

Northern Ireland



Practice Learning Requirements for the Degree in Social Work

(Amended version for August-December 2022)

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Social work education and training prepares students to become confident and competent social workers. Social workers aim to make a difference to the quality of life for users of services, their carers and the communities they live in. In order to do this it is essential for social work students to develop knowledge and skills that help them work with a wide range of people. Practice learning must therefore be an essential and major component of a student social worker's training. This is equally important during the current COVID-19 pandemic and this interim paper shall make some amendments to the requirements in order to mitigate for COVID-19 in as robust a way as possible.
- 1.2 The Northern Ireland Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work (the Framework) determines the practice learning as well as the academic content of the Degree. It also specifies the value base as an integral part of the knowledge and practice requirements. Course providers must develop a curriculum that includes both academic learning and practice learning and fosters the integration of knowledge, skills and values in teaching, learning and assessment. The academic learning curriculum must support practice learning. During COVID 19 this may be provided in a variety of ways which enable safety and social distancing, such as the use of virtual platforms.

2. Definition of Practice Learning

- 2.1 Practice skills can be learned through real-life practice in a workplace and simulation. Techniques such as action learning, e-learning, skills teaching, case studies, project work are among the range of simulated techniques that can be used to assist students develop their practice skills.
- 2.2 Practice learning must include a significant period of supervised, assessed practice in the workplace using real-life experiences. Assessed practice must include but is not limited to face to face work with individuals and families and participation in the full range of associated professional activities expected of a practising social worker. It should also include work with groups and communities. During Covid 19 this may be liaison by telephone or engaging with groups in a socially distant manner.
- 2.3 The balance between real-life practice learning and learning through simulation is specified in these requirements and has been amended to take into account the difficulties which may be encountered in facilitating real life practice learning during Covid 19. This will be reviewed regularly as we move through the pandemic.

3. Principles of Practice Learning

3.1 Practice learning must:

3.1.1 Promote student learning while safeguarding the rights of service users;

3.1.2 Support the development of confident and competent practitioners who can take responsibility for their own practice and their continuing professional development; and

3.1.3 Promote good social work practice.

4. Requirements for Practice Learning

4.1 Course providers must ensure that students' practice learning needs and achievements are recorded in an individual learning plan that accompanies the student throughout their training into the assessed year in employment and their future career.

4.2 Course providers must structure the course in ways that facilitate a progressive and incremental approach to practice development as indicated in the table below.

*Level 1 Foundation	Preparation for direct supervised practice
*Level 2 Application	Learning in and through direct (and, where this is not always possible, simulated) supervised practice
*Level 3 Integrated Application	Critical analysis of application and integration of knowledge, skills and values in direct (and, where this is not always possible, simulated) supervised practice
*These levels should not necessarily be interpreted as years	

4.3 All students' readiness to undertake direct supervised practice must be assessed to ensure they are safe to practise as a student social worker in the workplace.

4.4 Course providers must have assessment arrangements in place to credit students with prior experiential learning consistent with agreed regional arrangements.

4.5 All students must be assessed as competent at one level in order to progress to the next.

4.6 Students without credits for prior experiential learning will normally undertake **225 days** of practice learning, of which:

- **25 days** must be spent in **preparation for direct work**;
- **185 days** must be in **direct supervised practice**; and
- **15 days** to be used for **individual practice development**.

4.7 All students will normally be required to complete a minimum of **185 days** in direct and simulated (where direct practice is not possible), supervised practice except where they have been assessed for exemption at Level 2.

4.8 Overview of practice learning requirements is presented in the table below.

Level	Students with no prior experience	Students eligible for APEL	Progression
Level 1 – Foundation	Minimum of 25 days in preparation for direct practice	Credit up to 25 days	All students' readiness to undertake direct practice at Level 2 must be assessed
Level 2 - Application	Minimum of 85 days in direct supervised practice	Credit up to 85 days	Progression to Level 3 is subject to assessment for all students
Level 3 – Integrated application	Minimum of 100 days in direct supervised practice	No credit may be claimed.	All students must be assessed at Level 3
In addition there are 15 days to be used for individual practice development. These should be in addition to current teaching time, linked to the curriculum and structured to meet the learning outcomes for Practice Development Days. Individual practice development must be validated by the tutor.			

4.9 Assessed practice learning should be contrasting in order for students to understand, acquire and demonstrate transferability of knowledge, skills and values in practice. This

contrast will normally be achieved through variations in assessed practice learning experiences. Practice learning should therefore be structured over the course of the Degree to allow students to gain experience of:

4.9.1 Carrying out statutory social work tasks;

Ideally this should be gained through direct supervised practice following the social distancing measures and any other agency guidance for practice, however where this is not possible, practice teachers can use a variety of methods to enable this, e.g.

- Presenting the student with a real time case study that they work through with the PT/ member of the team in terms of the social work process and statutory functions
- Role play with PT/member of the team following social distancing guidance or via video call

4.9.2 At least two different settings;

4.9.3 Providing services to at least two user groups;

Every social work student will have at least one PLO in a statutory setting and at least one PLO with a focus on children. In some cases, it is possible that one of the student's PLOs could meet both requirements.

This means that the Practice Learning Opportunity must include experience in all of the following. (Where the PLO does not offer all of these experiences, the practice teacher may negotiate supplementary opportunities.)

- **Statutory functions**
- **Working within legislation**
- **Direct practice with children and/or parents/carers where the primary focus of the work relates to the wellbeing of the child**

4.9.4 Group care opportunities;;

This may be gained through action learning or project work where the impact of Covid 19 means that sufficient opportunities are not available in real-life practice

4.9.5 Working with at least two other professions;

This may be gained through telephone, written or virtual communication if face to face meetings are not possible during the Covid 19 pandemic.

4.9.6 The contested nature, scope and purpose of social work in a diverse society;

(e.g. Students could be encouraged to reflect on changes to teams, organisations and practice as a result of Covid 19, and consider the landscape of social work pre, post and during Covid 19.)

4.9.7 Participating in formal decision-making forums;

This may be gained through virtual platforms where the impact of the coronavirus renders face to face meetings inadvisable

4.9.8 Participating in and presenting evidence in courts or tribunals or other formal hearings;

This may be gained through simulation where sufficient opportunities are not available in practice

And

4.9.9 Applying community development approaches in social work.

Experience of this may be gained through action learning or project work where sufficient opportunities are not available in real-life practice. (e.g. drawing up a plan of how community needs might be met during and post Covid19)

5. Teaching and Assessment Requirements for Practice Learning

5.1 Teaching and assessment requirements for practice learning will be specified.

For further information about Practice Learning for the Degree in Social Work in Northern Ireland:

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