

**No: 038**  
**07 August 2013**

## **One Minute Guide: Practice Education in Social Work**

### **What is 'practice education' in Social Work?**

Practice education is the teaching, mentoring, supporting and assessing of Social Work students for the purpose of developing competence and raising the quality of the provision of services to service users. Practice education is delivered by a suitably qualified and experienced social worker within an employment setting and represents the part of the Social Work Degree course that is undertaken outside of the High Education Institute (HEI).

### **What is the value to the student Social Worker of a robust practice placement?**

*"For students on placement there is not only the opportunity to 'carry out' practice but critically to improve and extend their professional knowledge and process skills" (Eraut, 1994)<sup>1</sup>.* Placements form a crucial part of the Social Work degree programme as they provide the opportunity for students to practice social work skills, theory and values in real settings and have contact with service users.

### **Why is it important to the social work profession?**

The role and function of practice education and student supervision has, for many years, been considered fundamentally important to the development of qualifying social work students, with many attributing the success of their qualification to their practice learning placements (Davis, 1984, cited in Shardlow and Dowel, 1996; Kadushin, 1992). The College of Social Work (TCSW) states that employers have a responsibility to contribute to the development of the next generation of social workers. By working in partnership with universities they can ensure that the right numbers of social workers are trained, and that enough high quality placements are available to the area to meet the need this creates (TCSW 2013).

### **How can being a Practice Educator benefit me?**

Becoming a Practice Educator is a key step and an expected development at Social Worker Level 3. It is seen as a first step into developing the knowledge, skills and experience of managing qualified Social Workers.

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<sup>1</sup> Developing Professional Knowledge and Competence, Eraut, M (1994, Routledge Falmer)

*“My experience of being a Practice Educator thus far has been rather positive. The support from the university has been eye opening and the lecturers are a high standard, which has helped to inform my practice. Other benefits include seeing the transformation of students grow. At the start of their practice they have been shy, reserved or even lacked confidence and by the end of their practice placement they have developed into competent practitioner”.*

Kemi Akosile – Social Worker, CRC Ray Lodge

Registration with the [Health and Care Professions Council](#) (HCPC) is subject to satisfactory Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Undertaking the necessary courses and accepting students on placement are clear demonstrations of your commitment to CPD.

## **How can having a student placed with me be good for the whole Team?**

The whole Team benefits when a student is placed within them, not just the Practice Educator. Students bring energy, enthusiasm, along with new ideas. They can bring a fresh perspective to Team meetings.

*“Having a student in the team is very refreshing as they often come with new ideas. As they often ask a lot of questions this helps us to look at why we do what we do.”*

Nicole Nwafor - Team Manager, Intensive Support Team

A Team will also enjoy a period of having extra capacity, skills and practical support, which could be used for improving the amount of direct work with children, young people and their families.

## **What are the benefits to Redbridge as an employer of social workers?**

LB Redbridge Children’s Services remain committed to supporting and developing staff at all levels to ensure we are delivering the best possible outcomes for children, young people, their families and carers. This is in line with the Munro Review recommendations, which call for a move from a compliance to a learning culture, where practitioners have the freedom to use professional expertise in assessing need and providing help (Munro Review, June 2011).

Students completing placements have the option to apply for available social work positions when they arise with an employer they are familiar with and whose expectations they are aware of. Attracting high calibre students back to the borough as qualified staff, has a major benefit to Children’s Services in aiding recruitment, and therefore practice education is a key strand of Children’s Services recruitment and retention strategy for Social Workers.

The [Standards for Employers of Social Workers](#), developed by the [Social Work Reform Board](#), fully accepted by the Government, emphasise the importance of providing good quality practice placements (Standard 2), provide opportunities for continuing professional development (Standard 6), provide support for social work students on

placements (Standard 8) and demonstrate effective partnerships with higher education institutions (Standard 8). Ofsted will be including the Standards in the new inspection framework, due to be implemented in autumn 2013.

## How can I become a qualified Practice Educator?

In order to become a qualified practice assessor, you will need to undertake a recognised qualification. Qualifications are delivered in stages (see below).

**Stage 1:** Practice Educators have sufficient experience and can demonstrate competence to directly supervise, teach and assess social work degree students up to but not including the final assessment prior to qualification.

**Stage 2:** Practice Educators have sufficient experience and have demonstrated competence to supervise, teach and assess social work degree students up to and including the final placement. In effect, these practice educators will be sufficiently competent to recommend with evidence that the social work students are fit to practise at the point of qualification.

Full criteria for accessing Practice Education qualifications can be found in the [Social Work Practice Education Policy and Guidance](#) (July 2013) document. However, as a minimum you will need to be a qualified social worker, have successfully completed the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) (for those qualifying post 2012), completed the Post Qualification Consolidation of Practice Module: *'Working with Children, Young People, their Families and Carers'* (or equivalent) and have 2 Years Post Qualification experience.

## What support will I get if I accept a student on placement?

The [Professional Capabilities Framework](#) (PCF) provides clear guidance on [levels for Student Social Workers](#) which will help you understand how your student needs to be performing. You will also have support from the student's Course Tutor and from the Practice Learning Manager in the Children's Trust and be invited to any professional development activities that are available specifically for Practice Educators.

## Where can I find further information?

Children's Services have a [Social Work Practice Education Policy and Guidance](#) (July 2013) which provides more information and guidance. This can also be accessed via [TriX](#) from November 2013.

The Workforce Development Team has a limited supply of the publication [Practice Education in Social Work: A Handbook for Practice Teachers, Assessors and Educators](#) by Janet Walker, Karin Crawford and Jonathan Parker (Learning Matters, Sage, 2011) which is available to borrow. Please e-mail the [Workforce Development Team](#).

The College of Social Work (TCSW) have published [Practice Educator Professional Standards for Social Work](#), which are effective from October 2013.

## Who is the Lead Officer?

The Practice Learning Manager, Workforce Development Team, based in the Children's Trust, leads on practice education and can provide you with information regarding offering student placements etc. For further information you can contact the team by emailing [workforcedevelopment@redbridge.gov.uk](mailto:workforcedevelopment@redbridge.gov.uk)