

**Learning  
Network  
West**



# Practice Learning Information Pack



**Learning Network West** provides support and development for Social Work students by supplying a range of practice learning (placement) opportunities in the West of Scotland. These opportunities enable students to meet the Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE).

This information pack provides insight into the process of placing social work students in a voluntary or private organisation (agency). It covers benefits of providing practice learning opportunities, our expectations of voluntary agencies, and roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in the student placement experience.

Since 2004, student social workers must achieve an Honours Degree in Social Work (or an equivalent postgraduate award) to become professionally qualified. The introduction of this Honours Degree programme and subsequently, the Changing Lives agenda (2006), was seen as a way of raising the profile and standards in the social work profession.

As part of the Degree in Social Work, students are required to complete two assessed practice learning opportunities. Degree students are required to be assessed by a qualified Practice Educator (PE). The placements take place in the third and fourth year of the Honours Degree programme and in the first year of the Masters programme. Learning Network West welcomes voluntary organisations to work in partnership towards providing continuous improvement of the social work profession and social care.



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# OUR BACKGROUND

*“Practice learning is at the heart of developing a competent, confident social work profession, able to deal with an increasingly complex and changing world.. It will also be important to involve the private sector more and any other providers from any sector who can bring innovation into practice learning. Voluntary sector opportunities will continue to be vital”*

*Confidence in practice learning  
Scottish Government Publication 2004*

Learning Network West aims to increase the quantity and diversity of social work practice learning opportunities and to collaborate with partners across the West of Scotland in developing these learning opportunities. In the provision of these new and exciting learning experiences, we want social work students to experience an effective work environment in which their skills and abilities are nurtured. We aspire to develop enjoyable learning experiences that will shape students into reflective life-long learners in their professional practice.

We do not only benefit students. By working with us, your organisation will receive continuous professional learning of both staff and services, ensuring significant growth due to new challenges and experiences. The relationship which develops between the student and the social service workforce has a significant impact in constructing the best social work practice possible.

## OUR AREAS OF FOCUS

**Practice Learning development**

**Mental Health Award programme**

**Professional Development Award in Practice Learning**

Learning Network West endeavours to support our partner agencies including all Higher Education Institutions, Local Authorities, and Private and Voluntary agencies in the West of Scotland. As an organisation, we negotiate practice learning opportunities for students studying mainly from the four main universities in the West of Scotland: Glasgow Caledonian University, Strathclyde University, University of the West of Scotland, and Open University. We occasionally work with a number of students from Robert Gordon University and exchange students from Edinburgh and Stirling Universities

Learning Network West aims to develop high quality learning experiences for Degree and Master level social work students by:

Sourcing innovative and new placement settings and locations for Social Work students

Organising and facilitating student placements into appropriate settings. This is based on set criteria from the Scottish Government and Universities and can be in either local authorities or voluntary agencies.

Providing the recognised SQA qualification Professional Development Award in Practice Learning (PDAPL) to current qualified or experienced social services staff to enable them to become Practice Educators.

Recruiting and supporting Independent Practice Educators (IPEs) including regular forums with continuous professional development events.

Providing independent practice educators to assess students within voluntary placement settings.

Providing guidance for Link Workers and Practice Educators.

# **BENEFITS OF LINKING WITH STUDENTS**

Taking students within your social work setting is a valuable tool in building the development of knowledge and understanding of social work skills. It provides students with valuable knowledge and experience to strengthen their social work skills. It also expands the knowledge of staff by taking on new challenges and working with social work students in order to create new solutions, and strengthen social work practice.

Benefits of taking on social work placements within your organisation, include:

**Contributing to the social services workforce**

**Developing a learning culture**

**Potential source of new employees**

**Financial Remuneration**

## CONTRIBUTING TO THE SOCIAL SERVICES WORKFORCE

*“Scotland needs a social services workforce which is competent, confident and valued; capable of delivering personalised and flexible services which deliver improved outcomes for people and communities; able to work effectively with partners in delivery of high quality, safe, continually improving and user/carer focussed services.”*

Changing lives (2006)

Social work students are a vital part of developing the social service workforce and make a significant contribution regarding up to date knowledge. Agencies with expertise in their field provide an opportunity in which dual-learning can take place in developing best practice. The voluntary agencies are in a position to develop their own staff while offering students excellent experience of intensive support to vulnerable service users. This experience can often lay the foundations for the student’s future practice.

## POTENTIAL SOURCE OF NEW EMPLOYEES

One of the most vital resources an organisation will have is its people, and they need to be equipped with all the necessary knowledge and relevant experience to do their job safely and effectively. Placements enable students to gain relevant experience and develop the practical skills and understanding of the work within your organisation. The placement experience, thus, provides agencies the opportunity to recruit student social workers who have proved to be effective and an adequate fit for their team.

## DEVELOPING A LEARNING CULTURE

*“Organisations of the future will not survive without becoming communities of learning. The learning organization is no academic fad or consultant’s buzzword. It is absolutely essential for organisations to learn from their environments, to continually adjust to new and changing data, and, just as is the case with the individual, to learn how to learn from an uncertain and unpredictable future.”*

Changing lives (2006)

One of the key themes of the “Changing Lives” agenda was the need for evidence-based practice, research and innovation. Students contribute to this environment by bringing up to date knowledge and theory to placements and requiring workers to reflect on their own practice.

## FINANCIAL REMUNERATION

Below are the details of the financial remuneration voluntary agencies receive using their own Practice Educator or an Independent Practice Educator contracted through Learning Network West. These terms and conditions were previously agreed by the Management Board of Learning Network West which includes representation from the Third Sector, Local Authorities and HEIs.

Fee to Voluntary Organisation with own Practice Educator - £28/day

Fee to Voluntary Organisation Using Independent Practice Educator (registered with LNW) - £10/day

# OUR EXPECTATIONS

Learning Network West is committed to placing students in practice learning opportunities that meet the need of the requirements for the Standards in Social Work. There is a commitment to key stakeholders, HEIs, and SSSC to maintain the best quality possible in student's practice learning.

Within the practice learning opportunities, there are expectations that must be met to ensure the success of the student placement and its desired effects on the agency. For the practice learning placement to proceed smoothly, it is important that roles are clearly identified within the Practice Learning Team. This consists of an (Independent) Practice Educator, Link Worker, University Tutor and Student.

Learning Network West can provide the services of an Independent Practice Educator, who carries out the formal assessments required of a Student practicing on placement. The voluntary agency will provide the services of a Link Worker, along with a range of work activities and opportunities for the student to meet their learning outcomes. There is a requirement to complete the one-day Link Worker Training facilitated by Learning Network West before the placement takes place, to ensure understanding of how the placement will progress.

## **Link Worker Training** **content areas:**

- *Benefits of being a link worker*
- *Adult learning styles*
- *Emotional intelligence*
- *Placement journey & induction*
- *Learning team roles*
- *Health and Safety*
- *Knowledge, skills, and values*
- *Assessment framework*
- *Direct observations*



***If you wish to reserve a place for  
the Link Worker training:  
click on the link here  
or email:  
[martin.ryan@westlearn.org.uk](mailto:martin.ryan@westlearn.org.uk)***



## PRACTICAL SUPPORT

The agency must provide **appropriate support** for the student enrolled in the placement. This includes a desk, telephone, and computer. They should also acquire **facilities** that help provide one-to-one supervision with the Practice Educator throughout their learning experience.

Throughout the placement, students are required to demonstrate **professional competence** against specified proportion of the key roles set out in the framework for **Standards in Social Work Education (SISWE)**.

What this means for the agency is that they provide students with **direct experience and responsibility** with service users and opportunities in assessment, planning, and intervention approaches.

Assessed placements can vary in length—ranging from **80 days to 100 days** depending on the university programme. All universities have a requirement that there is a **learning agreement/contract** drawn up at the start of the placement and some Universities request that a **health & safety checklist** is completed prior to the student starting placement.



## DATA PROTECTION MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

All partners will be aware of the importance of complying with the Data Protection Act 1998. When processing the personal and sensitive personal data of students we must all take adequate steps to ensure that we are doing this in an appropriate and secure manner. This is to protect both Students and the organisations involved.

The implications of a data breach can be serious for both parties. It should be noted that when organising social work placements, we may be dealing with both personal and sensitive personal data. Accidental loss/disclosure of this information could cause extreme damage and distress to individuals.

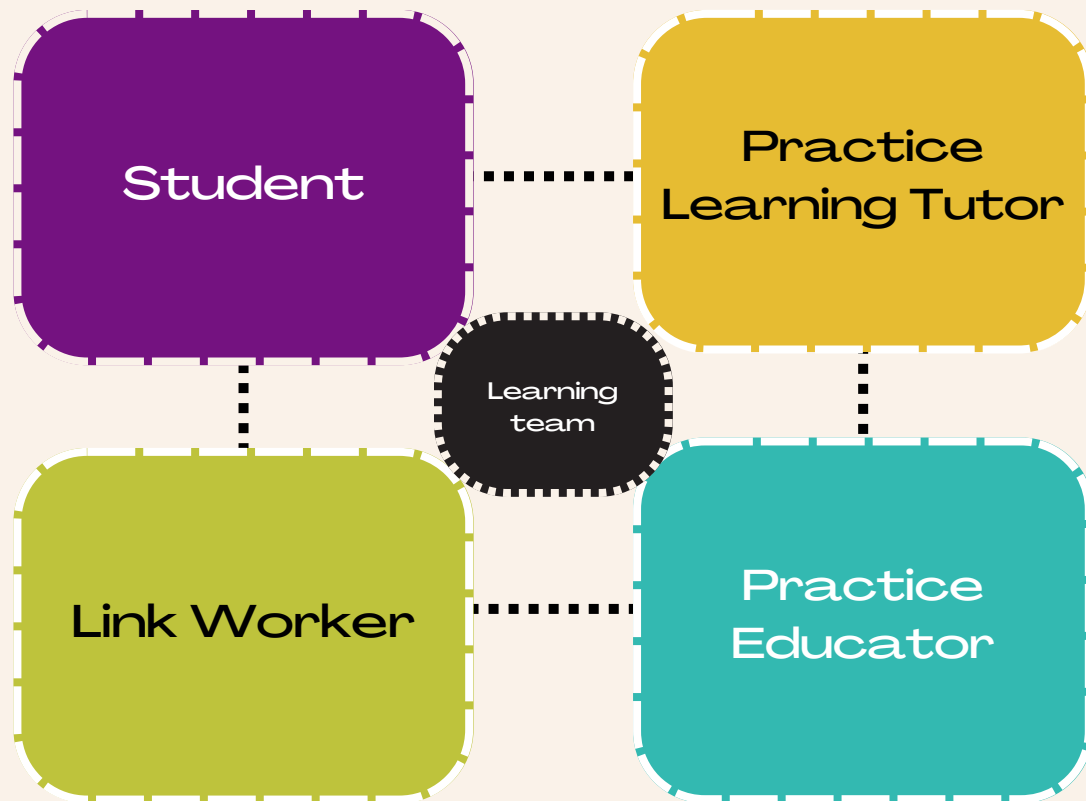
Organisations which breach the Data Protection Act can experience reputational damage and may be subject to the range of powers that the Information Commissioner has at their disposal. These include:

- Issuing monetary penalties of up to £500,000
- Prosecuting those who commit criminal offences under the Act
- Issuing undertakings committing an organisation to a particular course of action in order to improve its compliance

Any organisation processing personal data should adhere to best practice and take all necessary measures to ensure the security of that data. This is equally true when organising and managing placements for student.

**[Please click here for a copy of the memorandum of understanding available on our website.](#)**

# ROLES IN THE PRACTICE LEARNING TEAM



## Student

Prior to the learning experience, the student should prepare by reading relevant materials in relation to the service and care group of the project. They should attend all meetings and workshops and ensure that they have time for reflection.

There is a need to prioritise casework and academic requirements, ensuring that their practice addresses service users' needs and in accordance with the Scottish Social Service Council (SSSC) codes of practice.

Throughout their practice learning experience, they must behave in a professional manner in regards to attendance, punctuality and respect for staff and service users within the agency. They must demonstrate the required learning outcomes and identify their ongoing learning needs.

## Practice Learning Tutor

All Students studying social work have a Studies Advisor or Tutor within their University who oversees their academic studies.

Within the practice learning environment, a Practice Learning Tutor is assigned to the student upon placement who acts as a bridge between the academic environment and practice learning. They undertake meetings with university representatives, the Student, Practice Educator and Link Worker. Tutors offer support and problem-solving whilst making sure the Student is given opportunities to demonstrate the required practices within their placement.

Practice Learning Tutors will also undertake and document visits/ meetings in the event of any difficulties which the Student may experience within the practice learning setting. The Tutor will co- ordinate an action plan to address any issues and to assist upon any other appropriate course of action.

## Link Worker

The Link Worker (sometimes referred to as link supervisor) is provided by the agency where they do not have an in-house practice educator. The Link Worker provides day to day support to a student and identifies and allocates work (learning opportunities) in agreement with the practice educator. The Link worker is responsible for the day-to-day management of the student's workload and ensuring that the student adheres to agency policies and guidance.

The Link Worker is also responsible for the student's induction, arranging access to resources (I.T., phone, desk etc.) and providing regular feedback on the student's practice. As part of these processes the Link Worker will be invited to attend part of the supervision with the practice educator and student (this is typically only for a portion of the supervision, i.e. for the first/ last 15 minutes) - this provides opportunity to discuss and share feedback, agree allocation of work to the student (as guided by the practice educator) along with relevant support and resources.

There is an expectation that the Link Worker will carry out one of the formal direct observations of the student's practice (this will be agreed by the practice educator). The link worker will be invited to provide formal feedback on the students practice at both mid-point and final stages, with their feedback incorporated into the practice educator's reports.

University placement handbooks provide more detail of the Link Worker role.

## Practice Educator

A Practice Educator oversees the content, process and quality of the practice learning experience, including the summative assessment of the Student at the end of the practice learning opportunity.

The Practice Educator collaborates with the Link Worker at the pre-placement stage to make sure that the workplace is prepared for the student's arrival taking into account their learning needs and an appropriate induction period. The Practice Educator will also negotiate with the University if a student requires any additional support. There are three formal direct observations and there is a requirement that one is completed by the Practice Educator.

The Practice Educator is also involved in the constructive feedback process throughout the learning experience, ensuring that the student is working to their full potential within the professional environment. They observe and assist the Student throughout their placement and evaluate the practice learning experience with both the student and the link worker.



# EQUALITY IN PRACTICE LEARNING

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As we are committed to an equality and diversity agenda, it is important to consider the needs of Students with a disability or particular health needs or requirements. Consideration of those from minority ethnic backgrounds is vitally important to reflect and promote a diverse social services workforce in Scotland.

*“The workforce should reflect the diversity of the population. Social workers should come from all sections of the community e.g. the deaf community and minority ethnic communities.”*

Changing Lives (2006)

## PLACEMENT MANAGEMENT

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The diagram on the next page shows an outline of the stages involved in the practice learning opportunity. Students are normally in their third year of an Honours degree programme before starting their first placement. They may have already completed an observational placement. Universities will send the student request forms (pro-formas) to Learning Network West and the matching process begins. At this stage, agencies should identify the link worker for their project if they don't have their own practice educator. Learning Network West then matches students to different agencies and sends them the student pro-forma.

The Tutor is responsible for arranging the pre-placement meeting to look at the learning needs of the Student. Some Universities continue to hold mid-point meetings to review the Student's progress on the placement, however this may often be in the form of a telephone conversation between the Practice Educator, Student, and Tutor rather than a face-to-face meeting.

The Practice Educator, in collaboration with the Link Worker, will make the final recommendations for either a pass or fail for the Student at the end of the practice learning opportunity. If a student is not expected to pass, they will have been offered additional support from the practice learning team throughout the placement. This will include meetings with agreed action points to complete.

**0  
1** Student proformas to Learning Network West (LNW)

**0  
2** LNW begin matching process

**0  
3** LNW request agency capacity & Agency identifies link worker

**0  
4** LNW sends student pro-formas to agencies

**0  
5** Practice Learning Pre-placement Meeting

**0  
6** Practice Learning starts / 2-week Induction Period

**0  
7** Learning Agreement drawn up

**0  
8** Mid-point Review

**0  
9** Issues/concerns identified (for potentially struggling student)

**1  
0** Practice Learning Team discuss action plan if required

**1  
1** Action plan implemented

**1  
2** Final review with recommendation for practice pass or fail.

# HEALTH AND SAFETY

The health and safety of students working within a practice learning environment is of the utmost importance to Learning Network West, in addition to partner Universities and voluntary agencies.

At Learning Network West, we ensure that the practice learning opportunities must meet health and safety requirements. Each placement is evaluated and any concerns during the practice learning process must be reported immediately to us to allow the matter to be resolved effectively.

We highlight the collective responsibility between all those involved in practice learning opportunities to provide a safe and secure working environment for students to practice safely.

For placements within the UK, in regards to criminal liability, under health and safety legislation:

- Primary responsibility for the management of the health and safety for a student while on the placement lies with the placement provider (under Section 2.1 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974). The Student will be treated as equivalent to one of their own employees in relation to health and safety matters.
- 
- The Student has responsibilities to follow instructions and act sensibly to protect their own health and safety and that of others (as set out in Sections 7 and 8 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974).

***UCEA Health and Safety Guidance for the placement of Higher Education students***

There are various pieces of legislation and guidelines that apply to Health and Safety within the workplace. It is important to note that health and safety issues are continually being updated. There is also specific information/ training/ agreement required in relation to specialist areas of work.



# RESPONSIBILITIES OF THOSE INVOLVED

## VOLUNTARY AGENCY

The Voluntary Agency must ensure that the students involved in placement programmes have an induction period and are made aware of the health and safety policies/procedures within the working environment. If there is any specific training or immunisation requirements that the student must have then this should be made clear prior to the practice learning experience pertaining the Student, Practice Educator, and Tutor. Health and Safety checks required by the off-site Practice Educator or University must be completed by the student.

## HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

The Higher Education Institutions have a responsibility to ensure Students are prepared for the practice learning experience. They are also ultimately accountable for the health and safety of each Student and to ensure that agencies have robust procedures and systems in place to protect the Student. An over-view of the Agency's health and safety regulations will be required to ensure complete satisfaction from the University for the Learning experience to go ahead.



## STUDENT

Students must be aware of their own responsibilities regarding health and safety and assess the risk factors involved in the working environment in order to raise any concerns about the placement. They must also be involved in a discussion regarding health and safety at the pre-placement meeting.



# STANDARD PROCEDURES

## COMPLAINTS

Prior to the placement taking place, Students must be aware of the Agency Complaints Procedures. If the Student has a complaint regarding the placement, agency or university then all issues raised throughout the practice learning experience must be notified to the Practice Educator. If the issue is not resolved between the student and the Practice Educator then a four-way meeting of the Practice Learning team is arranged to discuss an action plan (if required). All Universities have clear guidelines for Students on placement regarding complaints that is outlined in the university handbook.

## TRAVEL & EXPENSES

Different arrangements are organised for travel expenses depending on the availability and bursary of the Student's university. Students who are able to use their car should discuss this at the pre- placement meeting, and a clear agreement should be stated in the learning contract. Students using their car must have business insurance. Agencies require clarification when regarding expenses during the placement.

## PVG CHECKS

All Students on a social work programme undertaking practice learning must register with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). This involves a PVG (Protecting Vulnerable Groups Scheme) check at the time of registration and students should be members of the PVG scheme.

The agency can accept the Student's PVG at the point of registration from a previous placement (if applicable) and a PVG which is a specific number of months/years old.

Before starting placement an agency will receive the University and Student declaration form to confirm they are a member of the PVG scheme. For more information, please contact Learning Network West.

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## CHILD CARE AND PROTECTION

During placement, students are required to evidence their understanding of supporting the wellbeing, safety and protection of vulnerable children and should have opportunities to explore implications of this for children and families as a part of their development into social work practices. For agencies that work with children on the child protection register, it is important that students are not the primary worker of the child protection investigation, or expected to make significant decisions regarding child protection. A qualified Worker is required to complete a year in post and undergo training before they can act in a lead role for Child Protection cases.

If Students wish to work with children on the child protection register, then these practices should be negotiated and clearly defined for the Student to understand what is expected of them. The named social worker should oversee the student's work and these responsibilities should be made clear, managing accountability for this work should also be clarified. This should then be agreed with the Practice Educator and Tutor from the beginning of the placement.

## TERMINATION OF PLACEMENT

If the Student chooses to cease their placement or the academic course then the situation is conducted in a formal manner with or without the Student present. The termination of placements may happen for a number of reasons, such as the course being the wrong choice for the Students or for personal matters.

However, some situations may breach the SSSC Code of Conduct for Social Workers these include:

- Behaviour that may put themselves and others at risk.
- Failure of duty of care by Student or gross negligence in the performance of an assigned duty; irresponsibility of Student in terms of attendance or conduct.
- The Student was unable (after instruction and guidance) to perform within a professional situation without an inappropriate degree of supervision from the Practice Educator.

# PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

Learning Network West acts on behalf of the Universities and is required to quality assure placement opportunities. To enable this, LNW has a partnership agreement with each agency providing placements to students. This is a proviso framework which details base line expectations of all parties engaged in undergraduate or post graduate programmes, leading to a social work qualification within the West of Scotland.

All participating parties within the provision require to agree and sign the terms outlined in this agreement. It is intended not to replace, but to be in addition to the Student's learning agreement, normally agreed by the Student, Tutor, Practice Educator and Link Worker.

It will also be signed on behalf of the Agency concerned by a senior training representative.

[To learn more about the Partnership Agreement and to download a form, please click here.](#)

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