‘Enabling Others’ – Information and advice for employers on the new PQ requirements for Practice Education

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Foreword

With the introduction of the new GSCC Post Qualifying Social Work Framework one of the most significant changes was to integrate the enabling and assessing of work-based learning into all Specialist Social Work Awards. Sarah Williams and Lynne Rutter responded to this development by writing a text book published by Learn to Care - ‘Enabling and Assessing Work-Based Learning for Social Work’ – which was written to support candidates undertaking this part of the Specialist Award.

Following on from this development, Skills for Care via its Innovation Project Funding commissioned the Centre for Post Qualifying Social Work at Bournemouth University to write a guide for employers to help them gain an understanding of the implications for workforce development and in particular the issues surrounding the Post Qualifying Social Work Specialist Award for social workers.

Sarah and Lynne have once again taken a lead with this work and they have worked in partnership with service users and carers, members of Learn to Care and colleagues at the Centre for Post Qualifying Social Work to produce this guide for employers.

We are grateful to Skills for Care for giving us the opportunity to produce this publication and we trust that it is of real benefit to all engaged in workforce development in social care.

If you have any further questions or issues you would like to raise please feel free to contact us at the Centre for Post Qualifying Social Work.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Who is this booklet aimed at?
Written primarily for managers in social care organisations (both in the statutory and private, voluntary and independent sectors), this publication will be of value to anyone who has strategic and / or operational responsibility for any form of work based learning that involves social workers, either as learners or as facilitators of the learning of others, including:

- People with supervisory responsibility for staff.
- Team leaders.
- Practice learning co-ordinators.
- Training managers.
- Human resource managers.
- Senior managers.

However, although it will be of particular interest to those with a responsibility for workplaces which include social workers, it may also be of value to those with a wider remit for workforce development. This is because some of the changes outlined in the booklet can be used more generally to support the development of staff and help to create effective learning cultures within all types of social care and community-based organisations.

1.2 Why do you need to read this booklet?
Following the introduction of the revised GSCC Post Qualifying Education (PQ) framework in 2006, the way that social work education is organised and assessed in the workplace is significantly changing (see appendix 1 for further information about the revised framework).
As someone who has an interest and/or responsibility for learning within your organisation it is important that you:

a) Understand what these changes are and consider how you will respond to the changes and support your staff, particularly those enrolling on Specialist Award programmes, to meet the new requirements.

b) Explore how you can use the new emphasis on the ability and responsibility to ‘enable others’ as a core part of a social worker’s professional role to provide impetus to the development of a more effective learning culture within your organisation.

c) Consider how programmes developed by Universities within the revised PQ framework can be used by your organisation to support wider workforce development and keep work based learning high on the agenda. The GSCC requires that programmes within the revised framework are modular and have a strong inter-professional orientation – often meaning that it is possible for people who are not qualified social workers to access modules like ‘enabling others’ as stand-alone modules.

1.3 What is included in the booklet?

- Information about the key changes that result from the introduction of the revised PQ framework.
- Brief information about the context for the changes and the benefits that they should bring to employers.
• An overview of the impact of the changes and key issues that you, as a manager, will need to consider.

• A summary of the GSCC ‘enabling others’ (practice education) requirements within the revised framework at the specialist level – these are the requirements that your staff undertaking Specialist Awards will need to meet.

• Ideas for how Specialist Award candidates can meet these requirements.

• Ideas for providing support to candidates whilst they are working towards their Specialist Awards – ensuring good quality learning experiences for them AND the learners that they are enabling / assessing.

This booklet has been written in consultation with employers, people who use services, carers, and other key stakeholders. It aims to provide clear and concise information about the implications for practice learning which result from the introduction of the revised GSCC PQ framework. It draws on information provided by employers at consultation events and in response to questionnaires sent out in September 2007.
2. What are the key changes that will affect employers?

Summary of the Key Changes

- **All social workers should be actively involved in supporting learning in their workplace** - the GSCC have made it clear that all social workers from the point of qualification onwards should begin to contribute to the learning of others – not as an ‘extra’ but as a core part of their professional role. This role should grow as practitioners gain experience and expertise (GSCC 2005).¹

- **All Specialist Awards now include a compulsory requirement to include learning on ‘enabling others’** – to ensure that social workers can meet the above expectation, all Specialist Awards in the revised PQ framework include learning (normally a unit / module) which prepares them to ‘teach and assess social work students and mentor and support colleagues’ (GSCC 2005).

- **All Specialist Award candidates must be involved in teaching and assessing a qualifying social work student** - whilst undertaking Specialist Awards social workers are now required by the GSCC to be involved in supporting the learning of a qualifying social work student – including taking some responsibility for assessing their practice competence (GSCC 2005).

- **The Practice Teaching Award has been phased out** – the familiar Practice Teaching Award is no longer a GSCC qualification and Programmes will be run for the last time in 2007/08.

3. Why was it considered necessary to make changes to the way that social workers are supported to learn and are assessed in the workplace?

Work based or practice learning forms the cornerstone of the Government’s strategy to raise standards of practice and help improve the quality of social work and social care. However, a number of significant barriers to the success of this strategy have been identified:

- A shortage of people in the workplace with appropriate skills and knowledge to support / assess qualifying social work students.
- A shortage of people with appropriate skills and knowledge to support / assess other forms of work based learning, both formal and informal (e.g. PQ, NVQ, other accredited and non-accredited courses and through mentoring and supervision).
- A shortage of practice learning opportunities (placements) for qualifying social work students.
- The need to provide more impetus for the development of learning cultures within social care organisations which support and encourage learning and development across the workforce.

Given that the changes have been designed to bring about improvements to learning in the workplace one of the most visible, and some would say, most controversial changes in the revised PQ framework has been the disappearance of the generally well respected Practice Teaching Award. It could be argued that this award already provided the opportunity for those with an interest in practice learning to gain the necessary skills and
knowledge to take responsibility for teaching and assessing practice competence in the workplace. However, although this award did in the majority of instances set the standards for good levels of support for qualifying students, the narrow focus of the practice teaching qualification did not actively encourage practice teachers to use their skills to support other forms of learning or engage in wider workforce development. Furthermore, the demands of the course (generally taking a year or more to complete) and the demands of fulfilling the role of a practice teacher (providing 1:1 support for 100 day placements) meant that relatively low numbers of social workers trained and stayed working as practice teachers. The limited numbers of active qualified practice teachers has significantly restricted placement opportunities for students and/or led to people without specific skills or training in practice education taking responsibility for supporting and assessing learning in the workplace (Slater 2007)².

Because of the importance placed by the Government on high quality practice learning as a key part of workforce development strategy, the revision of the PQ framework needed to include measures which would address the problems outlined above. The Practice Teaching Award has therefore been replaced in the revised framework by a wider ranging and accessible Practice Education Pathway which has been designed to ensure that there are:

a) Larger numbers of people able to support all forms of work based learning and contribute to the development of effective learning cultures.

b) Opportunities for people with a particular interest in practice education to further develop their skills and knowledge with an emphasis on the strategic and organisational aspects of learning and development.

This pathway includes an entry level ‘qualification’ that is now a **compulsory element of all Specialist Awards**. This is intended to ensure that all social workers qualified at the specialist level:

- **Have the knowledge and skills** to contribute to the support of all forms of workplace learning.
- **Understand** that it is a core part of their professional role to play an active part in the support of workplace learning, including, but not only, the learning and assessment of qualifying students.

Although there will be some variations between the way that Specialist Award programmes meet the GSCC requirement to develop knowledge and skills in *mentoring colleagues and teaching and assessing social work students*, the majority have included a specific module or unit within their awards which focuses on ‘enabling others’. These modules / units are generally rated at 15 or 20 credits, making up approximately 1/6th of the Specialist Award.

Further opportunities are being developed for people to enhance their practice education skills and knowledge through Higher Specialist and Advanced Awards which make up the remainder of the *Practice Education Pathway*. These awards are aimed primarily at senior practice educators, probably those involved at a strategic or a managerial level in the workplace.
4. What will these changes mean for employers? – How do you need to respond to the changes?

The changes brought about by the introduction of the revised framework should bring real advantages for employers – offering the opportunity to improve support for learning in the workplace. There should be:

- An increase in the overall number of people with appropriate skills and knowledge to support and assess learning in the workplace.
- A wider involvement in work based learning by social workers – the Specialist Awards will prepare social workers to be involved in ‘enabling others’ through mentoring and supporting colleagues as well as teaching and assessing social work students, and will help them to develop a basic understanding of the importance of contributing to the development of a learning culture within their workplace.

But, although the practice learning element in the new Specialist Award will ensure that there are considerably larger numbers of social workers with specific training in the basics of supporting and assessing learning in the workplace, this new award will not give people the same depth of knowledge and skills as the Practice Teaching Award. Although they will be able to make a significant contribution to learning and assessment in the workplace, it is unlikely that candidates who have completed their Specialist Awards will have the confidence, knowledge and skills to take full
responsibility for teaching and assessing qualifying social work students without good quality ongoing mentoring, support and training (Gilchrist 2007). Employers, in partnership with undergraduate programme providers, will therefore need to give careful thought to how they can ensure that those who are taking responsibility for social work students in practice are fully equipped and supported to take this responsibility. Many programme providers will also be producing supporting materials for their ‘enabling others’ units and modules. For example, in co-operation with Learn to Care, we have produced a handbook (Williams & Rutter 2007) of ideas, materials and reflective exercises which helps support candidates’ learning.

It is worth noting that although the GSCC require that the final assessment of qualifying students on social work degree programmes is made by a qualified social worker, there is no requirement that this social worker has undertaken any training in practice education. This leaves decisions about what preparation people undertaking this important role require very much down to local providers of education. The following questions will need to be resolved through discussions between stakeholders in local social work programmes (practice learning opportunity providers, university programmes, students, service users and their carers and practice assessors).

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Key questions for you to consider and discuss with other stakeholders in local social work programmes;

- Who will be supporting and assessing qualifying student learning opportunities in your organisation? – N.B. It is unlikely that there will be sufficient qualified Practice Teacher Award holders to meet future needs.

- What initial training will these people need? – is the ‘enabling others’ element of the Specialist Award sufficient? N.B. You will probably need to find out more about the contents of local ‘enabling others’ units / modules in order to make this decision.

- What ongoing or additional training will they need and how will this be provided? It may be worth considering what support / training is already provided by local Undergraduate programmes for people acting as assessors / practice educators for their students, also what ‘in house’ training your organisation offers. Is this sufficient or are changes needed?

- What mentoring and support will be offered to them? You will need to consider how people will be mentored and supported both whilst they are undertaking their training and also after they have completed their Specialist Awards. (Appendix 4 provides some useful practice examples.)
• How will you ensure that the people supporting and assessing social work students work to appropriate standards? Consider how you will provide opportunities for assessors to come together and discuss standard setting.

• How will people who support and assess social work students contribute to organisational learning about the provision of practice learning opportunities? Consider the ways the organisation encourages the sharing of learning, and allows ideas to filter upwards, e.g. via projects, team meetings etc.
5. Taking a closer look at the specific GSCC requirements for ‘enabling others’ at the specialist level

This section will summarise the key GSCC requirements for all social workers undertaking PQ Specialist Awards. The information is drawn from Post Qualifying Framework (GSCC 2005) and Specialist Standards and Requirements For Post Qualifying Social Work Education And Training (GSCC 2006)\(^5\).

Key GSCC requirements:

1. In addition to other requirements related to the specific specialist role, all Specialist Award programmes must also develop knowledge and skills in ‘enabling others’ through mentoring, practice teaching and assessment. Most University programmes have done so by incorporating a 15 or 20 credit Unit at the end of all Specialist Awards (there will be variations in how this requirement is met – please refer to individual programme providers for further details).

2. As part of their PQ Specialist level programme candidates, regardless of the specialism followed, must ‘teach and assess the practice of student social workers’.

N.B. Exceptions to the requirement to work with a degree student can be agreed by PQ programmes, for instance in situations where candidates are experienced managers and are working to support PQ candidates and are not in a position to gain experience with qualifying students (the GSCC expects this situation to be rare).

3. By the end of the Specialist Award candidates are expected to demonstrate that they have achieved the standards set out in the GSCC / Topss (2002) Guidance on the Assessment of Practice in the Workplace (see appendix 2 for full details of these standards).

4. The GSCC have stated that the assessment for this award should be a staged process with candidates demonstrating that they have met the majority of the requirements relating to ‘organising opportunities for the demonstration of assessed competence in practice’ (domain A) and ‘enabling learning and professional development in practice’ (domain B) before moving on to a full assessment of all three domains, including the third domain ‘manage the assessment of learners in practice’ (domain C). This will normally mean that candidates will need to undertake a staged assessment, with two or more pieces of assessment undertaken over a period of time.

5. The GSCC have stated that candidates must meet both professional and academic standards associated with social work at this level (for Specialist Awards this standard must be at least equivalent to level H – final year degree level). This will normally involve candidates in completing an assessment which demonstrates professional and academic competence e.g. a portfolio, reflective assignment, critical report etc. This assessment will normally be equivalent to 5,000 words, although this will vary between universities.
6. How can Specialist Award candidates be helped to meet the GSCC requirements?

a) Working with a social work student – essential experience for Specialist Award candidates

For the majority of candidates the bottom line is that they must ensure that they are involved in teaching and assessing a qualifying social work student whilst they are completing their PQ Specialist programme as this will enable them to meet the GSCC requirements for their PQ award. For many candidates this will not be too difficult to arrange as they will be working in teams that regularly offer practice learning opportunities to qualifying students and will be able to arrange to take some responsibility for working with a student as a natural part of their placement. However, for some candidates, particularly those who are working in situations / teams that do not normally have students on practice learning opportunities, this can be somewhat problematic and will require some careful forward planning both by the candidate and their manager.

It is worth remembering that not all of the requirements need to be demonstrated through work with a social work student and that the requirement to work with a social work student can be met by making a limited but meaningful contribution to teaching and assessment as part of a practice learning opportunity. It is, however, important to ensure that any work planned:

- Has been negotiated with the student and their practice teacher to meet some of the student’s specifically identified learning needs.
• Is included in the student’s learning contract.
• Is integrated into the learning for the placement as a whole.
• Involves the candidate in designing and delivering a learning experience for the student, based on the student’s learning needs.
• Involves an assessment of the student’s practice against specifically identified National Occupational Standards.
• Involves the provision of feedback on performance both to the learner and the practice teacher.
• Is normally carried out over a reasonable period of time and not just through a very brief one-off event.

Examples of experiences which would enable candidates to gain appropriate learning experiences and demonstrate competence at teaching and assessing a social work student include:

1. **Taking full responsibility** for both teaching and assessing a student on a practice learning opportunity (this is not the normal expectation for candidates completing this award).

2. **Providing workplace support** for a student who is being supported and assessed by a more experienced off site practice teacher / assessor. The candidate would manage the learning experience and make contributions to teaching and assessment but would not hold overall responsibility for the student’s learning or assessment within the practice learning opportunity.

3. **Working in partnership** with a more experienced practice teacher / assessor in their team to take responsibility for specific aspects of a
student’s learning experience within that team. This may include having a
student attached to a candidate to enable them to gain specific
experiences e.g. carrying out assessments / group work etc. Again, the
candidate would have specific responsibilities for organising some learning
experiences, teaching and assessment, but would not have overall
responsibility for the whole practice learning opportunity or overall
assessment.

4. **Offering a short learning experience** to a student who is placed
elsewhere (with a practice teacher / assessor taking overall responsibility
for that student in the main practice learning opportunity). The short
learning experience should be designed to meet a specific set of learning
needs identified by a student which cannot be met within their main
placement. Sometimes this can involve providing contrasting or
complimentary learning experience or may enable a student to learn about
a specific task or role (e.g. group work, a specific type of assessment etc).
For example, a candidate in a fostering and adoption team could offer a
short learning experience to a student placed in a Children and Family
Team or a Mental Health Team. The short placement may provide the
opportunity to be involved in a specific area of work, gain specialist
knowledge and skills or possibly gain experience that will give an insight
into the perspectives of carers and people who use services.

The candidate would take responsibility for co-ordinating the learning
experience and for assessing competence within their ‘short placement’.

5. **Offering a regular learning experience** e.g. one day per week, for a
student placed elsewhere (with a practice teacher / assessor taking overall
responsibility for that student in the main practice learning opportunity). As with the above example, the learning experience should be designed to meet a specific need for the student. For example, if the PQ candidate was working in a day / drop-in / community based service they may be able to offer students who are working in a care management team the opportunity to gain more experience of working ‘hands on’ with people who use services by spending, for example, one day per week in the community based service.

A summary evaluation of the models described above can be found in Appendix 3 of this booklet.

N.B. Offering a short learning experience or a regular learning experience can work particularly well as an arrangement between voluntary / independent / private and statutory sector organisations as a way to extend the learning opportunities offered to a student within a particular placement. For example, a student placed in a community based drop-in for older people may welcome the opportunity to spend a week / a day a week with a care manager in an older person’s team; a student in a mental health team may be interested in the opportunity to spend some time in a voluntary sector advocacy service.

b) Working with other learners - additional ways of meeting the GSCC requirements

As we have already said, not all of the requirements need to be met through the candidate’s work with a social work student. There is considerable
flexibility about how some of the requirements can be met, particularly those relating to mentoring and support. **It could be beneficial for candidates to meet some of the requirements of ‘enabling others’ by gaining different types of experiences, as this will directly encourage them to see how their skills and knowledge can be transferred to the support of other forms of work based learning.**

The following list (not exhaustive) gives some ideas about ways in which candidates who have had a more limited experience of working with a social work student can gain additional experiences and demonstrate them for the award:

- Mentoring less experienced colleagues.
- Supporting learning for non qualified workers (e.g. NVQ).
- Supporting induction programmes for new workers.
- Passing on new knowledge, skills and understanding gained through education or practice experience to other team members through presentations to the group / individual or small group mentoring / co-working.
- Facilitating discussions in learning groups / team meetings which encourage shared learning.
- Supporting / assessing post-qualifying learners.
- Supporting learning through supervision.
- Contributing to in house training and development.
Most candidates will probably combine some experience of working with a social work student with one or more of the examples above to enable them to fully demonstrate their competence at ‘enabling others’.

**Key points for you to consider**

- How will Specialist Award candidates be encouraged to plan how they will meet the learning objectives and demonstrate their competence at ‘enabling others’ at an early enough stage for them to put suitable plans in place?

- How can managers / training co-ordinators support candidates and enhance learning opportunities for social work students by developing a strategy which ensures that candidates are helped to access qualifying students and work with them in a way which benefits the student, the PQ candidate and the organisation?

- Will some central co-ordination of students and learning opportunities offered by Specialist Award candidates be needed to help ensure that all Specialist Award candidates have sufficient opportunities, including access to a social work student, to meet their requirements? (See Appendix 4 for useful practice examples.)
7. How can Specialist Award candidates, who are ‘enabling others’, be supported?

All candidates who are working towards meeting the ‘enabling others’ requirement of the Specialist Award will be taking some responsibility for supporting and assessing the learning of others in their workplace. For most candidates this will be a new experience which carries some considerable responsibility and will have time and resource implications. Although the candidates’ programmes will be supporting them to develop the skills and knowledge they need to enable others, employers should consider how they will be supported within their workplace to ensure that candidates apply their learning to practice and further develop their competence within their new role. There are two key areas which employers will need to consider:

1. How mentor support will be provided to candidates new to ‘enabling others’.

2. How candidates will be supported to ‘release the time’ needed to a) teach and assess learners in their workplace and b) make use of mentorship support.

Discussions with employers have shown that a number of different models for the provision of mentor support are currently in use:

- Mentor support provided by the candidate’s line manager as part of their supervision.

- Specialist mentor support provided by an experienced practice educator (outside of normal supervisory support) who is independent of the student / learner that the candidate is working with. This may be provided by the employer or by the candidate’s course.
• Specialist mentor support provided by a more experienced colleague who is co-working with the candidate to support / assess a student.

• Specialist mentor support provided to groups of candidates undertaking the award through group supervision / support sessions.

When considering what model(s) of support to use within your own organisation you will need to consider issues such as the skills and knowledge of line managers, availability of specialist practice educators, how and when time will be made available for candidates to work with mentors, how easy it is to bring groups of candidates together etc.

In conclusion, we have seen that ‘enabling others’ in the Specialist Awards needs some planning and thought to ensure a positive experience for all those involved. There are many ways to help candidates meet the GSCC requirements, as well as to support the development of new skills and knowledge during this time. Appendix 4 provides more advice using existing practice examples to show how this is being achieved in various organisations.

**N.B. Future practice**

This booklet adheres to the appropriate GSCC requirements at the time of going to press. However, GSCC requirements and guidance may be subject to change in the future, and therefore we strongly advise all staff involved in social work training and education to review them on a regular basis.
Appendix 1 - GSCC Post Qualifying Framework showing integration of ‘Enabling Others’
Appendix 2 - Domains

From ‘Guidance on the assessment of practice in the work place’ (GSCC 2002)

Domain A - Organise opportunities for the demonstration of assessed competence in practice

A.1- Take responsibility for creating a physical and learning environment conducive to the demonstration of competence

A.2- Negotiate with all participants in the work place, including service users and carers, the appropriate learning opportunities and the necessary resources to enable the demonstration of practice competence

A.3- Work openly and co-operatively with learners, their line managers, work place colleagues, other professionals, and service users and carers, in the planning of key activities at all stages of learning and assessment

A.4- Co-ordinate the work of contributors. Ensure they are fully briefed, understand their roles and provide feedback.

A.5. - Monitor, critically evaluate and report on the continuing suitability of the work environment, learning opportunities and resources. Take appropriate action to address shortcomings and optimise learning and assessment

A.6 - Contribute to the learning and development of the agency as a training organisation. Help to review and improve its provision, policies and procedures and identify barriers for learners.

Domain B: Enable learning and professional development in practice

B.1-Establish the basis of an effective working relationship by identifying learners’ expectations, the outcomes which they have to meet in order to demonstrate competence and their readiness for assessment. Agree the available learning opportunities, methods, resources, and timescales to enable them to succeed.

B.2- Discuss, identify, plan to address and review the particular needs and capabilities of learners, and the support available to them. Identify any matters which may impact on their ability to manage their own learning.

B.3- Discuss and take into account individuals’ learning styles, learning needs, prior learning achievements, knowledge and skills. Devise an appropriate, cost effective assessment programme which promotes their ability to learn and succeed.

B.4 -Make professional educational judgements about meeting learners’ needs within the available resources, ensuring the required learning outcomes can be demonstrated in accordance with adult learning models.

B.5 - Identify which aspects of the management of the learning and assessment programme learners are responsible for in order to achieve their objectives. Describe
and agree the roles of the work – based assessor in mentoring, coaching, modelling, teaching and supervision

B.6- Establish how the learning and assessment programme is to be reviewed. Encourage learners to express their views, identify and agree any changes and how disagreements on any aspect of it are to be resolved

B.7 - Advise learners how to develop their ability to manage their learning. Deal with any difficulties encountered by them.

**Domain C: Manage the assessment of learners in practice**

C.1 - Engage learners in the design, planning and implementation of the assessment tasks

C.2 - Agree and review a plan and methods for assessing learners’ performance against agreed criteria

C.3 - Ensure that assessment decisions are the outcomes of informed, evidence-based judgements and clearly explain them to learners

C.4 - Evaluate evidence for its relevance, validity, reliability, sufficiency and authenticity according to the agreed standard

C.5 - Use direct observation of learners in practice to assess performance.

C.6 - Base assessment decisions on all relevant evidence from a range of sources, resolving any inconsistencies in the evidence available

C.7 - Encourage learners to self evaluate and seek service users, carers and peer group feedback on their performance.

C.8 - Provide timely, honest and constructive feedback on learners’ performance in an appropriate format. Review their progress through the assessment process, distinguishing between formative and summative assessment.

C.9 - Make clear to learners how they may improve their performance. Identify any specific learning outcomes not yet demonstrated and the next steps. If necessary, arrange appropriate additional assessment activity to enable them to meet the standard.

C.10 - Ensure that all assessment decisions and supporting evidence are documented and recorded according to the required standard. Produce assessment reports which provide clear evidence for decisions

C.11- Ensure that disagreements about assessment judgements and complaints made about the assessment process are managed in accordance with agreed procedures.

C.12 - Seek feedback of learners on their experience of being assessed, and the consequences of the assessment programme for them. Incorporate the feedback into future assessment activity.

C.13- Contribute to standardisation arrangements and the agreed quality assurance processes which monitor the organisations training strategy.
Appendix 3 - Evaluation of models

Evaluation of models of PQ Specialist Award candidate involvement in qualifying student placements.

N.B – PQ Specialist Award candidates are referred to as ‘candidates’ throughout this table. Qualifying Social Work Students are referred to as ‘students’. The term ‘Practice Learning Opportunity’ (PLO) is used throughout this appendix to describe an assessed period of time in which a social work student is located in an organisation undertaking social work tasks, learning about the social work role, developing their knowledge and skills and being assessed against the National Occupational Standards. PLO’s are also commonly been called ‘placements’

1. Taking full responsibility for both teaching and assessing a student on a PLO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Provides good all round experience for the candidate of all aspects of practice education</td>
<td>• The ‘Enabling Others’ part of a Specialist Award may not fully equip candidates to take the role of practice teacher / assessor.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Provides consistent support for the student</td>
<td>• Candidates who are just finishing Specialist Awards may be moving into new jobs or taking on new responsibilities and this could be a difficult time for them to take on the additional responsibilities associated with taking full responsibility for a student.</td>
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<td>• Ensures clarity of roles because this model limits the number of people involved in the learning / teaching relationship.</td>
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2. Providing workplace support to a student in a PLO who is being assessed by a more experienced off-site practice teacher (assessor)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Provides good all round experience of all aspects of practice education with opportunities for the candidate to learn from their more experienced colleague (e.g. joint supervisions)</td>
<td>• There is an increased risk of communication difficulties as there are two people involved in the management / assessment process.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The shared responsibility with the practice teacher taking lead responsibility for teaching and assessment with input from the candidate means a more limited time commitment / level of responsibility for the candidate.</td>
<td>• This model can create more work overall because of the need for liaison between the practice teacher and on site supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The student benefits from the input of two people with different skills / knowledge</td>
<td>• There is the potential for a lack of clarity about roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Assessment decisions can be discussed between the practice teacher and candidate helping the candidate to gauge ‘what is good enough’.</td>
<td>• The student may feel over-supervised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The candidate may not gain experience of the full range of practice learning activities that they will need to evidence competence for the ‘Enabling Others’ unit because their input is limited.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 3. Working in partnership with a more experienced practice teacher (assessor) in their team / workplace

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provides good all round experience of all aspects of practice education with opportunities for the candidate to learn from their more experienced colleague (e.g. co-working, joint supervisions)</td>
<td>There is an increased risk of communication difficulties as there are two people involved in the management / assessment process (although this can be more easily minimised than in the above example when the two people are working together in the same team)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance / consultation / mentoring could be available from the experienced practice teacher for the candidate</td>
<td>There is the potential for a lack of clarity about roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More limited time commitment / level of responsibility for the candidate whilst still providing a good way of gaining experience and developing skills</td>
<td>This model can create more work overall because of the need for liaison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student benefits from the input of two people with different skills / knowledge</td>
<td>Student may feel over supervised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment decisions can be discussed between the practice teacher and candidate helping the candidate to gauge ‘what is good enough’.</td>
<td>The candidate may not gain experience of the full range of practice learning activities that they will need to evidence competence for the ‘Enabling Others’ unit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When two people from within a team work in partnership to provide a practice learning opportunity it is easier to cover for absences and ensure good levels of support to the student.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership working could also extend the learning opportunities available to the student.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4. Offering a short learning experience to a student in a primary PLO elsewhere (with a practice teacher / assessor in that PLO)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The learning experience can be negotiated to fit with the workload of the candidate and availability of a specific learning experience</td>
<td>Negotiating the additional experiences can be time consuming for the student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The candidate can take overall responsibility for teaching / assessment during the short learning experience – giving them experience of all aspects of practice learning</td>
<td>The ‘split’ placement may be disruptive for the student. The student has to learn about a second new workplace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The arrangement offers the student access to new and different learning opportunities (which may not be able to be in their primary PLO)</td>
<td>The opportunities for direct work with service users may be very limited in a short placement. This may limit the opportunities for assessing the competence of the student in practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student can take advantage of specific expertise of the candidate in their area of practice</td>
<td>As above communication between the practice teacher and the candidate may be an issue. Ensuring good communication strategies are in place will be essential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can strengthen links between teams and enhance co-operative working</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The candidate is provided with the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
opportunity to co-work with a more experienced practice assessor

- The short PLO may be weakened if there are no clear learning objectives agreed and if there is a lack of clarity about how the assessment for this learning opportunity will be carried out.

5. Offering a regular learning experience to a student with a primary PLO elsewhere (with a practice teacher / assessor in that PLO) e.g. one day per week for a 100 day PLO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- As above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The student has the opportunity to work with service users over a longer period of time than in the above example giving more opportunity to form and maintain professional relationships and to engage in longer-term pieces of work.</td>
<td>- As above the split nature of the placement may be disruptive for the student and increase overall workload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- There is a potential for communication difficulties and for inconsistencies in the teaching / learning / assessment experience for the student</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The candidate would probably need to provide regular formal supervision (this could be organised as joint supervision with the practice teacher) and this will have time implications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4 - Practice examples

Practice Example 1 – Providing support for People who are completing / have completed an ‘Enabling Others’ module and are taking responsibility for a social work student’s learning opportunity.

Worcestershire County Council

a) The Issue

Candidates undertaking ‘Enabling Others’ modules are all required to act as a Practice Assessor (taking full responsibility for a student) or a Work Place Supervisor (with off site support). Having completed the module candidates are able to act as Practice Assessors for students from local Universities. These candidates, both during the course and after completion, need effective support to develop their competence and confidence further, and enable them to provide good quality learning support to students.

b) How we are currently working to provide support to Practice Assessors / Work Place Supervisors

- We are visiting all teams to raise awareness of the benefits of practice learning for teams and individuals.
- We are running support groups for candidates whilst they are undertaking the module with access to advice by phone / email between group sessions.
- We are encouraging peer support for candidates by sharing group contact details.
- We are offering off-site consultancy / mentoring for people undertaking a practice assessment role.
- We are running six weekly practice learning support groups – for all people undertaking a practice assessment role in the County (including those in the Private, Independent and Voluntary Sectors). These support groups enable people to come together and share experiences. They also provide opportunities for ongoing training and development – sessions have included: anti-oppressive practice, ‘good enough’ practice, supervision, induction, theory to practice and report writing.

c) How this will improve practice learning

- Provides a clear structure of support for practice assessors at all stages of their development.
- Provides opportunities for further professional development within practice education.
• Provides opportunities for practice assessors to share best practice ideas and develop a support network.
• Supports the development of effective learning cultures.

d) The remaining challenges that we face

• Further supporting the development of practice learning opportunities within the Private, Independent and Voluntary Sectors where few staff are social work qualified.
• Encouraging people to get involved in Practice Learning when they are very interested but are worried about time / academic demands.

For more information contact: Liz Bartholomew, Professional Development Advisor, Worcestershire County Council, LBartholomew@worcestershire.gov.uk

Practice Example 2 – Ensuring PQ Specialist candidates are able to meet the requirement to work with a Social Work Student

Bournemouth University

a) The Issue

Some candidates undertaking the Enabling Others Unit of Specialist Awards at Bournemouth University have found it difficult to meet the requirement to work with a social work student. Reasons for this have included:

• There is a local requirement for social work students to be assessed in practice by a qualified practice teacher – students tend to be ‘placed’ in organisations which have practice teachers or are supported by off site practice teachers.
• We are situated in a rural area – a large proportion of the current social work students have no transport and are unable to travel to placements in the rural North and West of the County – candidates in organisations in these areas therefore have no access to students within their workplace.
• Some candidates are from teams that do not feel they are able to offer practice learning opportunities at the current time.
• Some candidates are from organisations with no tradition of offering social work practice learning opportunities and where there is no other social work / practice teacher within the organisation.
b) How we are currently working to resolve this difficulty

The undergraduate and post qualifying teams at the University have been working with local employers and candidates to look at ways of resolving this difficulty. We are looking to develop a system where social work students with unmet learning needs within their primary practice learning opportunities are matched with candidates who can offer short term practice learning opportunities which would meet those needs. To date the system has been reactive – working with individual students / candidates as the need arose. We are currently looking at developing a centrally co-ordinated system which will be more efficient and ensure that social work students have equal access any additional learning opportunities which exist.

Case Example

A PQ Specialist candidate working in a Local Authority Leaving Care team (that does not normally offer student placements) was matched with a social work student undertaking a 100 day practice learning opportunity in a voluntary sector housing project for vulnerable young women and their babies. The student spent five days in the leaving care team, having negotiated some specific learning objectives relating to gaining an understanding of the statutory role including involvement in assessment.

The Specialist Award candidate worked with the student to plan the learning opportunity, set learning objectives and agree methods of assessment and how assessment information would be communicated to the practice teacher.

c) The opportunities that this will open up

- Enhanced learning opportunities for social work students.
- Enhanced partnerships between statutory / voluntary and independent organisations through co-operative arrangements for practice learning.
- More creative approaches to meeting learning needs of social work students.
- New practice learning opportunities in organisations / teams that have not previously been involved in practice learning.
- Opportunities for PQ Specialist Award Candidates to gain experience of working with social work students without having to take full responsibility for organising a 100 day practice learning opportunity or full responsibility for making a final assessment of practice competence.

d) The remaining challenges that we face

- Co-ordinating the primary placement with the ‘short term learning opportunity’ – ensuring effective communication and planning.
• Providing support for candidates whilst they are working with the student.
• Quality assuring the ‘short term practice learning opportunity’
• Ensuring that all partners are involved in planning and that all line managers in organisations understand the needs of both PQ candidates and social work students.

For more information: contact Sarah Williams, Senior Lecturer, CPQSW, Bournemouth University: williamss@bournemouth.ac.uk