REGIONAL PRACTICE LEARNING HANDBOOK
August 2017 – June 2018

NI Framework Specification For the Degree in Social Work:
Sept 2014
(applicable to ALL students who commenced course from Sept 2015 onwards)

Issued: June 2017
FOREWORD

In October 2001, The Minister for Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) announced as part of the policy for the reform of professional social work training, that one regional partnership should be established to plan social work training arrangements across Northern Ireland in order to optimise the use of resources and to promote consistency of quality in course provision. The Northern Ireland Degree in Social Work Partnership (formerly the Regional Body) was established in July 2003 and its membership consists of representatives from all academic and employer organisations involved in the planning and delivery of the Degree in Social Work. The Partnership facilitates the development of regional policies and approaches in relation to Admissions, Practice Learning and Degree Delivery. This regional practice learning handbook is one reflection of the collaborative working arrangements between the universities, colleges and the employing agencies.

The handbook is produced on an annual basis and its production is harmonised with the academic calendar year to ensure that a consistent approach is taken to practice learning across the Degree in Social Work programmes in Northern Ireland. This handbook provides guidance on the overall practice learning experience and provides a central point for collation of key points from various documents that contribute to the planning, delivery and quality assurance of the Degree in Social Work. In producing the handbook the Partnership aims to provide an up-to-date resource which will assist you with your role and responsibilities, whether as a Student, Practice Teacher, On-Site Facilitator/Supervisor or Line Manager.

The handbook is reviewed each year in response to the views expressed by those utilising it and feedback is very much welcomed.

The Partnership recognises that practice learning is delivered and assessed in a climate of change and developments. With this in mind a small number of additions or amendments may be circulated throughout the academic year. The handbook and any additional materials are circulated via NIDSWP website (www.nidswp.net) employer organisations and academic institutions. It is imperative that you access the most up-to-date edition and that any additions and amendments are incorporated into your copy of the handbook.

The provision and delivery of a range of quality learning experiences is a key component of the Degree in Social Work and the Partnership recognises and appreciates the commitment and contribution of Practice Teachers, On Site Facilitators/Supervisors, Tutors, Line Managers, Staff Teams, Service Users, Carers and Survivors.

John Doherty
Chair NIDSWP
Introduction

Welcome to the Northern Ireland Degree in Social Work Regional Practice Learning Handbook. This handbook has been developed by Partnership agencies to provide guidance and direction for Students, Tutors, Practice Teachers and On-Site Facilitators/Supervisors. Its structure and content has been informed by those using it and is reviewed annually.

The handbook focuses on key aspects of practice learning and aims to set out requirements explain processes and clarify expectations. It is hoped you will find the handbook helpful in carrying out your role and responsibilities.

The Degree Partnership welcomes feedback on the handbook. If you think changes or additions are required or you have any suggestions as to how the handbook might be improved please convey these either via your organisation’s Practice Learning Co-ordinator or directly to the NI Degree in Social Work Partnership, Graham House, Knockbracken Healthcare Park, Saintfield Road, Belfast, BT8 8BH.

☎ 028 9056 6735 or ✉ joanne.lytle@hscni.net

The handbook is available via the F/HEIs websites, Practice Learning Co-ordinators in employer organisations and the NIDSWP website (www.nidswp.net)

It should be read in conjunction with the relevant F/HEI Handbook for the Degree in Social Work Programme.

Joanne Lytle
Professional Officer
Northern Ireland Degree in Social Work Partnership
## Glossary

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<td>Northern Ireland Degree in Social Work Partnership</td>
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<td>Northern Ireland Social Care Council</td>
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<td>Designated Practice Learning Provider</td>
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<td>RPA</td>
<td>Reflective Practice Assignment</td>
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<td>QUB</td>
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**NB:** All changes to this Practice Learning Handbook have been agreed by the Partnership and are highlighted in yellow.
Part One:

PRACTICE LEARNING
Section 1: Overview of Practice Learning and the Degree in Social Work

Context

The Northern Ireland Social Care Council’s Requirements for Practice Learning (NISCC: Revised 2010) state that 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 with Service Users (Preparation for Practice Learning Module)
185 days must be in direct supervised practice and;
15 days to be used for individual practice development.”

This handbook focuses primarily on the 185 days in direct supervised practice which is divided between two practice learning periods.

Under Graduate Route (UGR)

For those without a primary degree, the Degree in Social Work is a three-year academic qualification. Students begin with a foundation year which is known as Level 1. This is a basic introduction to the key academic or knowledge foundation, which includes introductions to social work, sociology, social policy, psychology, ethical/value issues and service users’ rights. UGR students undertake their first period of work based practice learning at the beginning of year 2 (level 2).

Relevant Graduate Route (RGR)

RGR students who already hold a relevant degree go straight into level 2 and their first period of work based practice learning is completed in the second half of the academic year.

All students upon completion of the social work degree academic qualification are required to complete a further assessed year in employment (AYE).

Preparation for Practice Learning Module (PfPL)

The Preparation for Practice Learning Module refers to 25 days preparation for direct supervised practice. This is a key module which is jointly delivered and assessed by agency and college staff. Students must pass all components of this module in order to proceed to their first directly supervised practice learning period.
Practice Development Days (PDDs)

Students are required to undertake 15 individual practice development days over the duration of the Degree programme. It should be noted that these days cannot be completed within the assessed periods of work-based practice learning. Guidance on PDDs is available on the NISCC website: www.niscc.info

Personal & Professional Development Workbook

All students are required to maintain a Personal Development Workbook (sometimes called a ‘Reflective Log’) which will be used throughout the programme as a key learning tool. While the workbook will not be assessed, and while students are not required to share the contents, they will be expected to use the material to inform certain assessed pieces of work. They will be encouraged to be creative and flexible in terms of how they develop the workbook and will be supported by their personal tutor and lecturers in doing so.

Individual Learning Plan

All students are required to develop an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) (Appendix 1), with their tutor at the beginning of their studies. It will be an evolving document over time and carried by the student into their post qualifying life. It is a tool aimed at reducing the division between practice learning and teaching and bringing personal, practice and academic learning needs together. It seeks to provide a holistic, cumulative, developmental record of the individual’s learning journey.

The ILP will be reviewed a minimum of four times over the course of the academic year: as part of preparation for practice learning tutorials, at initial and mid-way practice learning meetings and at least once within college based tutor groups. This document will be used by the students to inform the initial practice learning planning meeting, in terms of helping to identify student learning needs. Therefore it is a requirement that students provide an updated and current Individual Learning Plan at the initial practice learning meeting and that where possible it is linked to the specific practice learning setting.

Direct Supervised Practice Learning

Students must complete two periods of practice learning; level 2 - 85 days; level 3 - 100 days (90 days direct practice component followed by 10 study days) In both periods of practice learning students MUST show that their practice is founded on values, carried out in a skilled manner and is informed by knowledge, critical analysis and reflection. However, there are significant distinctions in what should be reasonably expected from students on their first as opposed to their second practice learning opportunity. In the first period of practice learning, a beginning ability to apply values, knowledge and skills will be required. The student should be able to develop a more integrated, confident and competent application in the second period. More detailed guidance is provided in the Statements of Differentials of Practice Learning (page 50).
It should be noted that students who come to the agency may have no direct experience of social work services given that this is no longer a requirement for entry into the social work degree programme. We all must take collective responsibility to enable students during the induction period to achieve the level of competence necessary to begin effective interventions with service users. The practice teacher must be assured that the student is ready for direct practice with service users’ and their families.

A support plan is developed in the early stages of the practice learning period to enable students to achieve their learning outcomes. As adult learners students have a responsibility to use the Practice Learning Opportunity (PLO) to maximise learning and to use the support provided to promote their personal and professional development.

**PRACTICE LEARNING OPPORTUNITY (PLO)**

**Allocation of PLOs**

Across NI the five Health & Social Care Trusts, Voluntary Sector, Department of Justice and the Education Authority NI provide PLOs across a range of settings and programmes of care. NI has a tradition of providing high quality PLOs and course providers work in partnership to ensure that there are sufficient PLOs to meet demand. However it should be noted that due to a range of factors the preferences of students cannot always be accommodated. PLOs can be located anywhere in NI and therefore travel is an explicit part of the Degree in Social Work.

Allocation of PLOs is determined by availability and with due regard to students’ needs. All PLOs are allocated to make the best use of the practice learning resources available to students.

Students will be allocated to suitable PLOs throughout the course of the degree in social work and will be notified of these at the relevant time.

Students commencing PLO in August will normally be notified of site allocation by the University/Further Education College in early June.

Students commencing PLO in January will normally be notified of site allocation by the University/Further Education College in late November.

Please refer to Practice Learning Allocations Student Information Booklet 2017 available on the NIDSWP website [www.nidswp.net](http://www.nidswp.net) and also Blackboard/Course Support Area/Virtual Learning Environment for further information.
**Conditions Applying to PLOs**

**Criminal Declarations**

Prior to PLO commencing all students must declare any cautions, convictions or binding over whether or not “spent” and any pending matter. Students must agree to disclosure of same to any agency offering a PLO so that the appropriate personnel can be informed.

Information of this nature is treated with sensitivity and as confidential, with only a very limited number of people needing to know the details.

All employer organisations have policies and procedures with regard to Access NI disclosure and students are required to cooperate with them.

Each employer has a ‘duty of care’ to their service users and Directors of social work and Human Resources will be involved in decisions relating to criminal convictions. The nature of the PLO, employer responsibility and the values and standards governing the organisation, are all key factors when an employer is making the decision as to whether someone with a criminal conviction is suitable for a particular PLO.

Each organisation will have its own protocol and this may require the student to attend a meeting to discuss any criminal declaration.

**Student must advise the course director and practice teacher in the event any caution, conviction, binding over or pending matter arises during the PLO period.**

**NISCC Registration**

“The NISCC Rules for the Approval of the Degree in Social Work’ (May 2003) require the Course Provider to have in place arrangements to confirm that students are registered with NISCC.

Higher Education Institution (HEI) is required to see evidence that the student has:

a) applied to register with the NISCC; and
b) that an acknowledgement letter confirming an application to register has been received by the student from the NISCC” (Revised September 2010)

All social work students must be registered before they commence their first and final PLOs.

Students have a responsibility to ensure that they are registered as a social work student and that they have an up-to-date certificate of registration for the duration of their PLO, a copy of which will be required by the organisation providing the PLO prior to commencement.
A student who does not have an up-to-date certificate of registration will not be permitted to commence PLO and this could result in them having a gap before their studies can continue.

Registration with NISCC requires individuals to make a declaration about their health. Non-disclosure where there might be a risk to the safety/welfare of service users, other staff or self could have serious implications. Students must also ensure that they maintain their NISCC registration by paying the annual renewal fee on a timely basis. Failure to do so may have serious consequences in that NISCC will suspend registration pending payment. A student cannot continue on PLO if unregistered and any delay in re-registration may make the continuation of the PLO unviable.

Pre-Practice Learning Visits

Except in exceptional circumstances the student must undertake a pre–practice learning opportunity visit to the allocated site. This will help him/her begin to orientate him/herself to the context of the agency and to prepare for the practice learning period. The purpose of an informal pre–practice learning visit is:

- to enable the student, practice teacher, any on-site facilitator/supervisor and team to meet informally;
- to allow the student the opportunity to gain some insight into the organisation and service user group;
- to assist the student to identify recommended reading or guidance for “tuning into” the particular service users with whom they will be working;
- to allow all concerned to work out the practicalities of the site allocation and;
- to give the student opportunity to share the practice teacher’s report and their social work training passport from the previous PLO with the new practice teacher.

Practice Learning Meetings

The NISCC Practice Learning Standards (2.4.5) (Revised June 2009) state that course providers should ensure that “there are a minimum of two tripartite meetings....”

Practice Learning meetings are a key aspect of each PLO and involve the student’s training team. The training team is the umbrella term used to describe key people involved in the student’s practice learning. The team normally comprises the practice teacher, student, on-site facilitator/supervisor, if relevant, and tutor. The line manager of the team/faculty may also attend meetings as and when appropriate.

Given that students are studying for a professional qualification and the practice learning meetings focus on the individual’s personal and professional development and practice with service users and their families, it is not considered appropriate for persons other than the student’s training team to attend these meetings.
Initial Practice Learning Meeting

In the case of all students while face-to-face contact is preferable for the initial practice learning meeting there is room for a degree of flexibility. The option exists for this meeting to be held via teleconferencing/video conferencing or other such communication systems.

There exist however circumstances which would warrant a face-to-face meeting and in such situations this should be facilitated:

1. Situation where student has extenuating personal or medical circumstances
2. Situation where student is repeating PLO; is returning to the programme after a significant period of absence; or has experienced difficulties during a previous PLO
3. When any member of the student’s training team feels that a face-to-face meeting is required.
4. Where a practice teacher is undertaking the Practice Teacher Training Programme.

Purpose of initial meeting

The meeting allows key issues such as:

- the working terms and conditions;
- student’s learning needs;
- practice learning requirements;
- supervision;
- key roles and social work standards;
- assessment;
- practical arrangements and
- process for dealing with any issues/concerns should they arise

to be addressed, clarified and agreed.

In order that practice learning periods can proceed without undue impediments, it is important that all parties involved in the learning agreement review the student’s previous professional and life experiences in light of the demands of the learning period to come.

Students may wish to consult their tutor prior to the initial practice learning agreement meeting if they believe that any past or current issue, either personal or professional, might need to be discussed.

If a student has particular support needs it may be necessary to consult with others at the planning stage to ensure that the necessary supports/reasonable adjustments are in situ prior to the PLO commencing.
‘Supporting social work students with disabilities undertaking practice learning opportunities’ (Appendix 6) provides guidance for supporting students who may require reasonable adjustments to enable them to fully maximise learning while undertaking PLO.

It is recommended that within the first 2 and no later than 3 weeks of the PLO the practice learning agreement should be negotiated and signed off. The agreement should be negotiated between all members of the training team – the student, practice teacher, tutor and if applicable the on-site facilitator/ supervisor(s). This must be recorded on the standard pro-forma and should be completed and signed by all participants at the time of the meeting (Appendix 3). Practice teacher and tutor must each chair and record one of the meetings. This should be negotiated and agreed prior to the meeting.

Mid-point Review Meeting

The mid-point review is a crucial point in the assessment of the practice learning period. Despite its name, it should not be held until the practice teacher in consultation with the student, on-site facilitator/supervisor, if applicable, and tutor, is satisfied that there has been enough work undertaken and reported on to allow for an interim judgement on the student’s progress. It is recommended that this is no later than week 8 of the PLO.

The mid-point practice learning meeting should be face-to-face.

If the initial PL meeting was face-to-face in the practice learning setting then the expectation is that the mid-point meeting will take place in the academic setting.

The mid-point is where the student’s progress is discussed and recorded. During the mid-point review the student will be required to make a presentation for no more than 10 minutes. The meeting is the forum in which any issues are raised and a process and timescale are agreed to address them.

It is the responsibility of the practice teacher to co-ordinate the completion of the relevant sections of the mid-point review pro-forma and to send them to the tutor one week before this meeting (Appendix 4). It is normal practice that the student, practice teacher and on-site facilitator/supervisor will have shared their progress reports before the mid-point meeting.

Additional Practice Learning Meeting(s)

It is accepted that difficulties relating to practice competence can arise that may require one or more additional review meetings. The purpose of such a review meeting may be to identify concerns and agree a plan of action, including timeframes. A subsequent meeting would be set in order to review the action plan and progress. It is essential that all additional review meeting(s) are recorded. The process to be followed for additional review meetings is similar to that followed for the mid-point review. The pro-forma contained in Appendix 5 should be used for this process. The relevant sections of the pro-forma should be completed and shared
prior to the meeting. The practice teacher should summarise his/her concerns with reference to each of the social work standards and if relevant the NISCC Standards of Conduct for Social Work Students (2015).

The student should be made fully aware of the practice teacher’s assessment of their level of competence and whether or not the recommendation is a passing or failing one at this point in time.

**Protocol for Dealing with Factors Affecting Progression of Practice Learning (NIDSWP: Revised version; June 2013). Appendix 14**

There exists a range of factors that may impinge on the progress of a student’s practice learning. Some of these may impede the student’s professional development whilst others may affect the student’s continued involvement in the degree in social work course. These can include situations where there are factors beyond the student’s control, situations of inadequate learning opportunities, extreme difficulties or situations where a student’s behaviour/practice/conduct is deemed to be damaging or dangerous to service users.

This protocol aims to provide direction as to the process to be followed when dealing with one or more factors impacting on the progression of practice learning. The protocol does not aim to cover every eventuality however its underpinning principles should be followed in any situation where there are issues.

The Protocol details the steps to be taken when there is a concern in relation to one or more of the above factors. Practice teachers, students, tutors and others involved in the delivery of practice learning should also familiarise themselves with NISCC and HEIs “Fitness for Practice” procedures. In situations where issues arise it is essential that supervision notes and minutes of meetings clearly reflect discussion of the issues, the agreed action plan and outcomes.

Please refer to
[http://www.ulster.ac.uk/guide/](http://www.ulster.ac.uk/guide/)
[http://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/AcademicStudentAffairs/AcademicAffairs/GeneralRegulations/Procedures/FitnesstoPractiseProcedure/](http://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/AcademicStudentAffairs/AcademicAffairs/GeneralRegulations/Procedures/FitnesstoPractiseProcedure/)
for further details of Fitness for Practice Procedures.

**STUDENT’S TRAINING TEAM**

**Roles and Responsibilities**

**Student:**
- ensure their registration with NISCC is current and advise NISCC of any change in circumstances e.g. leave of absence, serious health issues; change of name/address;
- ensure NISCC annual renewal fee is paid promptly
- prepare individual learning plan and identify learning needs
- complete student profile
- arrange pre-practice learning visit
- take responsibility for own learning i.e. make suggestions as to work which they can undertake, submit additional written pieces for feedback on own initiative, raise discussion about things they have read, bring items for inclusion in supervision/tutorial agenda
- complete relevant section of mid-point review pro-forma and send to practice teacher one week before meeting
- complete relevant section of pro-forma for any additional practice learning meetings
- keep their social work training passport up-to-date, share it in supervision and ensure it is signed by the practice teacher
- actively participate in supervisory process
- undertake written work as appropriate to support learning (see Section 4 Evidence Requirements)
- submit assignments in line with university programme requirements
- ensure that the practice teacher has a copy of both assignments by the date stipulated in the practice learning calendar (Appendix 13)
- inform practice teacher and/or tutor of any PLO issues, personal issues or change in circumstances that may have the potential to impact adversely on his/her ability to engage fully in the learning experience
- engage in a review of the practice learning experience with practice teacher
- participate in FHEI evaluation of PLO
- raise any issues/concerns during the PLO period (see below)

NB: On occasion, personal issues may have the potential to impact adversely on the student’s ability to engage fully in the learning experience. In situations where potential or actual difficulties may emerge, they need to be satisfactorily managed within the context of the student, practice teacher, tutor relationship while adhering to the PLO requirements and expected level of competence.

All those students commencing their level 3 period of practice learning or who are repeating a period of practice learning must provide the successive practice teacher with a copy of their previous practice teacher report.

Where a student's previous PLO was incomplete then he/she must provide their subsequent practice teacher with a copy of the progress report from the previous PLO.

Practice Teacher:
- facilitate the learning experience for the student
- prepare for practice learning period and plan how to access the practice learning opportunities to enable the student to meet the requirements. If required, liaise with the agency practice learning coordinator.
- provide regular supervision to the student. The NISCC Practice Learning Standards (revised June 2009) state that each student should have individual development supervision with his/her practice teacher of a minimum of 2 hours per fortnight up to the mid-point of Level 3
- directly observe the student's practice on at least three occasions (one of these observations, where appropriate, may be carried out by another accredited practice teacher)
• co-ordinate and complete the relevant sections of midway review pro-forma and send to the tutor one week before this meeting
• complete relevant sections of pro-forma for any additional practice learning meetings and share with student and tutor prior to the meeting
• assess the student’s practice and attend Practice Assessment Panel (PAP) and Board of Examiners if required.
• ensure student social work training passport proforma is signed and submitted with practice teacher report
• maintain student records in line with DHSSPS Good Management Good Records, 2011
• undertake a review of practice learning experience with each student
• complete evaluation of PLO as per agency requirements
• ensure assessment of student competence at Level 3 includes an operational line manager’s endorsement (Appendix 12) of the student’s practice as required under Criterion 2.6.5 of NISCC Practice Learning Standards: 2009

• Guidance Note: 'Where the operational Line Manager does not have sufficient knowledge of the Student’s practice, it is appropriate in such circumstances for the endorsement to be completed by the On-Site Supervisor/Facilitator as long as he/she is social work qualified'. (NISCC: June 2012)

Tutor:
• provide tutorial support to the student
• help the student identify learning needs
• regularly liaise with the practice teacher when concerns/difficulties arise
• contribute to mid-point review and complete relevant sections of pro-forma
• contribute to any additional practice learning meetings, complete relevant section of pro-forma and share with practice teacher and student prior to the meeting
• monitor the practice learning period.
• offer additional support to student as appropriate
• support student to raise concerns/issues in circumstances where he/she feels unable to do so

On – Site Facilitator/Supervisor:
• provide day to day management, guidance and support
• give feedback on student’s practice to student and practice teacher
• attend initial and mid-point review meeting and any additional meetings as required
• contribute to the assessment of the student’s practice

Good Records Management: Retention of Student Records

The DHSSPS Good Management Good Records was revised (November 2011) and substantial changes were made in relation to the management, retention and disposal of records. Changes included the addition of new categories of records and
specific details regarding retention periods. The revised guidance applies to both paper and electronic records.

Specific reference is made to student information and social work-training records with the retention period being 10 years following completion of PLO.

The Partnership has developed the following guidance to assist organisations and particularly practice teachers to meet the requirement in terms of retention; however it will be the responsibility of each Designated Practice Learning Provider (DPLP) to ensure that whatever approach is taken it meets the organisation’s audit and governance requirements.

- It should not be necessary to retain any records other than the Student’s supervision folder (See Appendix 2 for suggested content). Practice Teachers should ensure that supervision contract, supervision records, social work standards matrix and practice assessment report are sufficiently detailed and explicit to demonstrate the formative assessment process and the final assessment outcome.
- Copies of the student’s travel documentation should be retained on the student’s supervision file for the period of the PLO. Copies may also be retained by the DPLP’s travel claims department /Human Resources.
- Case specific records should be contained within the service user’s file
- It should not be necessary to retain learning/development tasks post exam board. Where there are difficulties and the PAP requires sight of additional practice evidence the practice teacher will be contacted directly.
- The evidence folder should also be retained normally for one year. This supports the summary matrix and demonstrates that the required standard has been met with regard to the social work standards.

Supervision and the Supervisory relationship

The NISCC Practice Learning Standards (Revised 2009) outline that each student should have individual development supervision of 2 hours per fortnight up to the mid-point of Level 3. This is in addition to professional case supervision and any other support activity. Supervision is viewed as a shared responsibility between the student and practice teacher (and on-site facilitator), in terms of agreeing agenda, recording and completing agreed tasks. Currently most agencies offer weekly supervision of 1.5 hours and they also provide supervision throughout the full period of practice learning at both Level 2 (L2) and Level 3 (L3.)

Where a model of fortnightly group supervision is offered to students, this must be no less than 2 hours. This must also be supplemented by alternate fortnightly individual supervision of 2 hours duration.

A supervision contract outlining the detail of how the practice teacher and student will work together, particularly in addressing concerns, should be completed in addition to the learning agreement. Sample templates are available in the Practice Teacher and Student Toolkit, August 2015 which is available on NIDSWP website (www.nidswp.net) and via DPLP Practice Learning Coordinators.
Support should be available to the practice teacher in the undertaking of their role. To aid consistency in how this support is provided the NiDSWP have issued the following guidance:

**Principles relating to how Practice Teachers are supported within organisations:**

- Every practice teacher should have supervision in relation to their practice teaching role by someone who is occupationally competent
- Each practice teacher should have a named person who provides this supervision on a regular basis
- Organisations should provide support and guidance as required
- Supervision should focus on the practice teacher’s role and function in relation to practice learning management and assessment
- Supervision should include sampling the practice of the practice teacher
- Organisations should ensure that they facilitate the practice teacher’s attendance at standardisation meetings; support groups; practice teacher workshops; annual review of practice learning and other continuous professional development opportunities
- Organisations should ensure that practice teachers have access to advice and guidance when there are concerns regarding the student’s competence
- Have in place arrangements to support practice teachers who assess a student as failing

It is intended that individual organisations will put in place appropriate arrangements to uphold these principles.

**Induction to PLO**

Students should be provided with an induction orientation period to assist them in getting a sense of the context and work of the organisation, team, agency and the needs of service users. This is vital in helping them cope with the natural anxiety and worry generated by the challenges of the new practice learning period. Opportunities for observation, reading and reflection should be built into the early period of practice learning.

The practice teacher is required during the induction period to make a judgement that the student has been able to demonstrate a sufficient understanding of the agency and his/her role and function in order to begin to move into direct work with service users/carers.
The induction is also the occasion for the agency to introduce to the student policies regarding such areas as absenteeism, information governance, health and safety and personal protection including lone worker policies where they exist. It is vital that agency policies with regards to these matters are drawn to the student’s attention in order that they can become fully conversant with them. (NISCC: Practice Learning Standard 3.5.1 (Revised June 2009).

**Recall Days and Study Days**

During the practice learning period all students will be recalled to University/College. Recall days are an integral part of the programme and an essential requirement for students. Normally non-attendance must be discussed and negotiated with the student’s tutor in advance of the “recall day”. It is the student’s responsibility to advise the practice teacher of his/her non-attendance.

**NB:** Recall days contribute to the total number of PLO days and if a student is absent he/she is required to make up this time in order to fulfil the NISCC attendance requirements. Guided study days also contribute to the total number of PLO days and as such should not be used to make up missed recall days.

Please see academic calendar (Appendix 13) for further detail.

**Guided Study**

It is important that students have guided study time for reading, evaluation and completion of learning tasks allocated by the practice teacher.

UGR 2 and RGR 2 full-time and part-time students completing 85 days PLO should have 8 guided study days during the designated practice learning period.

UGR 3 and RGR 3 full-time and part-time students completing 100 days PLO should have 7 guided study days during the designated practice learning period.

For level 3 students the practice element of the PLO is completed 10 days before the end of the designated period. This is to allow students 10 days to complete their final practice learning assignment. (See academic calendar for further details: Appendix 13)

Guided study arrangements should be discussed and agreed at the initial learning agreement meeting and any subsequent changes should be agreed in supervision.

It is envisioned that each week students will have preparation for both work and supervision which will require them to make use of their study time, therefore sizeable blocks of study days must not be ‘stockpiled’.

The location for guided study time i.e. in the agency or elsewhere is at the discretion of the agency. However flexibility and negotiation is encouraged.

**Principles underpinning guided study time – it is:**

- An integral part of the student’s learning to practice
A guided activity to promote professional development
Commensurate with the needs’ of the student
Managed by the practice teacher and student through the supervisory process
Linked directly to student’s work with service users/carers
Part of the working day
For the sole purpose of study and cannot be used to make up any absence from PLO e.g., sickness, recall day


In the interests of service users and as representatives of the social work profession students are required to adhere to the NISCC Standards of Conduct for Social Work Students (2015) and the practice standards set out in the NI Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work 2014. They should make sure that they have thoroughly acquainted themselves with their responsibilities under the standards and framework prior to commencing practice learning. Throughout the practice learning period students should continue to use the standards and framework to inform and guide their practice.

This includes the use of social networking sites.

Use of Social Networks

As registrants students should note the following guidance issued by NISCC (2011). ‘Social networking sites have grown in popularity over recent years and many Registrants now frequently use them. Such websites can be great for keeping in touch with friends and colleagues on a social basis and in the vast majority of cases the use of sites such as Facebook is trouble free.

The Pitfalls

There can be occasions when a Registrant’s personal life and work life may start to overlap online. NISCC has been made aware of some cases where Registrants have allowed service users to be a ‘friend’ online. Please note that this is totally unacceptable as it creates a personal relationship outside of the workplace. Furthermore, it leaves Registrants open to allegations regarding comments that they make online. There have been recent cases where members of the public have complained to the Council regarding comments posted on social networking sites by Registrants. These cases have highlighted how apparently innocent comments can be offensive to individuals. The Council would remind Registrants that anything they write online may leave them open to scrutiny from the public/service users and could potentially be viewed as misconduct.

The Council recommends that you...
1. ...review your security settings so that only those people on your friends list can access your information.
2. ...assist your colleagues by informing them if you notice anything on their webpage which may be misconstrued.
Please note that you should never...
1. ...make reference to any service user or work related issue.
2. ...state your employer/place of employment on social networking sites (this includes PLO).
3. ...put photos online which identifies your place of work or service users.
4. ...accept service users or their family members as online friends. You should delete any service user and their family members from your friends list immediately.

Please be aware that...
1. ...some service users may search online for information about Registrants involved with their care.
2. ...no matter how careful you are, what you write online can often end up in the public domain.
3. ...you may be in breach of the NISCC Standards of Conduct for Social Work Students if you
   a) comment on confidential work related issues and especially those which involve service users.
   b) make comments that may be offensive to people of a different race/religion/gender/sexual orientation or those with a disability.
4. ...under Standard 5 you must uphold public trust and confidence in social work services whether you are in work or outside work.

Students should also refer to their respective FHEIs Social Media Policy.

QUB:  
http://go.qub.ac.uk/socialmedia

UU/FE  
http://www.ulster.ac.uk/guide/

In line with the Framework Specification students also have a responsibility to ensure that they have obtained informed consent from service users prior to commencing work with them. Students should follow the principles set out in the DHSSPS Circulars “Consent in Social Care” (July 2004) and “Good Practice in Consent: Consent for Examination, Treatment or Care” (2003).

It is important for students to remember that once registered with NISCC as a student they are required to inform NISCC of any changes to the information they have supplied for the purpose of registration. Failure to do so may be treated as misconduct.

Use of specialist equipment and mobile phones

At times students with particular support needs may require reasonable adjustments to be made and this may include the use of specialist equipment to assist with recording and written work. There are an increasing number of students using specialist equipment such as voice recognition packages; audio recording devices
and IT support packages. Using these on PLO is not always straightforward because of IT Departments’ requirements, data protection and governance arrangements.

Students should note that the use of specialist equipment including USB/live scribe pens and recording devices must comply with the PLO provider organisation’s:

- Governance standards
- Good Practice Guidance
- Policies and procedures

with regard to data management and storage. As part of induction students should familiarise themselves with the requirements of the organisation. Students should also familiarise themselves with DHSSPS Good Management Good Records (2011).

Students are reminded that under no circumstances should they remove confidential information from the PLO setting. This includes information stored on recording devices and/or documents for external readers. While the equipment may belong to the student the data specific to service users and carers belongs to the organisation and therefore should not leave the organisation.

**All information must be removed from recording devices before a student leaves PLO and this should be confirmed by the practice teacher.**

Practice teacher and student should discuss the use of such equipment at the earliest possible opportunity. The agreement reached in relation to usage, data protection and storage should also be recorded at the initial practice learning meeting.

Students should not store service users’ data, such as telephone numbers /addresses, on their personal mobile phones and are advised that under no circumstances should they share their personal contact details with service users/carers.

**Student concerns/complaints: (PLO/Post PLO)**

*You are enrolled on an education and training programme that is preparing you to enter a profession that carries with it great privilege and responsibility. As a social work student, you should be proud of the profession you have joined and look forward to upholding its values and standards. (Standards of Conduct for Social Work Students, NISCC 2015:3).*

As registrants with NISCC students must demonstrate that they are able to adhere to the NISCC Standards of Conduct for Social Work Students (2015) and the Practice Standards contained within the Northern Ireland Framework Specification (2014). Course Providers including Further/Higher Education Institutions (F/HEIs) and employer organisations all share responsibility for supporting students to meet these NISCC requirements. However students also have responsibility for their practice and professional development throughout the course.
The Degree in Social Work course promotes 3 main elements of professional development:

- **Ethical Practice**;
- **Professional Responsibility and Accountability**;
- **Professional Competence**.

As detailed in the Framework Specification, (key roles 1 & 2), students are required to manage ethical issues, dilemmas and conflicts and practice in a responsible and accountable manner. This is challenging and requires utilisation of a range of skills such as negotiation; dealing with conflict; communicating in an open, respectful and honest manner and being prepared to challenge others. This also involves recognising when it is necessary and appropriate to seek support and guidance.

Effective working relationships and good communication are key aspects of social work practice and to working well together. As a social worker it is not essential that you always like or be friendly with colleagues irrespective of their discipline/profession but it is a requirement that all disciplines/professionals behave appropriately and treat each other with dignity and respect.

**Opportunities to raise concerns/issues**

It is recognised that on occasions difficulties can arise for students relating to:
- working in an agency
- being a student on PLO within an agency
- working relationships

There may be times when students find it difficult to address e.g. relationship difficulties, differing viewpoints and/or conflicts and other situations. The practice teacher and where applicable on-site supervisor have a role to play in helping students to raise concerns and finding a resolution.

There exist throughout the PLO both formal and informal opportunities for issues/difficulties to be raised and discussed:

1. The initial practice learning meeting focuses on a number of key areas, including how difficulties/issues should be addressed during the PLO. The process for managing difficulties/issues should be discussed, agreed and recorded in the practice learning initial agreement so that everyone including the student is clear about his/her role and responsibilities.

2. Further opportunities for the student to raise any concerns/issues will be available at the mid-point review meeting and, if applicable, at any additional practice learning review meetings.

3. Supervision sessions are another forum in which issues/difficulties should be raised. The process should be discussed and agreed as part of the supervision agreement between student and practice teacher and should be a standing item on the agenda for supervision. All such discussions should be noted as part of the supervision record and signed by both parties. Any agreed further action should also be recorded.
It is an important part of the Practice Teacher’s role to check with the student on a regular basis that they are satisfied with the supervisory process and the progression of the PLO. The Practice Teacher should also raise with the student, in a timely manner, any concerns/issues he/she might have about the progression of the PLO.

4. A student can request a meeting at any time with his/her practice teacher should they feel the need to do so.

5. A student has the right to consult with his/her personal tutor if they feel they cannot discuss an issue with their practice teacher or have raised an issue with their practice teacher which has not been resolved to their satisfaction.

6. In circumstances where a student has raised an issue but feels at the end of the practice learning period that it remains unresolved there is opportunity to reiterate the concern in PLO feedback to the provider organisation and/or FHEI. The concern will be escalated to a more senior person in the organisation for a response. This pertains solely to issues raised during the PLO.

While it is acknowledged that it can be difficult to raise certain issues, such as conflicts or relationship difficulties, the sooner matters are made known the sooner they can be addressed. Making a decision to do nothing could impact on the student’s progress, working relationships or the continuation of the PLO.

It is neither good practice nor appropriate to defer raising any concern/issues or making a complaint until the practice learning period has ended.

Process

Stage 1 – Informal process
The process for dealing with issues must begin at the lowest possible level and should generally begin within the student’s training team. Thus there should be discussion with the practice teacher, personal tutor and if appropriate on–site supervisor. The training team should normally be aware of any concerns/issues before it is brought to the attention of others within the organisation such as a line manager.

Best practice indicates that early and informal intervention is the most effective method of dealing with concerns/issues. An informal approach often serves to reduce the potential for conflict between the individuals concerned or indeed for difficulties to escalate. In situations where a student is dissatisfied or concerned he/she has a professional responsibility to raise such concerns at the earliest opportunity.

It is important that such concerns/issues are raised at an early stage before they have the opportunity to develop further. It is crucial that situations of misunderstanding are not allowed to develop into conflict and students/practice teachers/on–site supervisors should endeavour to address the situation through the supervisory process in the first instance.
In circumstances where a student feels that he/she cannot approach the practice teacher or on-site supervisor they should discuss the matter with their personal tutor and/or agency Practice Learning Co-ordinator and seek their support to communicate concerns/issues.

It may be necessary to convene an additional meeting to discuss the issues and find a resolution. There should be a signed written record of the discussion and outcomes, including further action if applicable.

Alternatively the student could ask for a facilitated meeting (facilitator would be identified by the Agency Practice Learning Co-ordinator) with the other individual in order to move towards an informal resolution. Again the student has the right to consult with their personal tutor. There should be a written record of the issues raised and how they have been resolved.

Where it would appear that there may be serious relationship difficulties a student or any other member of the training team may request that the regional Protocol for Dealing with Factors Affecting the Progression of Practice Learning to be invoked.

While there would be reasons as to why an issue was not raised sooner it may happen that a student chooses to delay raising an issue until the PLO has ended.

In such circumstances, it is recommended that normally this should be within six months of the last day the student was on the PLO site.

**Stage 2: Formal process - Student Complaint**

If it has not been possible to resolve the issue at the lowest level then student may choose to make a formal complaint and should use the mechanisms available to them within the organisation.

For many situations Stage 2 should only be initiated when the informal process has been exhausted and matters remain unresolved.

However there may be circumstances where the matter is so serious that an informal resolution is not appropriate and it should go straight to Stage 2.

Although individual situations may vary the NIDSWP have issued principles to which any organisation providing PLOs should adhere:

- Reference must be made to existing agency documentation which may influence how to make a complaint for example, bullying and harassment policy/whistleblowing policy/complaints policy (a list of such policies should be made available to the student during their induction to the agency, along with details of how they can be accessed).
- Students should be made aware the Standards of Conduct for Social Work Students (2015).
• Confidentiality should be maintained within this process – information should only be supplied to those with a need to know. **Individuals should not discuss specific complaints with others not involved in the process.**

Where a complaint has been investigated and found to be unsubstantiated but concerns have been raised about conduct/competence/behaviour of the complainant or complainee the matter may be referred to HEI, employer organisation and/or NISCC.

**Complaint about a student’s conduct / practice**

Students may occasionally find themselves in the position where a complaint has been made against them during a PLO.

Students should be provided with guidance/procedures on how a complaint against them may be addressed,

- Students should have knowledge of any complaints procedure existing in the organisation within which they are based. (A list of such policies should be made available to the student along with details of how they can be accessed).
- Students should be aware of the NISCC Standards of Conduct for Social Work Students (2015) and this should be discussed with them in the context of professional practice and accountability.
- Students’ attention should be drawn to “Fitness to Practice” procedures within their academic institution.
- All above documentation must be drawn to the attention of the student during their induction to the agency.
- Confidentiality should be maintained within this process – information should only be supplied to those with a need to know. **The student may in such circumstances discuss the matter with their personal tutor or Agency Practice Learning Co-ordinator.**

Practice teachers, tutors and students should also familiarise themselves with the following documents:

- *Protocol for Dealing with Factors Affecting Progression of Practice Learning: June 2013.*

**Travel/travel expenses related to work on behalf of the organisation hosting your Practice Learning Opportunity**

Geographical location of PLOs is a key factor which impacts on the allocation process. PLOs cover a wide geographical area and travel is an explicit part of the Degree in Social Work Course.
Students will therefore be expected to travel and students will need to be prepared to travel to their PLO destination.

In circumstances where a student refuses an offer of a PLO on the basis of travel she/he will not normally be offered an alternative PLO for that designated period of Practice Learning.

It should be noted that there is a division of responsibility regarding PLO travel expenses.

As part of the DoH (formerly DHSSPS) incentive scheme those students on this scheme receive £500 per year towards practice learning travel expenses. This is for travel to and from PLO. Agencies pay student expenses in respect of travel they undertake in order to carry out work on behalf of the organisation. Students will be informed of mileage rates by the DPLP providing the PLO and should claim travel expenses in line with agency procedures. The requirements of the agency in terms of the process for travel expenses claims and the receipts required should be discussed and recorded at the initial practice learning meeting. The requirement to have appropriate and current documentation relating to driving licence, business insurance, tax, MOT and vehicle registration should also be noted. Each student will be expected to provide copies of these documents to the appropriate department and also to the Practice teacher. Practice teachers should retain a copy of all travel documentation in the student’s supervision file.

Normally practice teachers need to verify and process student expenses claims and may be responsible for checking vehicle documentation however in some cases the latter is the responsibility of the department processing the claim.

Absence from the Practice Learning Opportunity

PLO requirements

It should be noted that normally students are required to complete the 85 or 100 days PLO within the designated practice learning timeframe.

Therefore if circumstances arise, prior to PLO commencing, which are likely to preclude the student from completing the designated period of practice learning then he/she should immediately advise their personal tutor and the practice learning coordinator. A student should not take up the offer of a PLO in the knowledge that he/she will not be able to complete the required number of days.

Students cannot take time out of the PLO for the purpose of holidays and therefore should not make arrangements to do so as such absences will not be accommodated. Students may not request either time out or a different working pattern to facilitate paid employment.

Absence from PLO

Where illness or other urgent and unavoidable circumstances necessitate absence from PLO the student must notify the team/facility and also the practice teacher.
The student is required to follow the absenteeism policy and procedures of the organisation in which he/she is placed.

If a student is unfit for PLO due to ill-health, injury or urgent unavoidable circumstances, he/she must notify the manager/on-site facilitator and practice teacher at the earliest opportunity. Notification should be via telephone (not text) and normally not later than 10.00am on the first morning of the first day of absence. Student must provide information on the general nature of the illness/absence and if possible, some indication of the expected duration of the absence. This information is essential as the line manager may need to make arrangements to cover the student’s work.

Student must keep in regular contact with his/her practice teacher, line manager and tutor. Student should not expect the tutor to communicate this information on his/her behalf. It is the responsibility of the student to contact members of his/her training team as necessary. Failure to do so may result in withdrawal of the PLO.

In order to meet NISCC requirements a student must complete 85/100 days PLO as appropriate. **Therefore any absences from PLO must be ‘replaced’**. A record of absences should be maintained (Appendix 2) and also a written agreement should be reached as to how any missed days/hours will be made up.

In the case of ‘missed days’ due to illness/urgent and unavoidable circumstances the following will normally apply:

**Up to and including 5 missed days:**

The student **must** make up these days/hours as agreed with practice teacher. Study time cannot be used to make up absences.

**6- 10 missed days:**

The student must make up these days/hours as agreed with practice teacher, tutor and on –site facilitator. This is likely to involve negotiation of an extension to the practice learning period. Any renegotiation of the end date of the PLO will depend on the needs of the PLO provider, the needs of service users and the services delivered.

Applications for extensions to hand–in dates will be considered.

**More than 10 missed days:**

PLO would normally be discontinued. Any exception to this must be reported to Professional Officer, NIDSWP including the reason upon which the decision is based.
In arriving at a decision to continue or discontinue a PLO the training team will need to consider the individual circumstances of each student, in consultation with the DPLP/ADPLP Practice Learning Co-ordinator and/or Senior Manager as appropriate. It may be necessary to renegotiate the end date of the PLO period. Any renegotiation will be dependent on the needs of the PLO provider and service users.

If a student's competence and development is considered to be marginal no extension will be made to the PLO, i.e. no additional days will be given, to allow the student opportunity to bring his/her performance up to the required standard.

Jury Service

QUB
If a student is called for jury service essentially she/he should present with their summons at the Student Guidance Centre which will then supply a letter seeking exemption and explaining the grounds for this request – this is usually accepted by the Court Service.

UU/FE
If a student is unsure as to what to do then she/he should contact their Course Director as a matter of priority.

PLO: Hours of work

Full time students are required to work 37.5 hours weekly, which is the standard working hours for most agencies. Part-time students are required to work 37.5 hours per fortnight. Some agencies may require work outside 9 - 5 office hours e.g. weekends and evening work. Some PLO settings may require home visits outside of office hours.

Students located in residential and supported living settings will normally be required to work shifts which may include evenings, overnights and weekends.

Only those students who have been accepted as having individual circumstances within the defined criteria may, if deemed necessary, have adjustments made to the working pattern of the PLO. However they are still required to meet the NISCC requirements as detailed above.

Organisations may be prepared to accommodate a degree of flexibility. Students, as is the case with employees, do not have an automatic right to flexibility in the workplace. The needs of service users and the requirements of the agency are key factors when such requests are being considered. (Please refer to Practice Learning Opportunities - Information Booklet for Students; August 2017, which is available on the NIDSWP website (www.nidswp.net)).
Supervised and assessed practice learning should offer a range of experiences to students to help them understand, acquire and demonstrate transferability of knowledge, skills and values in practice. To this end, nine practice learning requirements have been identified. These are the range of mandatory assessed practice opportunities which are to be offered over the course of the Social Work Degree. Students will be offered opportunities to gain experience of:

- Carrying out Statutory tasks
- At least two different settings
- Providing services to at least two user groups
- Group care
- Working with at least two other professionals
- The contested nature, scope and purpose of social work in a contested society
- Participating in formal decision making forums
- Participation and presentation of evidence to courts, tribunals or other formal hearings
- Applying community development approaches in social work

All students over the course of both their practice learning periods need to cover each of the above requirements **at least once**. With regard to working in at least two different settings and providing services to at least two user groups, it has been agreed that the Degree Partnership will endeavour to ensure that students meet these requirements through the practice learning allocations process. It is recognised, however, that there will be concerns regarding the expectations that all these practice learning requirements can realistically be covered on any one practice learning opportunity. Some sites will quite legitimately not be able to meet all of the requirements, particularly group care and community development.

With regard to participation and presentation to courts, tribunals or other formal hearings and with regard to community development, the NISCC have clarified that experience of these two learning requirements can be gained through action learning or project work where sufficient opportunities are not available in real-life practice.

Programme providers will ensure that these two requirements are part of the taught curriculum to make sure that students do acquire sufficient grounding. However agency providers and practice teachers are still encouraged to consider these two areas within actual periods of practice learning perhaps through some form of action learning work. The challenge is that all partners involved in the Degree should
ensure that consideration is actively given to all practice learning opportunities to ensure they meet as many of the requirements as possible.

**Guidance on meeting the Practice Learning Requirements**

It is recognised that the provision of experiences relating to particular practice learning requirements will be more problematic for some sites than others.

A general point, which relates to all nine practice learning requirements, is that students should be encouraged and facilitated to revisit the University/College teaching and any previous courses they have undertaken to date which relate to the requirements. Supervision with their practice teacher will assist them to integrate this teaching into practice. Students may also, while completing PLO, be able to access agency training as long as it is deemed relevant and appropriate. Such training should be related to the practice learning experience and should not significantly impact on the amount of time available for direct practice with service users.

**N.B**

Students at Level 2 are required to cover at least one of the following during their practice learning opportunity:

- Group care
- Community Development

Some of the specific learning requirements will now be addressed:

**Statutory Tasks**

This should be interpreted as broadly as possible in terms of helping students see the legal basis or mandate or limits to the work they are involved in. For example, students placed in a voluntary site should be in a position to be aware of the statutory basis underpinning the role and remit of the practice learning site, even if delegated from Trusts or another statutory body. In addition all social work agencies operate within the context of overarching pieces of legislation which will permeate and influence many aspects of practice.

**Participation and presentation to courts, tribunals or other formal hearings**

There is no expectation that this practice learning requirement will be met when the student is in a social work agency undertaking their practice learning experience. All students can meet this requirement by taking the modules on Court Work Skills within their academic teaching. However it should be recognised that there is a gap in the legal/procedural knowledge base (and its application) when a student commences his/her first practice learning opportunity as he/she will not yet have undertaken the module on court work skills.
There may however be ways to assist students to avail of opportunities to expand their knowledge and/or skills with regards to this practice learning requirement dependent on the type and nature of the first practice learning opportunity.

It is also acknowledged that students on both practice learning opportunities will rarely get the opportunity to undertake court, tribunals or formal hearing work while in agencies and that they may be placed in a site where none of these are immediately available.

Practice teachers are thus encouraged to attempt to negotiate with teams who do undertake such tasks for any opportunity for the student to:

- Shadow a social worker who is involved in any type of court, tribunals, formal hearing work related to the PLO service user group: e.g. vulnerable adult case, Article 18 report, DLA applications, detention for assessment under mental health legislation, review tribunal, residence order, child protection case conference, guardianship, Power of Attorney and Office of Care and Protection, etc.

- Examine the file of a recent case which involved any of the latter types of work and engage in purposeful discussions with the worker involved.

- Examine a case from initial referral through all the social work processes to maximum state intervention into service users’ lives and even “worst case scenario” (death of service user/ public inquiry).

- Liaise with Probation Service for a group of students to undertake a pre-planned visit to court to observe it in operation, exploring roles and responsibilities

Students may also be encouraged and facilitated to deepen their understanding by questioning -

- Why are formal hearings, tribunals and court work part of the social work process?

- What methods of intervention are used in such types of work?

- What are the theories / legislation/ policies / procedures used in this type of work?

- What skills, knowledge and values do social workers need to be effective in this type of work?

- What, if anything, is different in this type of work compared with other types of social work practice?
Community Development

The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and the Public Health Agency (PHA) have worked together to bring forward a Community Development Strategy for Health and Wellbeing 2012-2017. The HSCB and PHA view community development as a key tool to improve health and wellbeing.

“The Board and Agency want to see strong, resilient communities where everyone has good health and wellbeing, places where people look out for each other and have community pride in where they live”.

The Board and Agency are seeking a number of benefits such as:

- Helping to reduce inequalities;
- Strengthening partnership working with service users, the community and voluntary sectors and other organisations;
- Strengthening families and communities;
- Supporting volunteering and personal development; and
- Making best use of resources


The strategy approves the National Occupational Standards (2010) definition of community development as:

“enabling people to organise and work together to identify their own needs and aspirations; take action to exert influence on the decisions which affect their lives; improve the quality of their own lives, the communities in which they live, and societies of which they are a part. It is a long term value based process which aims to address imbalances in power and bring about change founded on social justice, equality and inclusion”.

How Community Development Works:

Community Development has always had an asset based approach which includes:

- the practical skills, capacity and knowledge of local individuals, families and groups;
- the passions and interests of local people that give them energy for change;
- the networks and connections – known as 'social capital’ – in a community, including friendships, neighbourliness and volunteering;
- the effectiveness of local community groups and voluntary associations;
- the resources of public, private, voluntary and community sector organisations that are available to support a community; and
- the physical and economic resources of a place that improve wellbeing.

(National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, 2009)
International evidence is clear that commissioners need to provide consistent leadership in relation to community development and that better outcomes are achieved when service users, carers, volunteers and communities are fully involved in decision making in their areas. 


Examples:

Some examples include grassroots practical innovative approaches of support, such as; meeting and greeting patients at Accident and Emergency Departments, developing a Cancer Survivor Programme and Self-Managing long term conditions. Through involving communities, families, groups and volunteers the regional plan aims to add value to the work of HSC staff.

The Regional Community Development Strategy and Regional Volunteering Plan will include support for community development approaches and innovation such as:

- Increased partnership approaches with the community sector;
- Working with communities on human rights issues, equality and social justice;
- Re-enablement agenda, helping older people to say at home for as long as possible: e.g. help with shopping, befriending, social support from communities;
- Recall Project: Medicine management/reminders;
- Nutrition Strategy: Meal time companions;
- Ambulance Service: Increased roles for volunteers;
- Mainstreaming volunteer roles in health and social care;
- Strengthen service users, active citizenship which improves/enhances service delivery;
- Enhancing Person Centred services and patient experience;
- Influencing and ensure strategic fit to Transforming Your Care agenda;
- Support vulnerable people and enhance quality of life;
- Increased person centred, self-directed support;
- Re-admission to hospital – prevention - “Tele care” and linking to community support;
- Seek coherence between linked strategies, community development, PPI, equality and patient experience;
- Systematically develop community development approaches in all aspects of their core business.

Community development approaches should be an integral part of all social work practice and not an add on.

This practice learning requirement can be met through a variety of ways and students can develop their practical understanding of community development in social work through work with individuals, groups and communities. In meeting this requirement students need to demonstrate an understanding of the key characteristics and practice of community development approaches.
Imaginative and creative thinking may be needed to help students to relate to the community development aspects of the area of practice in which they are involved.

The Community Development Performance Management Framework (Community Development Strategy for Health and Wellbeing 2012:19) provides a useful tool as it illustrates community development practice at a number of levels.

Students should be encouraged to explore it within the context of their practice learning setting and the service user group with whom they are working. The following are examples of key areas which could be considered:

- What is the role of community development within health and social care?
- How can you incorporate community development into your work with this service user group?
- What is the extent of service user involvement within the setting and or organisation?
- How is the service reviewed and evaluated?
- Critically evaluate your knowledge and experience of community development within social work practice. For example, what are the current gaps in community development work in relation to the practice learning site/service user group? In what ways could the service be enhanced?
- What innovative approaches are being taken in relation to health and wellbeing in relation to the service user group?
- How is partnership working with individuals, groups, communities promoted and achieved?
- Explore the levels of user involvement and engagement with the wider community within this practice learning setting?
- What is the relationship with the local or wider community sector?

Examples of action learning:

- Audit of service user involvement;
- Group work programme (e.g. personal development);
- Helping with group development and dynamics;
- Developing or strengthening links between group and health and social care services;
- Promoting and extending volunteering within an organisation which might include training needs;
- Satisfaction surveys on community initiatives, identify actions;
- Basic needs assessment;
- SWOT analysis.

Whichever approach or task is undertaken in relation to this requirement there should be explicit reference to the knowledge, skills and values developed during the work.
Group Care

Introduction
The NISCC requirements for practice learning stipulate that students must gain practice experience in group care. The following guidance notes outline an agreed regional approach to meeting this requirement.

Group care is defined as:

“Where people come together where there are elements of shared daily living activities and living or being within the life space of others”.

Therefore group care can be interpreted flexibly and examples are:
- Residential settings either full time or overnight/weekend
- Day care settings
- Supported living projects
- Outreach/drop-in projects
- Hospital settings

Example 1: A student based in a statutory fieldwork team could usefully undertake a reception assessment for day-care and/or residential services following one service user from point of referral to attendance or admission and complete the initial assessment and care plan

Example 2: A student in a statutory fieldwork team undertaking work at a voluntary advocacy drop-in project for the same User group.

In meeting this requirement there is an acknowledgement that there will major organisational challenges in providing these practice learning opportunities. It is also inevitable that this requirement will have an impact on service users living in group care settings and efforts should be made to minimise any disruption to service users. Demands on group care learning sites will therefore need to be carefully managed. The fact that a number of such learning sites may not have a qualified social worker on site with potentially no subsequent social work role modelling available to the student needs to be taken into account.

This requirement cannot be met through observation or simulation but must be met through direct work in a group care setting. The learning outcomes outlined in this section need to be addressed and the practice teacher should ensure that the student has sufficient learning opportunities in order to address the learning outcomes.

The fundamental purpose of group care learning is to provide the student with the opportunity to consider the range of care provision for users of service to promote and enable quality of life factors. When considering the relevance of accessing group care opportunities when the student is not placed in a core group care site, practice teachers should be mindful of the appropriateness of linking the student to a group care site.
Group care opportunities should not be sought unless there is a clear alliance to the core site and where the provider agency does have formal partnerships and alliances between community based and day care and residential units. Group care opportunities may not be accessible for all core sites across Northern Ireland.

**Learning Outcomes from Group Care Opportunities**

When undertaking group care opportunities students could achieve the following:

1. An increased understanding of the impact on service users of the process of transition through exploration of personal losses and gains within a group care environment;

2. An increased understanding of the impact on service users of institutional processes through exploration of group norms and behaviours;

3. An increased understanding of the concept of individual action through exploration of care planning; management of routines and unit policies;

4. An increased understanding of the role and function of group care services through an exploration of the continuum of care provision and the appropriateness of referrals to group care;

5. An increased repertoire of skills for working in the life space through exploration of relationship formation, group dynamics, observation skills, exchange of information skills and continuity of care skills.

These learning outcomes can be linked to the evidence requirements and the social work standards. Practice teachers should consider the outcomes as guides for the allocation of group care opportunities.

**Potential Work Opportunities:**

1. Complete the admission and review process with one service user;

2. Complete discharge and review process with one service user;

3. Undertake identified objectives from the care plan e.g., work with loss, self-esteem work;

4. Undertake identified project work e.g., facilitating information exchange regarding new policies or resources;

5. Undertake typical duties within group care e.g., complete skills in residential work; facilitate activity sessions in day care.

It should be noted that it is deemed appropriate for students to undertake personal care tasks associated with the nature of the PLO e.g. day care, residential, but this should not be the main or core role for students.
Minimum Requirements

Whilst it is recognised that some students may meet the learning outcomes within a shorter time frame, it is anticipated that 40 hours would be a reasonable time period in which to undertake identified group care opportunities. This would include associated preparatory, evaluative and reflective written work.

Conclusion

There are many and significant challenges in seeking to maximise the range of learning requirements that practice learning sites can offer students. The suggestions in this handbook are intended as a helpful beginning to this process.

The onus is on the practice learning provider, represented through the practice teacher and on-site facilitator/supervisor, to be clear about what the practice learning site can provide for the student and to address this clearly in the initial contracting meeting. Furthermore it is imperative that identified sites have considered the real possibility of accessing opportunities to meet all requirements particularly where the site is considered to be a core site, i.e. one where the student will undertake a substantial amount of their practice. This work is on-going and needs to continue across the statutory and voluntary sectors. It will also be informed by the NISCC Standards for Practice Learning Providers.

Nevertheless, regardless of how the situation develops, it remains critical, that if meaningful and purposeful opportunities are not available within a level two PLO the practice teacher must note this clearly to ensure appropriate allocation of a site is made for level three.
Section 3: Key Role Specification

The Degree seeks to prepare students to work in a broad range of situations and to respond to and contribute to change in the professional context. During their practice learning, students strive to take forward three main elements of professional development. Firstly, fundamentally and at the centre of everything, there is ethical practice in terms of the application of the professional value base. The NISCC Standards of Conduct for Social Work Students (2015) along with the “Statement of Expectations” from Service Users/Carers, (Northern Ireland Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work (DHSSPS, NISCC: 2014) need to influence the student’s practice. Secondly, professional competence needs to be demonstrated in relation to the knowledge, understanding and skills to promote service users well-being in preparing for and delivering direct practice. Finally there is the need for professional responsibility and accountability in seeking to understand and work within the contested nature, scope and purpose of social work in a diverse society. The inter-relationship and bringing together of these 3 elements are fundamental to “developing professional social workers whose practice is founded on values, is carried out in a skilled manner and is informed by knowledge, critical analysis and reflection.”

The six key roles laid out in the Northern Ireland Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work (DHSSPS: 2014) detail the key core skills, knowledge and standards that are required from all students to meet the required standard of competence. In the framework specification document, the links with the National Occupational Standards for Social Work (2011) (NOS) and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Benchmark Statements: – Academic Standards – Social Work, 2008 are made explicit. The key roles are further broken down into 20 standards which are required in order to fulfil these key roles. The standards are the general benchmark statements that explain the professional practice components of each key role. Students must demonstrate that they have achieved the key roles and associated standards whilst, as indicated above, adhering to and demonstrating the values and principles stated within the NISCC Standards of Conduct for Social Work Students (2014) and the Statement of Expectations (DHSSPS, NISCC: 2014:7.7) from individuals, families, carers, groups and communities who use services or those who care for them.

The Key Role Matrix

For the purposes of this handbook, the standards have been outlined in a matrix (Appendix 7). As indicated above, these 20 standards are considered essential for
confident and competent practice at levels two and three of the degree. They are required and mandatory for all students. Students and practice teachers should refer to the differential statements of outcome for each level of practice learning.

The matrix also details the expected performance criteria for each of the social work standards. (The associated acquired skills, as well as the knowledge and critical understanding needed, are omitted in this matrix but can be accessed in the Framework Specification document). The performance criteria are indicators of what the student must demonstrate at the end of the three years to ensure they meet the requirement of confident and competent practitioners. In addition suggestions as to appropriate evidence indicators for the standards are also provided. **It is not required for students to specifically reference how they have met each performance criteria.**

Students and practice teachers should note that universal terms are used for suggested evidence indicators, as practice learning will take place in a range of settings and sectors. With regard to the pieces of work the student is asked to undertake, they need to be able to describe, analyse, evaluate and reflect on how the work was prepared for, assessed, planned, taken forward and reviewed, in other words, **the social work process.** This will occur even in situations where it may not be formally recorded as such by the agency. It is therefore important that these indicators are viewed as **indicative only** and where an agency does not complete formal assessment/risk assessment reports consideration should be given to what the equivalent evidence could be within that particular setting. For example, assessment reports could be viewed as formal agency reports or professional judgements as to the user situation as prepared by the student for supervision. (See also Section 4 Evidence Requirements)

Finally the matrix provides space for the student and practice teacher to note emerging evidence. The matrix is a **key working document** during the practice learning period and can be used in a number of different ways:

- As a recording tool for the identification of the type of evidence being generated by the student;

- **A minimum of two, maximum of three pieces** should be cited for each social work standard;

- As an audit tool for the type of typical evidence that would demonstrate confidence and competence;

- As a verification tool for the practice teacher who can initial that the evidence was generated;

- As the final record of evidence.

**Practice teachers and students must use the matrix throughout the practice learning period, and a completed copy should be maintained within the student supervision folder. Only the summary matrix citing the evidence for each standard should be included in the Practice Teacher Report.**
matrix is a working document the summary sheet should reflect the on-going process of the student becoming competent and confident, i.e., work should be signed off at varying points throughout the PLO.
Section 4: Engaging in the Work, Gathering Evidence, and Meeting the Assessment Requirements

Practice learning is about learning from the work. Students will have the opportunity to engage in service provision across the range of areas that social work operates within. The Degree seeks to maximise the learning for students during these protected periods of practice. Every effort should be made to ensure that over both their practice learning periods, all students have access to a full range of learning opportunities and requirements. In addition, there needs to be clarity in what is expected from students in terms of their integration of knowledge and values and demonstration of skills in showing competent practice. Students will also require support and guidance in linking theory to practice. To assist practice teachers and students in doing this, it will be important that students share with practice teachers their learning and reading lists from academic modules, which can also be accessed through the programme handbooks. Programme handbooks are available through FHEIs websites.

It should be noted that evidence will be generated by the student in the “normal” course of undertaking their social work duties. The focus should be on carrying out the social work task and evidence generation will be the natural outcome. The practice teacher will ensure that the student has sufficient work to allow for the production of evidence and will require the student to undertake a number of written pieces of work during practice learning, not all of which will ultimately form part of the formal evidence requirements.
Evidence of Professional Development and Confident and Competent Practice

The six key roles and twenty social work standards are the baseline for all assessments of competence. In order to demonstrate the required level students must be proficient in all aspects of the social work process. Practice teachers cannot confirm competence unless they have assessed evidence - written and/or verbal of appropriate understanding and practice of all aspects of the social work process as noted within the key roles. This must be underpinned by explicit competence in skills at all levels, anti-oppressive practice and evidence based practice. Evidence should be generated throughout PLO to ensure essential formative assessment by practice teachers. In the summative assessment practice teachers are asked to explicitly discuss the competence of the student within the social work process.

Given that assessment of competence within the social work process is an integral part of the key roles, there needs to be flexibility as to how this is demonstrated during the timeline of the PLO. This should be reflective of the student’s professional development and learning journey. A number of CORE evidence requirements have been stipulated FOR ALL STUDENTS, and 1 DISCRETE REQUIREMENT FOR LEVEL TWO AND THREE.
The inner circle represents the required **core** evidence that all students would produce.

The three direct observations (DO’s) should be planned to reflect the developmental journey of the student particularly at level two. Please refer to page 55 for further guidance on the observations.

The completed matrix should cite a minimum of two and maximum of three sources of evidence from throughout the PLO against each standard. Students are encouraged to cite evidence that demonstrates competence across a number of standards.

The **core** and **discrete** formal evidence is the baseline for demonstrating competent practice but does not constitute all of the evidence a student may produce. The practice teacher can continue to ask for additional pieces to be completed where there are concerns that work is failing to meet the standard of competence required.

Practice teachers need to set learning tasks that are written such as tuning-in, evaluation, theory analysis, process records etc. They can also assess learning and development through verbal processing in supervision, presentations or meetings etc.

It is the responsibility of the practice teacher to outline clearly the rationale behind the learning task and there should be a clear link with the PROGRESSION TO COMPETENCE (positive and negative indicators and differential statements) and
AIDE FOR EFFECTIVE EVIDENCE documents. (See Appendix 8) These would also provide an explicit baseline for the final assessment report.

Any written learning tasks should normally have a word count of 1200-1500.

The Ladder of Learning (page 49) represents the broad steps to final confidence and competence with three stages delineated as to the focus for the development and evidence of learning. It should be noted that the three stages should not be measured in terms of number of weeks for each but are indicative of the incremental nature of learning that would be normally expected in an 85 or 100 day PLO.
THE LADDER OF LEARNING
AN INCREMENTAL APPROACH TO EVIDENCE OF
CONFIDENT & COMPETENT PRACTICE.

PLO ENDS PT COMPLETES REPORT

THROUGH ONGOING REFLECTION AND ANALYSIS,
SUPERVISION AND 1 DIRECT OBSERVATION PT ESTABLISHES
THAT STUDENT IS INTEGRATING KNOWLEDGE FOR
PRACTICE AND IS CONSISTENT IN APPLICATION.

THROUGH REFLECTION AND ANALYSIS AND SUPERVISION,
PT ESTABLISHES APPROPRIATE LEVEL OF COMPETENCE IN
ASSESSMENT, RISK AND DECISION MAKING.

THROUGH REFLECTION AND ANALYSIS OF KEY ASPECTS OF
PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE, SUPERVISION AND 1 DIRECT
OBSERVATION, PT ESTABLISHES ABILITY TO WORK WITHIN
THE SOCIAL WORK PROCESS AS APPROPRIATE TO PLO

THROUGH INDUCTION, INITIAL SUPERVISION,
LEARNING LOG, INITIAL TASKS AND 1 DIRECT
OBSERVATION, PT ESTABLISHES BASIC ABILITY TO
INTERACT WITH SERVICE USERS.

STUDENT STARTS WITH INDUCTION. THIS DETERMINES
GENERAL LEARNING NEEDS AND LEARNING CONTRACT
AND ESTABLISHES INITIAL LEARNING TASKS FOR
ASSESSMENT.

STARTING POINT
## Statements of Differential for Levels of Practice Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level Indicators</th>
<th>Level One Foundation</th>
<th>Level Two Application</th>
<th>Level Three Integrated Application</th>
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</table>
| **Knowledge**    | o Understanding of key theoretical concepts which inform social work practice | o Beginning ability to apply social work theories and methods to direct and inform practice  
  o Uses appropriate sociological/psychological material to further understanding of Service User’s situations  
  o Can relate knowledge of law and social policy to agency function. | o Demonstrates ability to select, apply and sustain appropriate social work methods and demonstrate explicit use of same  
  o Demonstrates informed and critical awareness of agency function  
  o Can critically apply a range of theoretical perspectives and research to support evidence-based practice |
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<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Level One Foundation</th>
<th>Level Two Application</th>
<th>Level Three Integrated Application</th>
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| **Skills** | o Demonstrates understanding of and ability to apply basic verbal and non-verbal skills of engagement  
  o Can produce a clear, concise and accurately presented written report | o Demonstrates ability to undertake social work role and related agency tasks  
  o Can use a range of social work skills appropriate to each stage of the social work process  
  o Demonstrates the ability to use verbal and non-verbal skills of engagement in a considered way  
  o Can express and present information clearly in verbal and written form  
  o Can demonstrate a beginning ability to use self  
  o Demonstrates a beginning ability to analyse, evaluate and reflect on practice  
  o Can manage time and own workload competently, with guidance | o Demonstrates confident and competent use of a range of verbal and non-verbal communication skills, including the ability to respond to complex and unforeseen situations  
  o Demonstrates confident and competent use of self  
  o Can report and present information concisely, yet comprehensively, presenting complex issues clearly  
  o Demonstrates an extended repertoire of skills integral to their practice  
  o Demonstrates a developed ability to analyse, evaluate and reflect on practice  
  o Can manage time and own workload competently with some guidance |
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<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Level One Foundation</th>
<th>Level Two Application</th>
<th>Level Three Integrated Application</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Values</strong></td>
<td>o Demonstrates awareness and understanding of impact of values, beliefs and attitudes on self, Service User and service delivery</td>
<td>o Can recognise significance of power and authority in worker/Service User relationship and is able to safeguard right and promote responsibilities of others</td>
<td>o Can challenge individual, institutional and structural oppression in an appropriate and constructive manner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Demonstrates an awareness of the potential for conflict between personal and professional value base</td>
<td>o Demonstrates understanding of different forms of discrimination and oppression and their impact on Service Users</td>
<td>o Demonstrates an ability to work toward resolution of value dilemmas and conflicts in both interpersonal and professional contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Demonstrates a basic understanding of inequalities and diversity</td>
<td>o Can recognise and begin to explore some of the value dilemmas and conflicts inherent in social work practice</td>
<td>o Can integrate the values of social work in to own practice while understanding own personal value system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o Demonstrates the ability to actively promote rights of Service Users</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Tuning-in to PLO**

Preparation for the practice learning period begins at the point where the student is notified of his/her practice learning opportunity. In preparation for discussion of his/her Individual Learning Plan with personal tutor, the student should consider/reflect on his/her learning needs in the context of the practice learning opportunity.

*(It is recognised that there can be changes in allocation of PLO or late notice of exact site etc. which understandably limits the capacity of the student and tutor to identify specific learning needs before PLO commences. This should be addressed as early within the PLO as possible)*

PLO 1- Consider previous life/work/academic experience to date including Preparation for Practice Learning module (PfPL) and feedback given.

PLO 2- Consider experience to date including reflection on learning needs as identified by practice teacher from the first PLO and the academic teaching since this practice learning opportunity ended.

Preparation should also include a pre-placement visit to the PLO site and identification of relevant reading.

**Induction Period**

The student should use the induction period, including corporate induction and site induction, to begin to develop understanding of the service user group, community profile, organisation, team and resources.

**Folder of Evidence**

The folder of evidence is an extremely important element of the PLO and it is central to the successful completion of the PLO and academic assignments.

Practice teachers are reminded that a balance needs to be struck between the student undertaking a range of appropriate direct practice tasks and tasks for supervision. Expectations and outcomes should be fully discussed in the initial contracting phase with the student and reviewed on a regular basis.

**Evidence and the Matrix**

The full matrix should record ongoing evidence as appropriate for the social work standards, e.g. initial visit; tuning-in and evaluation; risk consideration/analysis; initial assessment. In so doing the student is noting the ongoing professional practice evidence.

It is recommended that a review of on-going evidence production is completed on a regular basis throughout the period of practice learning, with minutes of supervision noting the practice teacher verification.
In completing the matrix summary sheet, that is included in the Practice Teacher Report, the student should identify the most appropriate type of evidence already verified. The formal evidence requirements should be contained as part of the identified evidence.

Finally, a pro-forma in relation to obtaining service users consent and ensuring confidentiality needs to be completed in respect of the work carried out with service users and which has been used by the student for their learning purposes.

Practice Teachers are reminded of the DHSSPS Circular (Consent in Social Care: July 2004) on the need to have service user consent before students undertake work with them

Contact with service users and how the student sought consent should be commented upon by the practice teacher within their report.

**Service User and Carer Feedback in relation to Student Performance**

The Degree Partnership has in consultation with service users and carers developed guidance to assist practice teachers, students, on-site supervisors and others when seeking feedback regarding a student’s performance. It incorporates key principles which should inform the process of seeking feedback and it provides examples of possible questions which can be used to guide practice.

Seeking service users and carers feedback is ‘part and parcel’ of good practice and should be a key and regular aspect of any social work contact or interaction. When seeking feedback from individuals or groups it needs to be recognised that “one size does not fit all” and careful consideration should be given to:

- Who is the most appropriate person to seek the feedback?
- What is the most appropriate means by which to gain feedback e.g. written, verbal, pictures? Is the means of communication sensitive to the service-user’s culture, notably language, level of education, literacy and understanding?

Whether feedback is sought from individuals or groups and whatever the means the following principles should underpin the process:

**Guiding Principles:**

- Service users and carers should be given the opportunity to give feedback during the practice learning opportunity. This can be based on one or more contacts with the student;

- Service users and carers will be given a choice as to whether they participate in giving feedback;
• Full and explicit information should be provided regarding the purpose of the feedback and with whom it will be shared;

• The decision to seek feedback should not take priority over the service user’s or carer’s presenting needs at that point in time;

• All available support should be provided to enable service users and carers to give feedback;

The means of communication should be sensitive to the service-user’s culture, notably language; health and psychological wellbeing.

Some examples of questions which the individual seeking feedback can use to inform practice:

• Did the student social worker identify him/herself and make it clear as to why he/she was there?
• Do you feel the student showed you respect?
• Do you feel the student listened to what you had to say?
• Did the student share information with you?
• Did you feel the student tried to understand your situation?
• Did the student involve you in making plans?
• What has changed as a result of the student visiting you? Can you give examples?
• Would you have changed anything about the student's involvement with you and/or your family?
• Have you any advice for the student as to how she/he might behave or respond to someone in a similar situation to you in the future?

NOTE: Students will need to continue to evidence service user /and or carer feedback through formal records. This does not necessarily mean that the pro-forma available in the toolkit have to be used. Other formats can be used.

Direct Observations of Practice

○ OBSERVATION REPORTS

There is a requirement for a minimum of 3 direct observations, of passing standard, (i.e. refer to statements of Differentials and pro-forma (Appendix 9).

One of these will involve a comprehensive ‘tuning–in’ and evaluation. The recommended word count for each of these elements is 2000 words.

The tuning–in and evaluation for the other two observations will have a specific focus which can be either an identified learning need or a particular aspect of practice/issue. The focus will be negotiated between the student and practice teacher. It should involve a combination of written and verbal (supervision) ‘tuning–in’ and evaluation. The written component should be brief and concise.
It is recommended that where possible one of the observations at Level 2 should focus on assessment and one of the observations at Level 3 should focus on assessment including risk.

Normally all 3 direct observations must involve face-to-face contact with service user(s) and/or carer(s). As non-verbal contact is an essential component of interactions it is only in exceptional circumstances, and, where the nature of the work is predominantly by telephone contact, that one of the three observations can be of a verbal interaction. Additional opportunities would have to be provided to enable student to have face–to-face contact for the other two observations.

All 3 direct observations must be carried out by an accredited practice teacher / practice teacher award candidate.

Records of Observation Guidance

- Developmental assessment:
  - Observations should ideally be “staggered” throughout the PLO, i.e., beginning/middle/end phase of the PLO
  - Assessment feedback within the observation report should be constructive and should make links with any previous observation(s), i.e., future learning needs previously identified

- Content of observation report
  - It is preferable if the observation reports are typed
  - Feedback within the report: Practice teachers are advised to provide specific constructive feedback with regard to the use of knowledge, skills and values/AOP. This feedback should highlight strengths, areas for development and cite specific examples

GUIDANCE FOR PRACTICE TEACHERS

- Verbal feedback should normally be given immediately after the observation. This feedback should clarify with the student as to the status of the observation, i.e. competent session with developmental areas to be detailed in record; not competent session to be detailed in record;

- The record of observation should normally be completed within one week of the date of observation;

- Practice teacher should be explicit as to the nature of service user involvement. Was consent appropriately sought? Was partnership and participation appropriately demonstrated? Was feedback sought as to focus and outcome of the session;

- Practice teacher should be explicit as to the focus for the observation e.g. to assess competence in planning; to assess competence in managing resistance;

- Developmental and learning points should be explicit in the summary.
Practice Teacher Report

Arrangements for Submission
Please note that the Practice Teacher report (including completed matrix and student training passport proforma) must be submitted electronically to the Universities by the due date (see Appendix 13).

**QUB** – submission of the report will be the responsibility of the student using their student ID under the relevant practice learning module code.

**UU** - instructions on the electronic submission of the reports will be forwarded to practice learning coordinators who will disseminate the information to practice teachers. These instructions will include details regarding the need to save all of the components of the practice teaching report as one document and how to save the report and name it. In addition practice teachers will be advised on how to forward the report to a specifically created secure e-mail address.

Guidance on Content

- Reports should represent the summative assessment of the practice teacher with reference to significant points of the formative assessment;

- Reports should provide explicit information for the student as to next level learning needs and objectives. As such it is a further learning tool for students to assist their professional development;

- The exact format is not prescribed but practice teachers *must* ensure they comment summatively with formative references on the areas specified within the handbook e.g. ethical practice, professional competence and professional responsibility. Furthermore Practice teachers *must* refer to the following:
  - Student’s engagement in and understanding of the social work process;
  - Student’s engagement and competence in service user involvement—consent and feedback;
  - Quality and depth of evidence;
  - Ability to link theory to practice, detailing AOP;
  - Ability to critically analyse and evaluate own practice;
  - Future learning needs.
Incomplete PLO- Practice Teacher Progress Report

In circumstances where a student does not complete the period of practice learning, for whatever reason, the practice teacher will complete a progress report (refer to Appendix 11) which will be submitted to the University practice assessment panel/board.

It is recognised that if a student withdraws prior to the mid-point review it would be difficult for the practice teacher to make an informed assessment in terms of whether or not the student is passing or failing the PLO at that point in time.

However for any PLO which progresses beyond the mid-point review the progress report must include a judgement as to the likelihood of the student meeting the required level of competence had the designated period of practice learning been completed. In other words was the student passing or failing the PLO at the point of withdrawal.

The progress report must be submitted by the Practice Teacher within 2 weeks of PLO ending to the student and FHEI Practice Learning Co-ordinator. The Practice Teacher will make a recommendation on the outcome of PLO if the mid-point has been reached. A copy should be made available to the practice teacher of any subsequent PLO by the student.

Guidance on Content

- Reports should highlight areas of strength as well as areas for concern
- Reports should provide explicit information for the student as to their learning needs and objectives for the next PLO. As such it is a further learning tool for students to assist their professional development.
- The exact format is not prescribed but practice teachers must ensure they comment on the areas specified within the handbook e.g. ethical practice, professional competence and professional responsibility. Furthermore Practice teachers must refer to the following:
  - Student’s engagement in and understanding of the social work process
  - Student’s engagement and competence in service user involvement — consent and feedback
  - Quality and depth of evidence
  - Ability to link theory to practice, detailing AOP
  - Ability to critically analyse and evaluate own practice
  - Understanding of NISCC standards for social work students
  - Future learning needs.
Guidance on writing a report where there are serious concerns about a student’s conduct/practice/behaviour

There may be circumstances where a student’s conduct; practice and/or suitability for social work gives serious cause for concern. In such circumstances the NIDSWP Regional Protocol will be used and may result in one or all of the following outcomes:

- No further action taken
- PLO suspended pending investigation
- PLO terminated
- Student referred to the University and /or NISCC for Fitness to Practice.

The Importance of the Practice Teacher’s and Designated Practice Learning Provider’s (DPLP) Investigation Reports

The Practice Teacher’s report is extremely important in all circumstances but it is crucial when a student’s fitness to practice is being considered. Both the Practice Teacher’s Report and the DPLP’s Investigation Report will likely be used in other forums, for example, a University Fitness for Practise panel, a University Appeal Panel or a NISCC Conduct Referral.

Members of the University panels may not have an in-depth knowledge of professional social work standards; the level of competence and confidence required to qualify as a social worker and/or the course requirements, including the NISCC Standards of Conduct and Practice for Social Work Students.

It is therefore extremely important that the Practice Teacher report explicitly identifies the concerns/issues and that timelines are clearly established. It may be useful to include the following:

- a chronology of events;
- a detailed account of the checks and measures that were put in place to manage the concerns and encourage student progress;
- a clear indication of the student’s level of competence in relation to the standard required for their stage of training. The ladder of learning and differentials contained within the regional practice learning handbook are key tools in identifying the exact nature of concerns about a student’s progress;
- reference to meetings proforma;
- NISCC: DHSSPS NI Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work, which is based on the National Occupational Standards for Social Work, is also a key tool.
- reference to the NISCC Standards of Conduct for Social Work Students (2015) commenting on the value and ethical requirements underpinning professional social work.

*Remember the report needs to be explicit and self – explanatory!*
The Management of Concerns Specifically Related to Practice Competence – Guidance for Practice Teachers

Section A
NISCC Practice Learning Standard 3.7.3 states

“each practice learning provider ensures staff are supported in carrying out their assessment responsibilities, including opportunities for standardisation, continuous professional development and sharing of best practice.”

To ensure the above is achieved, provider agencies are required to have arrangements that are consistent, fair and transparent.

Whilst each agency has internal mechanisms for support and guidance for practice teachers and a quality assurance system in relation to the standards to measure student competence, over and above normal managerial supervision, the following are central when the practice teacher has concerns about the student meeting all requirements:

- Ensure full involvement of tutor, student, on-site supervisor and line manager (as appropriate);
- Record and agree timescales for use of any formal internal processes of quality assurance (to be discussed in Practice Teacher Report);
- Ensure completion of additional practice learning review meetings pro forma including clear identification of concerns in relation to key roles and NISCC Standards of Conduct and Practice for Social work Students (2015).

Section B

This guidance is advised for Practice Teachers where there are concerns about a Student’s ability to meet the key roles and / or practice learning requirements.

- Do not ignore the situation, but at the same time do not over react;
- Be clear about the problem areas with the Student;
- Provide the Student with honest feedback on work (written and practice);
- Make time to address the issues as soon as they arise and set tasks/objectives and review progress within agreed timescales;
- If concerns arise prior to the mid-point review instigate an earlier meeting;
- If concerns arise after the mid-point review initiate an additional meeting(s);
- Formulate appropriate opportunities within agreed timescales including a date for a formal review meeting;
- Maintain appropriate records;
- Advise relevant managers and ensure support for self;
- Ensure Student has access to appropriate support mechanisms;
- Ensure sufficient time for completion of detailed assessment report;
- Use managerial supervisory arrangements throughout the practice learning period;
Ensure adherence to organisation’s internal mechanisms for quality assurance of Student competence;
Ensure you are fully aware of and where appropriate adhere to “Protocol for Dealing with Factors Affecting Progression of Practice Learning” (NIDSWP: June 2013);

N.B. If a serious/dangerous situation should arise you should immediately refer the matter to the appropriate person(s) within your organisation and adhere to “Protocol for Dealing with Factors Affecting Progression of Practice Learning” (NIDSWP: June 2013).

ENSURE THE WELFARE AND SAFETY OF SERVICE USERS.
Section 5: Assessment of Practice Learning

Summative and Formative Assessment

The assessment of the student’s practice learning period needs to be accurate (valid and reliable), it needs to be fair, it needs to be efficient and finally it needs to fit within the context of the Degree. To this end, practice learning is assessed in two main ways.

Firstly, the practice teacher has the responsibility to provide an open, clear, on-going and fair assessment of the student’s practice during the practice learning period. The methods of assessment will be discussed and agreed at the initial planning meeting. This assessment will be informed by direct observation of the student’s practice, the supervisory process, agency records and through completion of evidence requirements outlined in the previous section. The assessment will include feedback from other workers, carers and service users. (Feedback pro-forma are available in Practice Teacher and Student Toolkit: 2015)

The practice teacher and student will have to negotiate and plan the production and assessment of various items of evidence throughout the practice learning period. This will be a formative assessment of the student’s on-going competence and confidence through the evidence of their practice. The practice teacher will verify competence across all work.

The planning of the production of evidence is critical and practice teachers are strongly advised to discuss and agree an expected timeline for production.

There should be an incremental approach to evidence production that facilitates a clear and valid formative assessment.

The practice teacher is responsible for gathering, verifying and retaining various evidence items throughout the practice learning period. The practice teacher will then make a summative assessment of the student’s practice within his/her report. This assessment will be on a pass or fail basis and is not given a numerical mark and does not contribute to degree classification. It is the practice teachers responsibility to ensure that his/her report is submitted by the required deadline. The practice teacher must discuss their report with the student and give them the opportunity to comment on it. Both practice teacher and student must sign the report. Where a student is given the opportunity to read and sign the report but declines to do so, it should be noted.

Students will receive regular feedback on their progress in relation to the practice learning requirements and level of competence. This will also be a particular focus of the mid-point review and a consistent feature of supervision.
Role of the Practice Assessment Panel (PAP)

The purpose of the Practice Assessment Panel is to collate and present recommendations to the Practice Assessment Board/Board of Examiners and to monitor and assist in the development of standards in relation to assessment and with regards to student competence in practice learning. The Panel has a membership of representatives of academic and agency staff.

The Panel reserves the right to request the evidence folder where issues are identified.

The PAP will also consider all practice teacher progress reports and recommendations where a student has not completed the PLO, for whatever reason, and a recommendation will be made to the Board of Examiners which will make the final decision.
Section 6: Practice Learning Assignments

Level 2

Assignment title: Case Study

Task

In consultation with your Tutor and Practice Teacher, select one practice example which will enable you to demonstrate and evaluate your practice. Where you need to draw on more than one practice example, this must be agreed in advance with the Tutor and Practice Teacher.

N. B. A practice example is defined as the process of work with one service user, family, carer, group or community.

Guidance

In completing this assignment you should:

1. Include a brief description of the Practice Learning setting, pen picture of practice example(s) and context of the work, including your role.

2. Demonstrate how knowledge, skills and values (including relevant research and anti-oppressive practice) have informed your social work practice in this case, with regard to:
   i. Preparation for contact
   ii. Assessment
   iii. Planning
   iv. Intervening/Implementation
   v. Endings

3. Provide a critical evaluation of the impact of your intervention on the life/lives of the service user(s).

4. Present the assignment to an acceptable standard, which conforms to academic conventions regarding grammar, spelling and the Harvard system for referencing cited works.

Word Limit
The assignment is 3,500 words (+ 10%). The exact word count must be stated on the front cover.
Level 2

Assignment title: Reflection on Practice

Purpose:

To enable you to reflect on your practice and demonstrate learning and professional development in relation to this stage of your qualifying training

The Task

You will provide an overview of the key aspects of your learning throughout this practice learning opportunity, as illustrated by your work with service users in two or three cases, selected in consultation with your Tutor and Practice Teacher. This overview should include critical reflection on your professional development.

N.B. These examples must not be the same as those used in the Case Study assignment.

Guidance

In completing this assignment you should:

1. Provide a brief description of the Practice Learning setting, including your role.
2. Using a model of reflection, reflect on the development of your knowledge, skills and values (to include anti-oppressive practice), drawing on two or three practice examples.
3. Demonstrate how you gave consideration to the impact of feedback from your Practice Teacher, service users and other relevant sources in developing your learning.
4. Identify key areas for future professional development and give consideration as to how these might be addressed at Level 3
5. Present the assignment to an acceptable standard, which conforms to academic conventions regarding grammar, spelling and the Harvard system for referencing cited works

Word Limit

The Reflection on Practice assignment is 3,500 words (+10%).

The exact word count must be stated on the front cover.
Level 3

Assignment title: Reflection on Practice

Purpose

The purpose of this assignment is to enable you to critically reflect on your learning and development in relation to becoming an accountable and competent social work practitioner.

Task

You will provide an account of your professional development during level 3, as informed by your work in two or three cases, selected in consultation with your Tutor and Practice Teacher. This account will include critical reflection on your management of risk and ethical decision making in the context of your work with service users.

Guidance

In completing this assignment you should include:

1. A brief description of the Practice Learning setting, including your role.

2. An application of one theoretical model of reflection to inform your account of professional development.

3. A critical reflection on the application of knowledge, skills and values to practice; which should demonstrate your ability to practice ethically and challenge oppression in your decision making and management of risks.

4. An identification of your continuing professional developmental needs and how these might be addressed in the Assessed Year in Employment.

5. Presentation of the assignment to an acceptable standard, which conforms to academic conventions regarding grammar, spelling and the Harvard system for referencing cited works.

Word Limit

The assignment is 3,500 words (+ 10%).

The exact word count must be stated on the front cover.
Level 3  
Case Project  
(Evidence Based Practice)

Purpose

In the final year of training, social work Students have the opportunity to closely inform their knowledge base about the circumstances, needs and services available to a specific Service User group. Students are presented with a challenging learning experience and opportunity to focus on a group of Service Users using critical enquiry and evidence appraisal skills.

Task

The assignment centres on the consideration of a particular group of people in receipt of a social work service, for example, older people experiencing abuse, young people who have experienced the breakdown of foster care placements or people with learning disabilities entering the job market.

The group should be decided upon in consultation with the Student’s training team. Care should be taken to ensure sufficient material is available. It is intended that the issue which characterises the Service User group selected for study will be pertinent to the Student’s learning.

The completed assignment should provide the reader with an up-to-date account of the current state of knowledge, understanding and practice in relation to this group.

This assignment will primarily involve library research and should include the voices of the Service Users, their Carers where appropriate and the agencies / professionals who provide services to this group. This information should normally be taken from the literature reviewed and from personal contact.

Students are NOT required to undertake a questionnaire/ interview based investigation of Service Users’ and/or Carers attitude and experiences.

Project Summary

Students are required to provide a summary proposal of not more than 300 words, to include a general title, brief background and expected outcomes for social work practice. The summary proposal will be submitted to an assigned Tutor as per F/HEI guidance.

In undertaking this task Students must:

1. Provide a summary proposal of no more than 300 words (not included in the overall word count), which summarises the content of the assignment.
2. Provide an introduction that specifies clearly the Service User group, who are the focus of the study, states why this group has been chosen and identifies sources of information used.

3. Provide a critical review of both UK and international literature relating to this specific group of Service Users and in doing so; demonstrate an understanding of the historical, sociological, psychological and policy perspectives.

4. Provide a critical evaluation of the local policies, practices and provision of services. This should include the identification of any gaps and proposals for improvements in existing provision. (It is expected within this section that Students would convey an understanding of the providers' perspective.)

5. Demonstrate an understanding of Service Users’ and / or Carers’ perspectives. This may be achieved through the examination of secondary data or evidence from practice with Service User.

   N.B as previously stated Students are NOT required to undertake a questionnaire/interview based investigation of Service Users’ and/or Carers attitude and experiences.

6. Provide an analysis of value issues and anti-oppressive practice within the work. This should also convey the Student’s understanding of the discriminatory systems which operate in the lives of the Service Users and how these might be challenged.

7. Present the assignment to an acceptable standard, which conforms to the academic convention regarding grammar, spelling and the Harvard system for referencing cited works.

**Word Limit**

The Case Project should be no more than 5,000 words (+/- 10%). excluding summary proposal and references.

The Student **must** state the exact word count on the front cover.

**Structure of Project**

(This is a suggested format only and Students may present their project in an alternative form, whilst ensuring that there is an adherence to the marking criteria.)

**Title**

This should state the project topic in a succinct form, for example, “Social Work Service provision for older people with Dementia within a Northern Ireland context.”

**Introduction**

This section will explain why the project topic is important, relevant and worthwhile. It provides the background rationale and justification for the project.
Aim of project
The Student will explain how the broad goals identified in the introduction should be met. For example,

(1) The project will seek to examine service provision for older people in the North-West of the province.
(2) It will consider the literature, which underpins policy and practice in a Northern Ireland and UK context.
(3) The project will seek to outline current gaps in service provision and make recommendations as to how these can be addressed.

Review of relevant literature
A good understanding of what is already known or established about the topic is very important. Literature searches should include a consideration of work done at a local level, perhaps within your agency, alongside an examination of relevant research and policy documents at regional and national levels. It is also necessary to examine the relevant legislation and underpinning theory base. There should also be explicit reference to value issues and anti-oppressive practice in relation to the specific Service User group.

Service Users’ / Carers’ / Service Providers’ Perspectives
Service User and / or Carer and perspectives may be collated from practice within practice learning opportunity, via analyses of interaction with specific Service Users and Carers. Where possible, an examination of service providers’ perspectives should be included. It may be possible to elicit this data from agency policy/procedure documentation or through an examination of service providers’ views via a discussion with a senior member of the practice learning opportunity agency.

Outcomes
Indicate how aspects of current literature, research findings and Service User/ Carer perspectives may inform practice, highlight models of good practice, enhance social work understanding and lead to a greater understanding of Service User participation in practice.

NB. It is suggested that to best assist the Student with their assessed pieces of work that Practice Teachers will focus primarily on using the evaluations of evidence and related tasks to assist Students in developing their knowledge and skills of reflective practice. Alongside Practice Assessment Panel (PAP) and academic guidance, Practice Teachers can give guidance on the Reflection on Practice Assignments. Tutors will focus primarily on the production of the Practice Analysis and Evaluation/ Case Project. This may include for example discussing material which a Student may usefully include/consider direction in relation to reading/research and reading the work plan for practice analysis and evaluation/project. NEITHER Practice Teacher nor Tutor will read drafts of Student assignments.

It should be noted that the order in which the assignments are submitted differs for the two universities.
Please refer to the academic calendars (Appendix 13) for further detail.

**Submission of assignments to practice teacher**

It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that the Practice Teacher has a copy of each assignment by the date stated in the Practice Learning calendar (Appendix 13).

If a student fails to meet this requirement the practice teacher will advise the Chair of the relevant University Practice Assessment Panel (PAP).

**Note: Verification of assignments**

Practice Teachers do not have to provide written verification in relation to the assignments. However, in circumstances where a practice teacher has concerns that the evidence, practice examples cited are not representative of authentic practice, he/she must advise the Chair of the relevant PAP.