



Practice learning in context

Practice learning is a central and core component of social work. As Finch (2017, p.12) notes, 'it is the place where theory and practice interact and synergise'.

The practical element of the social work programme has been structured in line with Practice Learning Guidance issued by the disbanded College of Social Work, together with requirements and guidance from the HCPC, The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and The Department of Health (DH) until such time as new guidance emerges from Social Work England, due to become operational in March 2019.

National Requirements

The DH and HCPC have specified that all social work degree programmes must:

- enable social work students to demonstrate that they have met the Standards of Proficiency and are suitable to apply to Social Work England, as the new regulator from 2019, to register as social workers on completion of the degree
- ensure that the teaching of theoretical knowledge, skills and values meet the QAA Benchmark Statement Social Work (2016) and are based on their application in practice
- ensure that students' achievement against the required standards is regularly and accurately assessed and confirmed that all have been met before being awarded a degree in social work
- ensure that the principles of valuing diversity and equalities awareness are integral to the teaching and learning of students
- ensure that all social work students spend at least 200 days gaining required social work skills, with 170 of these being in practice settings and 30 days being University based, as follows:
 - SW4002 Social Work Skills (Readiness for Practice)
 - SW5001 70 day Placement; and
 - SW6001 100 day placement.

Each student must:

- Shadow a social worker during Level 4 as part of their Readiness to Practice Portfolio
- Experience at least two practice settings
- Experience statutory social work tasks involving legal interventions during their final placement
- Experience at least two user groups (e.g. child care and mental health).

University Curriculum

The practice curriculum moves the student from novice to advanced beginner in a series of stages. Social work learning requires 'the transforming of self' (Stone and Harbin, 2016, p.1) the key requirements of which require students to understand that:

- They need to be motivated, autonomous, reflective, life-long learners.
- They must take responsibility to develop their own skills and knowledge gleaned through academic study and on placement.
- That professional development is the responsibility of the individual student, coupled with support of a confident and knowledgeable supervisor/educator.
- That self-management is the first of many steps through career progression.
- That placements are the first steps to being able to build resilience and manage the emotional and academic demands of the job.

To meet national requirements, the course develops practice skills in four dimensions:

- Skilled practice - where the practitioner consciously uses a range of interpersonal, organisational and evaluative skills to build working relationships for the benefit of service users.
- Critical practice - where the practitioner has access to a broad theoretical, legal, policy and ethical framework within which to locate his/her own activity, and from which to reflect upon and evaluate his/her interventions.
- Reflective practice - where the practitioner, as a matter of course, identifies strategies for reflecting upon, evaluating, and learning from their own practice, and consciously seeks to include such learning in their own self-development.
- Autonomous practice - where the practitioner takes responsibility for the quality, creativity and ethical soundness of their work. The practitioner is able to seek out support, supervision, guidance and learning opportunities as the prerequisites for responsible professional practice.

To meet national requirements, the curriculum content contains:

- At Level 4 (year 1): A shadowing placement that forms part of the judgement made about the student's suitability to proceed into their professional training. Students produce a portfolio which demonstrates 25 days skills development as 'Readiness for Direct Practice'.
- BASW (2018) guidance requires that 'by the point of assessment of readiness for direct practice (prior to first placement), students should demonstrate basic communication skills, ability to engage with service users, capacity to work as a member of an organisation, willingness to learn from feedback and supervision, and demonstrate basic social work values, knowledge, theories and skills to be able to make effective use of first practice placement'. This underpinning knowledge is delivered in the following modules:



Students are not allowed to progress to their first placement unless they have passed all Level 4 modules.

At Level 5 (year 2): A 70 day block placement in Semester 1 assessed against the 'End of First Placement' level of the Professional Capabilities Framework (BASW, 2018), the Standards of Proficiency and Guidance (HCPC, 2017) and Guidance on Conduct and Ethics for Students (HCPC, 2016). Students also have a placement preparation orientation prior to commencement.

BASW (2018) guidance indicates that 'by the end of the first placement students should demonstrate effective use of knowledge and skills and commitment to core values in social work in a given setting, predominantly dealing with situations of lower complexity, with supervision and support. They will have started to demonstrate capacity to work with situations of greater complexity and where solutions and outcomes are uncertain or less clear-cut. They will have started to use specific social work models, skills and interventions and to have evaluated their impact'.

Students continue to develop their knowledge base in Semester 2 in the areas identified below:



Students are not allowed to progress to their final year unless they have passed all Level 5 modules

At Level 6 (year 3): A 100 day block placement in Semester 2 assessed against the 'last/qualifying' level of the Professional Capabilities Framework (BASW, 2018), the Standards of Proficiency (HCPC, 2017) and the Guidance on Conduct and Ethics (HCPC, 2016) leading to eligibility to apply to register with Social Work England.

BASW (2018) guidance indicates that by the 'End of Last Placement/Completion' newly qualified social workers will have demonstrated capabilities in applying social work approaches with a range of service user groups, the ability to undertake a range of tasks and social work interventions at a foundation level and evidenced the capacity to work effectively with more complex situations.

They may have deepened specific skills in one or more social work field. They should be able to work with appropriate autonomy, whilst recognising that final decisions will often rest with their supervisor or other senior authority. They will seek appropriate support, supervision and be ready to pursue continuing professional development. These capabilities will have been demonstrated through the last (or latter parts of their) placement together with the final assessment of other work in the qualifying programme'.

Underpinning knowledge gained for this final statutory placement are:



Students will also be completing a desk based literature review during the whole of the final year of study, including during a short time on placement. Students are prepared for placement within the placement module.