of the portfolio for reading and marking and taking the outcomes to the Practice Assessment Panel. The portfolio will receive a grade of UF and the student will fail the module. The normal academic regulation requirements for retaking modules will apply unless action is taken as detailed below.

Immediate suspensions of placement due to conduct, DBS or other safeguarding matters.

There is no entitlement to an immediate alternative placement until investigations into conduct, DBS or safeguarding matters have been completed. It is important that a trusted member of staff, usually the student's Personal Tutor (unless they are the Module Tutor or Course Leader) maintains contact with the student to offer guidance and signposting to other areas of support within the University as required.

The Module Tutor, Course Leader and Academic Subject Lead will review whether follow-up action under the Fitness to Practice (2016) procedures should be invoked. The procedures can be found on the Student Charter pages at <http://www.glos.ac.uk/life/pages/student-charter.aspx>

It is not possible within this guidance to pre-empt any outcome from the implementation of any University procedures.