Practice Educator Professional Standards for Social Work

These standards set out requirements at two stages, commensurate with the different levels of complexity and responsibility in teaching, assessing and supervising social work degree students. The standards are also relevant for those supporting and assessing PQ candidates, newly qualified social workers or others engaging in formal or informal learning and development activities.

From October 2015 all practice educators of social work students must be registered social workers. These are minimum expectations. Employers and HEIs are free to develop requirements at a higher level individually or collaboratively. The standards will be phased in from October 2012 through transitional arrangements.

A glossary of terms used is provided in annex 1.

Staged Approach

The standards have two stages of progression, which build on and commence from the standard associated with the ‘enabling others’ module in the current PQ Framework.

Stage 1

Practice educators at this stage will have sufficient experience and have demonstrated competence to directly supervise, teach and assess social work degree students up to but not including the final assessment prior to qualification. At this stage they may contribute to a final placement but not take full responsibility for assessment or act as the practice educator on a day-to-day basis.

Stage 2

Practice educators at this stage will 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.

Developing pathways or programmes to meet the standards

It is for HEIs and employers to develop suitable ways of enabling candidates to meet the learning outcomes ranging from self managed portfolio presentations to a variety of in-house, distance and open learning or HEI-based training pathways.

1 Post-qualifying framework for social work education and training (GSCC, revised 2009)
Paragraph 49 (viii)
Programme providers can combine stage 1 and stage 2 training arrangements and assessment of learning outcomes into an integrated programme to maximise flexibility and local workforce planning needs.

**Assessment and accreditation**
The underpinning principle of the two proposed stages is that evidence to meet the learning outcomes may be generated within the workplace without the need for HEI accreditation and approval arrangements. It would be for partnerships and networks to plan together formal APL/APEL arrangements and credit rating. Partnerships should also ensure that practice educators have relevant opportunities to undertake continuous professional development and are able to demonstrate continued proficiency.

Practice educators, as registered social workers, need to apply their professional value base to whatever role they undertake in a range of contexts. The applied value base presented within the Guidance on the assessment of practice in the workplace (GSCC/Topss 2002) is provided for reference. This was linked to GSCC Codes of Practice and core values requirements of the post-qualifying framework but practice educators will need to ensure that the values on which they base their own practice and on which they teach, supervise and assess learners are in line with current expectations of their regulatory and professional bodies.

**Equivalent practice educator qualifications**
Practice Teacher Award (PTA) holders and those who have achieved a Higher Specialist Award in practice education within the current PQ framework who are qualified and registered social workers, are accepted as having reached the standards for stage 2 of the proposed framework. As such, if employers and HEIs are satisfied that the PTA holder has continued to regularly practice as a practice educator (normally has had direct responsibility for at least one student in the last two years or had relevant experience in practice education) and has retained and developed their skills, knowledge and value base, then they can continue to be responsible for assessing and teaching students at all placement levels and may be able to act as mentors and assessors for PE candidates.

**Independent practice educators and practice supervisors**
Independent off-site PEs would be expected to have demonstrated proficiency at stage 2. It is the responsibility of the agency or HEI contracting the independent PE to be satisfied that the independent PE is competent and suitable to carry out their responsibilities. This would include ensuring that safeguarding checks have been undertaken.

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2 who also have met the practice educator standards observation of practice assessment requirements in the attached table

Final version, Social Work Reform Board, December 2010
Although practice supervisors would not have to reach Stage 1 proficiency to support and supervise the day-to-day work of a social work student and would not necessarily have to be registered social workers, it is recommended that they should be working towards the stage 1 learning outcomes (excluding A5 and C11) and be supported by their line manager and practice educator. It is for the line manager to ensure that a practice supervisor is competent to provide day-to-day practice supervision of social work students.

Further Developments
The Practice Educator Professional Standards will be integrated within the overarching professional capabilities framework for social work currently being developed by the Social Work Reform Board.
## Practice Educator Professional Standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Stage One</th>
<th>Stage Two and Combined Stage 1 and 2 pathways</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional Qualification</strong></td>
<td>Registered Social Worker</td>
<td>Registered Social Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experience</strong></td>
<td>Two years’ relevant work experience before taking full responsibility for assessing a social work placement, qualified for two years.</td>
<td>Three years’ relevant work experience, qualified for two years by the end of the programme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge, skills and values – linked to learning outcomes</strong></td>
<td>Pathways and programmes must support practice educator candidates to meet <strong>stage one outcomes</strong> in Domains A, B and C and apply values (from Guidance of Assessment in the Workplace(^3)) to practice.</td>
<td>Pathways and programmes must support practice educator candidates to meet all learning outcomes in Domains A - D and apply values (from Guidance of Assessment in the Workplace(^3)) to practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support</strong></td>
<td>Guided support from an appropriate mentor on individual or group basis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment Process</strong></td>
<td>Applicants for the role must evidence achievements against learning outcomes in domains A – C, according to arrangements made by local or regional employer networks</td>
<td>Applicants for the role must evidence achievements against learning outcomes in domains A – D, according to arrangements made by local or regional employer networks</td>
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1. **Evidence**

- One direct observation of a practice educator candidate teaching, supervising or assessing a social work student against occupational or professional standards.

2. **Observation of Practice**

- Two direct observations of a practice educator candidate teaching, supervising or assessing against occupational or professional standards.

3. **Assessors**

- All assessors of PE candidates, including those observing a candidate’s practice, must be appropriately qualified at stage 2 or equivalent e.g. PTA holder/ those who have achieved PQ modules in Practice Education at Higher Specialist level\(^5\).

4. **Assessment standards**

- Evidence must be in line with agreed assessment standards in accordance with partner HEI expectations, national benchmark, a national framework and learning outcomes and GSCC accreditation and approval requirements.

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\(^3\) Guidance on the assessment of practice in the workplace (GSCC/Topss, 2002)

\(^4\) Post-qualifying framework for social work education and training (GSCC, revised 2009) Para 49 - ‘Teach, Mentor and Support social work or other students and/or colleagues and contribute to assessment against national occupational standards’

\(^5\) who also have met the practice educator standards observation of practice assessment requirement
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<tr>
<td>Links with QAPL</td>
<td>All candidates should:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Contribute to the completion or review of a QAPL(^6) audit</td>
<td>Additional learning outcomes to be met either by an additional assessed module, through APL/APEL processes or via flexible CPD learning opportunities (e.g. in-house training, practice education conferences, e-learning, distance learning, a sequence of workshops). Achievement of learning outcomes from flexible learning opportunities must be evidenced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Complete a QAPL practice educator feedback form for each student they assess</td>
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<tr>
<td>Programme structure</td>
<td>There should normally be some core input around domains A and B before the practice learning opportunity starts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Link with PQ requirements</td>
<td>Candidates at this stage should be able to meet the requirements for enabling others or evidence the equivalence.</td>
<td>Social work qualified candidates at this stage will have achieved Enabling Others or can evidence the equivalence. They may be able to acquire academic PQ credits or modules at specialist or higher specialist level depending on their programme of study.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GUIDANCE STATEMENTS

Domain A

Organise opportunities for the demonstration of assessed competence in practice

Practice educators at stage one and two should:

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

2. Devise an induction programme that takes into account a learner's needs and their previous experience.

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

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

5. Co-ordinate the work of all contributors. Ensure they are fully briefed, understand their roles and provide them with feedback.

6. Complete or review an audit and complete a practice educator feedback form for each student they assess in line with the Quality Assurance for Practice Learning (QAPL) framework.

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

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

Enable learning and professional development in practice

Practice educators at stage one and two should:

1. Teach the learner using contemporary social work models, methods and theories relevant to the work, powers and duties, and policy and procedures of the agency, demonstrating the ability for critical reflection.

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

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

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

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

6. Identify which aspects of the management of the learning and assessment programme learners are responsible for, in order to achieve their objectives. Describe and agree the roles of the practice supervisor and/or educator in mentoring, coaching, modelling, teaching, supervision and management and support of the placement.

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

8. Advise learners how to develop their ability to manage their learning. Advise, guide and respond to any difficulties encountered by them and where necessary provide instruction.

9. Support the learner in gathering evidence according to programme requirements

Additional learning outcome for practice educators at stage 2

10. Apply an appropriate range of supervisory models, roles and skills, which recognise the power dynamics between practice educator and learner.
Domain C

Manage the assessment of learners in practice

Practice educators at stage one and two should:

1. Engage learners in the design, planning and implementation of the assessment tasks.
2. Agree and review a plan and methods for assessing learners’ performance against agreed criteria.
3. Ensure that assessment decisions are the outcomes of informed, evidence-based judgments and clearly explain them to learners.
4. Evaluate evidence for its relevance, validity, reliability, sufficiency and authenticity according to the agreed standard.
5. Use direct observation of learners in practice to assess performance.
6. Base assessment decisions on all relevant evidence and from a range of sources, resolving any inconsistencies in the evidence available.
7. Encourage learners to self-evaluate and seek service users, carers and peer group feedback on their performance.
8. Provide timely, honest and constructive feedback on learners' performance in an appropriate format. Review their progress through the assessment process, distinguishing between formative and summative assessment.
9. Make clear to learners how they may improve their performance. Identify any specific learning outcomes not yet demonstrated and the next steps. If necessary, arrange appropriate additional assessment activity to enable them to meet the standard.
10. Ensure that all assessment decisions, and the supporting evidence, are documented and recorded according to the required standard. Produce assessment reports which provide clear evidence for decisions.
11. Ensure that disagreements about assessment judgments and complaints made about the assessment process are managed in accordance with agreed procedures.
12. Seek feedback from learners on their experience of being assessed, and the consequences of the assessment programme for them. Incorporate the feedback into future assessment activity.
13. Contribute to standardisation arrangements and the agreed quality-assurance processes which monitor the organisation’s training strategy.
14. Demonstrate the ability to make difficult assessment decisions around areas of development, which may include marginal or failing learners.
Additional learning outcomes for practice educators at stage 2

15. Demonstrate the ability to mark learner's academic and/or assessed work

16. Demonstrate an ability to use a range of assessment methods including recording, reports, and the feedback of people who use services and carers, professionals and other colleagues
Domain D

Effective continuing performance as a practice educator

Practice educators at stage two should:

1. Critically reflect upon and evaluate own professional development and apply learning to subsequent practice education experience using a range of methods.

2. Demonstrate critical reflection on own development as practice educator including the use of feedback from direct observations, colleagues and HEI tutors and other assessment sources

3. Demonstrate knowledge of current HEI quality assurance systems and ability to liaise and negotiate HEI processes

4. Maintain information and data relevant to the development of practice

5. Demonstrate an applied knowledge of contemporary issues in research, policy, legislation and practice including agency policy, procedures and practice.

6. Demonstrate an ability to transfer practice educator skills, knowledge and values to new roles in mentoring, supervision, teaching and/or assessment

7. Establish and maintain effective resources for your own support and supervision in respect of the Practice Educator role and demonstrate the ability to consult and work with others in contentious and challenging contexts such as failing learners and formal appeals and complaints.
Values for work based assessors  
(adapted from Guidance on the assessment of practice in the workplace, GSCC and Topss England, 2002)

Values for social care work-based assessors have been developed in addition to the core values of social care and social work and the General Social Care Council’s Code of Practice for Social Care Workers. Work-based assessors are key people in training and development strategies that enable staff to carry out their responsibilities as outlined in the Code of Practice for Social Care Employers.

This guidance focuses on the implications of these values in relation to the assessment process. In order to promote anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practices, work-based assessors will:

- identify and question their own values and prejudices, the use of authority and power in the assessment relationship, and recognise and act upon the implications for their assessment practice;

- update themselves on best practice in assessment and research on adult learning and apply this knowledge in promoting the rights and choices of learners and managing the assessment process;

- respect and value the uniqueness and diversity of learners and recognise and build on their strengths, and take into account individual learning styles and preferred assessment methods;

- accept and respect learners’ circumstances and understand how these impact on the assessment process;

- assess in a manner that does not stigmatise or disadvantage individuals and ensures equality of opportunity. Show applied knowledge and understanding of the significance of
  - poverty
  - racism
  - ill health and disability
  - gender
  - social class
  - sexual orientation

in managing the assessment process;

- recognise and work to prevent unjustifiable discrimination and disadvantage in all aspects of the assessment process, and counter any unjustifiable discrimination in ways that are appropriate to their situation and role; and

- take responsibility for the quality of their work and ensure that it is monitored and appraised; critically reflect on their own practice and identify development needs in order to improve their own performance, raise standards, and contribute to the learning and development of others.
Annex 1

Glossary

HEI. Higher Education Institution.

Practice educator. This person takes overall responsibility for the student’s learning and assessment, utilising information from their own assessment and other sources. The practice educator is the person who makes the recommendation to the course examination board about the student’s competence in relation to national occupational standards.

Off-site practice educator. A person employed through the agency or university social work degree course to undertake the role of practice educator who is not located in the same work site as the student. They normally partner a designated individual who is the on-site practice supervisor.

Practice supervisor. A person in the same work site as the student who is designated to manage the day-to-day activity of the student and who contributes to the student’s learning and assessment.

QAPL. Quality Assurance benchmark statement and guidance on monitoring of social work practice placements published by Skills for Care on behalf of the Social Work Development Partnership, January 2010