

1

PROCESSES AND PRACTICALITIES

Chapter summary

When you have worked through this chapter, you will be able to:

- Explain the purpose of a social work placement;
- Outline the preparation for placement procedures;
- Describe the purpose and content of readiness for direct practice assessments;
- Understand the role of the pre-placement meeting;
- Reflect upon your own readiness for direct practice and consider ways of preparing for placement.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers the practical tasks you will need to complete to ensure a successful start to placement, including the completion of documentation and the placement application form. We ask you to reflect upon and consider your level of capability as a beginning social worker and to identify your learning needs so that you and your practice educator can prepare for your placement. Most universities will have a person or team of people with designated responsibility for practice placements (although they may have different job titles) and in this chapter we introduce you to the work of this person or team and outline key steps in both applying for placement and demonstrating that you are ready for practice. Students usually find placements exciting and also a little nerve

wracking; we hope this chapter will guide you through some of the early processes associated with getting ready for starting placement.

WHAT ARE SOCIAL WORK PLACEMENTS?

Social work placements are varied, diverse and unique. Over the last few years, placements have been developed in a range of non-traditional settings which may not be automatically associated with the practice of 'traditional' social work; this includes schools, voluntary organisations, private agencies, placements within organisations led by service users (Doel et al., 2007) and placements with individual service users as part of the personalisation agenda (Tickle, 2009). This may mean that the person in the agency who takes day-to-day responsibility for organising your placement and the work you undertake, sometimes called a practice supervisor, work-based supervisor or on-site supervisor (in this book we use the term on-site supervisor for people who take this role), is not a qualified social worker. This does not mean that your placement will be of inferior quality as all placements are audited under the framework for Quality Assurance in Practice Learning (QAPL) which was first introduced in 2010 by the General Social Care Council (GSCC, 2010) and has recently been revised by The College of Social Work and Skills for Care (2012). Many of these 'non-traditional' placements offer invaluable learning and development opportunities for social work students that would not be available within 'traditional' placements such as those provided by local authorities.

From 2013, all social work qualifying programmes will provide a placement structure that consists of 30 days' readiness for practice, a first practice placement of 70 days and a final practice placement of 100 days (TCSW, 2012a). In general terms, work placements provide students with the opportunity to acquire skills pertinent for employment, evaluate their practice and knowledge and inform future employment choices (Fanthome, 2004). However, for social work students, placements are an opportunity for you to learn about the professional practice of social work, apply theory to practice situations and demonstrate proficiency and capability in social work skills, values and theory. From September 2013 all students will be assessed against the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) (TCSW, 2012b, 2012c). During placement you will need to show your practice educator that you have met the requirements of the PCF, which measure your understanding and application of social work knowledge, values and skills, and your capabilities as a beginning social worker across nine domains set at different levels of proficiency and complexity for each placement. Importantly, you will have to pass each assessed practice learning experience in order to progress in your studies. It is therefore crucial to have a clear view of the knowledge, values and skills that you already possess and what your learning needs for placement are (see Chapter 2).

As a starting point, this first activity asks you to think about your first placement.

Activity 1.1



My first placement

Thinking about your first social work placement, work through the questions below and complete the right-hand column of the table.

Questions	My initial thoughts
Which service user group would you like to work with?	
Where would you want your placement to be?	
What are you most looking forward to about your placement?	
Do you have any worries about placement?	

PREPARING FOR YOUR FIRST PLACEMENT

All placements and all students are individual; as such the period prior to placements can cause students anxiety. Placement providers respond to requests for placements at different speeds, pre-placement meetings take place at different times and practice educators may not be available to provide a placement in precise alignment with the university’s calendar; inevitably this means that students will know at different times when their placements are confirmed. For some, confirmation and organisation of the placement will not be received until close to the start date or placement commencement period. Whilst university staff and placements teams will be familiar with such processes and may not seem anxious about the uncertainty, this can be a worrying time for students. It is therefore important to be able to cope with your anxieties and to carefully manage your communications with the university’s placements team – time spent by staff helping you manage your emotions may well be better spent organising and confirming placements. This is not meant to discourage you from contacting your placement team, merely to reassure you that they will not have forgotten about you.

COMPLETING RELEVANT DOCUMENTATION

Part of demonstrating your readiness for practice involves completing paperwork and documentation in a timely fashion; this section outlines some of

documentation you will be asked to complete, often right at the very start of your social work studies.

ENHANCED CRIMINAL RECORDS BUREAU (CRB) OR DISCLOSURE AND BARRING SCHEME (DBS) CHECK

Within the first few weeks of commencing your course, you will be asked to complete a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) or Disclosure and Barring Scheme (DBS) check, which will formally record any cautions or criminal convictions you may have. The Disclosure and Barring Scheme undertake CRBs (see: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/agencies-public-bodies/dbs/about-us1/what-we-do/before-the-dbs/). Your university will probably have asked you to disclose any cautions or criminal convictions at interview and it is important to be completely open and honest. Having a conviction or caution (where you have admitted guilt to the police) does not necessarily preclude you from social work training but it does depend on the nature of the offence and when the offence occurred. As a profession, our primary duty is to protect the wellbeing of service users and some offences may mean that you are potentially unsuitable for social work. Failure to disclose a caution or conviction may be regarded as an attempt to deceive your social work programme and could result in the instigation of formal readiness for practice procedures which may result in the termination of training. The importance of vetting staff for work with vulnerable service users, and in particular the role of the CRB check, came to prominence following the murders of Jessica Chapman and Holly Wells by their school caretaker, Ian Huntley, in 2002 (Bichard, 2004).

DECLARATION OF SUITABILITY FOR PRACTICE

As a social worker in training, you are expected to comply with the Health and Care Professions Council's (HCPC) Guidance on Conduct and Ethics for Students (HCPC, 2012a) and you may be asked to sign to say that you have read and will comply with these standards. Whilst this is generic guidance for students in all professions regulated by the HCPC, the document sets out the standards expected of students during their training. The expectations include ethical practice in relation to your conduct with service users, guidance on disclosure of information to your education provider should any circumstance impair your fitness to practise and requirements to maintain your professional development, knowledge and skills and to be aware of when these are insufficient (HCPC, 2012a).

Typically a declaration of suitability for practice will also ask students to disclose any physical or mental health issues, disciplinary offences or involvement with statutory services that may impair or be relevant to fitness to practise. Deciding what is relevant and what is not can be difficult, but our advice is to disclose information even if you are unsure of its relevance. The HCPC places the onus on practitioners and students to take responsibility for their own health and character and to recognise when they are physically or mentally unfit to practise or when their conduct

would preclude them from doing so. In practical terms, this requires students to inform the university if any issue arises that might affect their suitability for practice (HCPC, 2012a).

It is also possible that universities will ask whether you, or anyone in your immediate household, have been users of social care services (as an adult or a child). Again, past or current involvement with social care services does not automatically preclude you from the profession, but some concerns (e.g. safeguarding issues) may lead your university to make enquiries about your suitability.

OTHER DOCUMENTATION

There are other important processes and documents that you need to consider prior to the commencement of your placement. For example, if you are intending to use a car whilst on placement, you need to ensure that you have obtained business insurance. Some insurers will provide this at no additional cost, but others will charge. If you do not have, or cannot afford business insurance, you must not use your car to transport service users or for any business travel. Be aware that your placement provider may ask to see all of your vehicle documents including your car insurance, your driving licence and a current MOT certificate. You need to ensure that all of your documentation is current, as if placements require a car driver, they will not allow you to start until you are able to prove that you are appropriately insured and safe to drive on their behalf.

AN IMPORTANT REMINDER ABOUT DOCUMENTATION

The documentation that you complete and compile is part of your preparation and readiness for practice processes. Your university programme may ask to see some or all of the documents before you can proceed to placement. Additionally, placements may ask to see this documentation to ensure that you are a suitable candidate for a student placement within their organisation. It is not unknown for some organisations to ask you to complete a further CRB/DBS check specifically in relation to your placement with them; this will depend upon the organisation's policies and procedures.

We are aware of situations where students have lost or misplaced documentation or where paperwork has been damaged, making it illegible. In these circumstances, you will need to obtain new or duplicate documentation, which could potentially delay the start of your placement. It is therefore vital that you store the documentation in a safe place where it cannot be damaged. Also, universities may require you to have a CRB/DBS check that is less than three years old, so students on part-time courses or who have interrupted studies may need to renew their CRB/DBS. Our advice is to buy a folder to place these documents in, which you will be able to show during readiness for practice processes (if required) and also to placement providers.

Your documentation acts as a ‘passport’ to placement (Doel, 2010: 3) and it is important that you make sure you keep this up to date. In the event of any change in your circumstances, such as health issues or criminal convictions (including speeding tickets), you will need to disclose this information to the university (HCPC, 2012a; Parker, 2010a) no matter how minor you perceive this to be.

Top tips – Preparing your documents

- Store documentation safely
- Buy a folder to store all key documents
- If your circumstances change (e.g. CRB/DBS, health), you must inform your university

Activity 1.2



Keeping track of key documents

Work through the table below and complete the two empty columns as you locate and collate the necessary documentation. We have left some room for you to add any other documentation that might be required by your university.

Documentation checklist	Tick when complete	Where have you stored this document?
Complete CRB/DBS documentation Read the HCPC Guidance on Conduct and Ethics for Students If required, obtain business use on car insurance Make sure you driving licence is in date (if applicable) If required, make sure your car has a current MOT certificate Complete declarations of suitability for practice (if required) Complete the placement application form		

COMPLETING YOUR PLACEMENT APPLICATION FORM

As detailed earlier in the chapter, most universities will have a dedicated placement or practice team who will be responsible for guiding you through the placement application process. It is important to be familiar with the structure of placement provision within your university and the processes of applying for placements. Regardless of when placements are scheduled to commence, the application process is likely to take place some months prior to the start date to allow time for placement finding and matching. If you have a particular requirement, such as wanting a placement overseas or perhaps in your home town, which falls outside existing partnerships between your university and local placement providers, it would be wise to alert your placement team to this at the earliest opportunity.

Placement application forms and processes will also vary across universities, so what follows is generic advice on completing the placement application form. Placements can be scarce resources, so it is important to complete your application form with thought and care. It is likely that the application form will provide you with some options about your preferences (e.g. service user group, location, travel). Generally speaking, narrowing your options with specific placement interests may make placement finding problematic; we would therefore advise that you indicate broad preferences (e.g. working with children and families) rather than narrowing your requirements to a specific type of work or placement setting (e.g. Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service [CAFCASS] or adoption work). Placement application forms are also likely to reflect something about your pre-course experiences and what you envisage your learning needs to be. Your university will probably encourage you to complete a self-audit of your knowledge, values and skills prior to placement so you can identify learning needs to be addressed in placement. Time spent reflecting upon your learning during the degree course and what this means for your future learning needs will be time well spent. It is really helpful if placements know what your strengths and learning needs are as it will help to plan suitable learning opportunities.

If you have any specific requirements, the application form is a good place to make these needs known. Some students are reluctant to disclose details of disabilities or specific needs, but this information can be vital in finding you a placement that can meet your needs. You may also have caring responsibilities that need to be accommodated and placement teams will only be familiar with your needs if you let them know.

Whilst this may be self-evident, it is also important that you ensure that the placement team has your correct contact details (including term-time and home addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses). If you change any of these contact details, remember to let the placement team know so that they can update their records. Additionally, you need to make sure you allow time to review and edit your application, paying particular attention to grammar and spelling as well as content. Sometimes your placement team or academic tutor will be able to assist with placement application forms to ensure you present your information coherently and articulately.

WHAT YOUR UNIVERSITY MAY EXPECT OF YOU

Placement teams/placement coordinators often have to meet the needs of students at different levels of social work training, sometimes at both undergraduate and post-graduate levels. Social work programmes will therefore usually require you to complete documentation well in advance of the placement start period and they will expect you to submit by a specific date in the academic year. Universities will also expect you to consider suitable placements, even if this does not match your view of what an ideal placement would be. All placements are audited as part of quality assurance processes (TCSW and Skills for Care, 2012), so they should be able to meet your learning needs. Social work degree courses are generic and you should not refuse to consider a placement in a setting that you do not intend working in on qualification. Often students find that taking a placement in a setting which they had previously discounted can be a rewarding experience which informs their career choices and adds to their curriculum vitae (CV). There may also be an expectation that you undertake travel to placement and if you receive a social work bursary, there is a portion within it which is earmarked for travel costs. Some placements may reimburse travel costs, but many placements are not able to do so.

Some students may also have valuable information or contacts that can lead to the development of new placements. Universities always need to increase the number and the quality of the placements they provide and we would encourage you to contact your placement coordinator/placement team if you are able to provide new leads or contacts. However, many universities will insist that students should not arrange their own placements. Whilst arranging your own placement may seem an obvious solution to students, this interference in established processes and systems can cause problems for university staff, placement providers and other students. It can also place additional demands on placement providers who may be confused by receiving placement requests from a number of different sources.

PLACEMENT MATCHING

Once you have completed and submitted your placement application form, the university placement team/coordinator will review your information in the light of available placements and other programme demands and make decisions about where to send your application form. Universities will try to match you to your preferred placement setting, based upon the needs and interests you expressed in your application form, although they cannot guarantee an exact match. Some universities will send copies of your application form to potential placement providers, whilst others will hold a formal matching meeting, or there might be a combination of both of these methods. Once placements have received your details, they might be able to make a decision about whether to invite you for an (often informal) interview but in some organisations (such as local authorities), several applications may be given/sent to one person who has the job of finding and matching placements within their organisation. Inevitably, the latter approach will take longer to complete.

READINESS FOR PRACTICE

The social work degree requirements place great emphasis on readiness or fitness for practice, with 30 days being set aside for this process. The readiness for practice arrangements are designed to be robust and are jointly planned, delivered and assessed by universities, service users and employers (TCSW, undated (a)). Whilst there is still flexibility in how readiness for practice processes are configured and assessed, there is an expectation that universities will draw on a range of methods of assessment to determine fitness to practise (Social Work Reform Board, 2011; TCSW, 2012d, undated (c)). The College of Social Work (undated (c)) anticipates that most of the 30 days will be used prior to commencement of the first placement to assist students in developing the necessary skills for practice. However, some days can be retained for more advanced skills development later in the degree programme. The readiness for practice assessment reflects the Professional Capabilities Framework, and an initial level of capability across all nine elements will need to be demonstrated before students can proceed to placement (TCSW, 2012d). The intention then is that only suitable, high quality students will be able to progress through training (Social Work Reform Board, 2010b).

Whilst it is difficult to anticipate the evolution of readiness for practice processes, you will need to be prepared to have your skills observed and examined, your knowledge tested both in terms of academic understanding and the ability to apply this to direct practice, and your values scrutinised to ensure compatibility with and adherence to professional standards. Suggested content of readiness for practice modules includes developing skills in communication and observation, understanding the context in which social work practice takes place, shadowing qualified social workers and the involvement of service users and carers as experts through experience (TCSW, undated (c)). Readiness for practice assessment will occur at several points within your degree programme.

As discussed, a mixture of strategies to assess readiness for practice will be utilised, often involving service users as co-assessors in determining suitability and also co-providers of readiness for practice assessment opportunities (Advocacy in Action et al., 2006; Elliott et al., 2005; Lishman, 2009a). Assessments of readiness for practice are therefore varied and may include:

- An interview with your academic tutor, sometimes with a service user or practitioner;
- A discussion with a service user;
- Role play with opportunities for feedback;
- Shadowing of an experienced qualified social work practitioner, often with a reflective account of your learning from this experience;
- An assessed video of practice or live observation of practice;
- Academic assessment of written work;
- Providing evidence that you have completed necessary documentation (e.g. CRB).
(Advocacy in Action et al., 2006; Doel, 2010; Elliot et al., 2005; Parker, 2010a)

The PCF at the level of readiness for direct practice requires students to show beginning levels of capability in all nine domains of the PCF, which are presented in Table 1.1. We have included a column for you to keep track of your learning and begin to think about how you have met the readiness for direct practice domain level capabilities. Later in the chapter, Activity 1.3 asks you to map your development in relation to each domain.

Table 1.1 PCF domain level – Readiness for Practice Capabilities (TCSW 2012d)

Domain	Readiness for direct practice domain level capabilities	Where and how this can be evidenced
Professionalism	Describe the role of the social worker Describe the mutual roles and responsibilities in supervision Describe the importance of professional behaviour Describe the importance of personal and professional boundaries Demonstrate ability to learn, using a range of approaches Describe the importance of emotional resilience in social work	
Values and ethics	Understand the profession's ethical principles and their relevance to practice Demonstrate awareness of own personal values and how these can impact on practice	
Diversity	Recognise the importance of diversity in human identity and experience, and the application of anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive principles in social work practice	
Rights, justice and economic wellbeing	Understand the principles of rights, justice and economic wellbeing, and their significance for social work practice	
Knowledge	Demonstrate an initial understanding of the application of research, theory and knowledge from sociology, social policy, psychology, health and human growth and development to social work Demonstrate an initial understanding of the legal and policy frameworks and guidance that inform and mandate social work practice Demonstrate an initial understanding of the range of theories and models for social work intervention	
Critical reflection and analysis	Understand the role of reflective practice and demonstrate basic skills of reflection Understand the need to construct hypotheses in social work practice Recognise and describe why evidence is important in social work practice	

Domain	Readiness for direct practice domain level capabilities	Where and how this can be evidenced
Intervention and skills	Demonstrate core communication skills and the capacity to develop them Demonstrate the ability to engage with people in order to build compassionate and effective relationships Demonstrate awareness of a range of frameworks to assess and plan intervention Demonstrate basic ability to produce written documents relevant for practice Demonstrate initial awareness of risk and safeguarding	
Contexts and organisations	Demonstrate awareness of the impact of organisational context on social work practice	
Professional leadership	Demonstrate awareness of the importance of professional leadership in social work	

It is clear that you will need to evidence at least a rudimentary level of capability that can be further developed in your first placement. Although universities have different readiness for practice assessments, there is some preparation work that you can do, for example:

- Discuss the readiness for practice process with your academic tutor and ask for guidance on relevant preparation to undertake;
- After reading this text, seek further reading on social work placements to support your learning about social work placements and what they might be like;
- Revise the academic modules you have studied so far and make a note of how these have influenced your knowledge, values or skills; make links to the PCF domain level capabilities for readiness for direct practice as you do this;
- Practise communication and listening skills with your family and friends;
- Write a short statement about your values in relation to the HCPC Guidance on Conduct and Ethics for Students or the values proposed by the British Association of Social Workers (BASW, 2012) (available from: http://cdn.basw.co.uk/upload/basw_112315-7.pdf);
- Read newspapers articles about social work and social care to make sure you are aware of contemporary social work issues and concerns;
- Visit the website of The College of Social Work (www.collegeofsocialwork.org/), which will give you lots of information about current developments in social work practice.

An important component of the readiness for practice process is to test your understanding of the PCF, as this will form the basis of your assessment on placement. You will be asked to demonstrate a detailed understanding of the requirements of

the framework whilst on placement and you will need to be familiar with the document prior to undertaking your readiness for practice process.

In order to help you with your preparations, this next activity asks you to complete a self-evaluation of your performance in relation to each of the nine domains of the PCF. Do not worry if you feel unfamiliar with the PCF as we will discuss it in greater detail later in the book. Do not forget to consider the teaching you have received on your course so far, your previous experience and any gaps or needs in your knowledge and skills.

Activity 1.3



Evaluating your knowledge, values and skills in relation to the PCF

PCF	What do I know about this aspect of the PCF?	What sorts of things have I already done that will demonstrate evidence for this capability?	What skills do I already possess in relation to this capability?	What skills, knowledge or values do I need to develop for this capability?
Professionalism				
Values and ethics				
Diversity				
Rights, justice and economic wellbeing				
Knowledge				
Critical reflection and analysis				
Intervention and skills				
Contexts and organisations				
Professional leadership				

When you have completed this activity, read the case study below which introduces Gulshan, a social work student who is soon starting his first placement. In Chapter 2 you will read more about Gulshan and consider what theories would be relevant to his placement.

Gulshan

Gulshan is a social work student; he attends his pre-placement meeting in a busy voluntary agency which works with socially excluded young people in an inner-city environment. The agency runs a variety of group work activities and provides activity weekends away from the city. It also helps young people find work either on a paid or voluntary experience. It has a limited number of ‘crisis’ beds for homeless young people where they can stay on a temporary basis. Gulshan’s practice educator tells him that issues he can expect to encounter on placement include substance misuse, self-harm, poor educational attainment, loss of parental contact, offending behaviour, mental health problems and homelessness. The practice educator already has a number of service users in mind that Gulshan could potentially work with including a young man with learning difficulty who has recently come out of prison and is currently homeless.

Prior to his placement, Gulshan completed Activity 1.3 and evaluated his learning and development in relation to the PCF domains at the readiness for direct practice level. Table 1.2 presents a copy of Gulshan’s completed work on Activity 1.3.

Table 1.2 Example case study: Evaluating Gulshan’s knowledge, values and skills in relation to the PCF

PCF	What do I know about this aspect of the PCF?	What sorts of things have I already done that will demonstrate evidence for this capability?	What skills do I already possess in relation to this capability?	What skills, knowledge or values do I need to develop for this capability?
Professionalism	That I should behave at all times like a professional.	Good attendance on the social work course. I have been reliable and punctual. I have read the HCPC Guidance on Conduct and Ethics for Students. We have discussed how best to look after ourselves whilst on placement.	I have good time management and organisational skills.	I need to work on how to present myself in meetings with other professionals.
Values and ethics	I have been learning about professional values such as respect, self-determination, confidentiality, empowerment and protecting people from harm.	We have completed a module on Values and Ethics. I have tried to listen to other people’s points of view even though they are different to my own. I now know about treating information as confidential.	I believe in treating people with respect and think I’m good at understanding people’s experiences and views.	I need to learn how to challenge people effectively. I would like to learn how to manage information in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

(Continued)

Table I.2 (Continued)

PCF	What do I know about this aspect of the PCF?	What sorts of things have I already done that will demonstrate evidence for this capability?	What skills do I already possess in relation to this capability?	What skills, knowledge or values do I need to develop for this capability?
Diversity	I have been learning about discrimination and anti-oppressive practice. I've also learnt about my own pre-conceptions and prejudices and how these might influence how I see practice situations.	I have taken part in discussions about oppression and have thought about other people's experiences and perspectives. I have been good at listening to what others have to say but felt less confident in voicing my opinions.	I have started to see issues of social injustice and discrimination and that anti-oppressive practice is not about treating everyone in the same way.	I need to develop skills in discussing issues of discrimination and oppression with service users in a clear and understandable way. I need to keep reflecting on my own perceptions and prejudices to make sure they don't interfere with the work on placement.
Rights, justice and economic wellbeing	In university, we have been discussing people's rights and legislation such as the Human Rights Act 1998. I also attended a Welfare Rights session.	During some voluntary work, I liaised with a housing department for a service user.	I have some knowledge of the law and have been learning about discrimination.	I need to know how legislation is applied in real practice.
Knowledge	I have undertaken a range of academic modules that provide theory that can explain situations or how to best intervene.	We have been working on case studies in seminars and also for assignments which need you to think about the role of knowledge in social work practice. Service users came to talk about their experiences of social workers and that really made me think about what sort of practitioner I want to be.	I have developed my communication skills and understand some of the theories and methods. There was an assessed role play as part of the readiness for practice module.	I am struggling to understand how to apply theory to practice.
Critical reflection and analysis	I've noticed that the lecturers talk a lot about criticality for our academic work and when using case studies about practice, we have been asked to think about different ways of helping.	I have been reading about criticality for my assignments and bought some study skills books. Thinking about practice, we have been applying assessment and analysis skills to case studies.	I have learnt never to take things at face value.	I need to develop skills in working with real service users and analysing information.

PCF	What do I know about this aspect of the PCF?	What sorts of things have I already done that will demonstrate evidence for this capability?	What skills do I already possess in relation to this capability?	What skills, knowledge or values do I need to develop for this capability?
		We have been looking at reflective practice and part of the readiness for practice assessment is a written reflective account of my development prior to placement.	I have started to examine and question my own assumptions and views.	
Intervention and skills	In the communications module, I have learnt about counselling models and done activities to try out these skills. We also practised taking a telephone referral.	In my last job before coming to university, I worked in a customer service centre and have a lot of experience of answering the telephone.	I have some telephone skills which have been helpful for listening.	I am concerned about how to write things for service users' files.
Contexts and organisations	The placements team organised a talk from placement providers and the different types of organisations amazed me.	We did an assessment case study using a video and had to consider the range of professionals who might be working with the service user.	I was quite good at thinking about who might be able to help the service user.	I do not have any experience of inter-agency or interdisciplinary work.
Professional leadership	I was unsure whether I would be able to meet this capability at this stage in my career, but I have been taking responsibility for my own learning during the first year of the degree.	I have become a student representative. With some friends, we have set up a study group. I have also set myself a study timetable which has helped me manage other demands on my time. We had some teaching about using supervision which stressed the responsibilities students will have during supervision whilst on placement	My communication and negotiation skills have helped me set up the study group and represent the views of the student cohort in formal meetings.	I would like to work on my confidence in presenting information in formal settings.

COMMENT

Whilst being at a very early stage of his career, Gulshan has still been able to find evidence in relation to each aspect of the PCF. Even small things can count as evidence towards your development in relation to the PCF (e.g. reading about an issue) as you

will be able to build upon these small steps and develop increasing complexity as you progress. In common with many other students about to start placement, Gulshan has highlighted learning needs about the application of theory to practice and hopes to build both his skills and confidence in relation to each area. Being able to reflect upon your progress, learning needs and practice situations is vital for social work practice, as we will discuss in Chapter 2 in relation to reflective practice.

WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU FAIL YOUR READINESS FOR PRACTICE ASSESSMENT?

There are a number of reasons why you might fail your readiness for practice assessment. Some are listed below, although this is not an exhaustive list:

- Not demonstrating sufficient understanding of knowledge, skills and values to commence placement;
- Not evidencing a grasp of the requirements of the PCF;
- Failure to complete necessary documentation within the required timescales;
- Issues relating to your Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) or Disclosure and Barring Scheme (DBS) check;
- Inability to relate to service users or to accurately report their experiences;
- Breaches of the HCPC Guidance on Conduct and Ethics for student professionals in training;
- Behaviours that suggest unsuitability for practice with vulnerable service users (e.g. unreliability, lack of honesty and integrity) or raise concern about your health and wellbeing.

If you fail your readiness for practice assessment, what happens next will depend on the reason for failing. For example, if your documentation is incomplete you might be offered another chance to be assessed and it may be possible to conditionally proceed to placement with the requirement that you produce the necessary documents at the earliest opportunity, or by a set date. However, if there are concerns about your understanding of knowledge, values and skills or if your behaviour has caused significant concerns, then you might not have another assessment opportunity. Some issues are so serious that your university may formally invoke university-wide readiness for practice processes, for example serious breaches of professional expectations as outlined in the HCPC Guidance on Conduct and Ethics for Students. This is usually a formal panel of practitioners, service users and academics that will consider the available evidence and will determine whether a student is permitted to continue with their social work studies. If you find yourself in this situation you will be able to present your account to the panel, often with the support of a representative of the Student's Union.

MAKING CONTACT WITH YOUR PLACEMENT/THE PRE-PLACEMENT INTERVIEW

Having received your application form, it is likely that the placement provider will invite you for interview; this is called a pre-placement meeting. You will need to carefully prepare for this meeting; whilst it is not always the case, it is possible that, in some areas, other students are also applying for a placement with the organisation. You may find it helpful to make a list of questions to ask at the meeting (Lomax et al., 2010); for example, information regarding working hours, dress code, what the organisation expects of students, what sort of work you will be allocated, what pre-placement reading and preparation is required, as well as who you will be working with both within the team and externally. You might also have particular needs (e.g. caring responsibilities or specific learning needs) that you wish to discuss with your practice educator so they can make sure these are catered for once the placement begins. There is a lack of research evidence about pre-placement meetings (see research summary below), but we know that there is no prescribed format for this meeting.

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Because of the lack of research about the purpose and function of pre-placement meetings, we undertook a qualitative study (currently submitted for publication) of pre-placement meetings. There was one focus group with experienced practice educators and another focus group with students about to start their first placement.

Our findings were that:

- Pre-placement meetings come in all shapes and sizes with very little consistency about the way they are structured and the things that are required of students;
- Some pre-placement meetings were competitive interviews for the placement;
- Some pre-placement meetings were very formal and others were very relaxed;
- Students experienced some pre-placement meetings as an informal chat whereas others were asked to prepare presentations and attend a panel interview;

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- The pre-placement interview makes sure the placement and student are a good match for each other;
- The meeting is the opportunity to be clear about specific needs such as child care responsibilities;
- There were occasions when the student did not attend the pre-placement meeting or offer apologies;
- Practice educators use application forms as a screening tool;
- Practice educators may test out the student's understanding of theory and the level of their pre-placement preparation.

ISSUES FOR PART-TIME STUDENTS

Some social work degrees are offered on a part-time basis and some students who study part-time do so as 'employment-based' or 'work-based' students. It is also then possible, in some regions, that these students may undertake their first placement within their own work setting. However, in some regions this is actively discouraged because, in doing so, students undertaking placements in settings where they have worked or currently work will have particular issues to consider. Whilst there may be no concerns about the content or nature of the work with service users or how to work effectively within an organisation, employment-based students face a number of other challenges. For example, how to make their learning explicit in a setting where they may have worked for some time; students may take certain skills and abilities for granted and therefore may not easily recognise evidence of capability in relation to the PCF. When on placement in their own work setting, employment-based students face particular difficulties in making the transition from practitioner to 'student' (Doel, 2010). This can be exacerbated by the expectations of their manager or wider team and by demands of a (heavy) caseload; for example, colleagues may forget that they are a student and need learning opportunities in the same way as other students; managers may find it hard to provide workload relief and the student can find it difficult to take study leave when the pressures facing colleagues are evident. If you are in this position, we strongly advise you to make sure you discuss your student status with your practice educator so that thoughts and plans for how this can be protected are considered in your learning agreement.

PLACEMENT COUNTDOWN

Our view is that preparation for placement takes place over several months prior to arriving in your placement setting. This final section of the chapter takes you

through some of the last-minute preparations you need to make prior to the start of your placement and covers three areas: preparing yourself; organising academic work; and understanding placement roles and responsibilities.

PREPARING YOURSELF

As we outlined earlier, it is crucial to have given some thought to your learning needs prior to placement which will require critical self-reflection and self-evaluation. Your practice educator will appreciate you sharing your ideas of your learning needs as you arrive in placement and your progress towards meeting these can be reviewed during supervision throughout placement. We suggest that you make a written note of your learning needs prior to placement start and use these to inform your learning agreement.

There might also be practicalities to consider, such as ensuring that you understand the dress code of the agency. For example, some settings will not allow you to dress in jeans and may expect you to cover tattoos or remove piercings. Many social care and social work placement settings require smart casual dress, unless you are attending an event which has a specific type of dress code (e.g. court attendance or outdoor activities with young people). Some students unwittingly fall foul of what are largely unwritten dress codes within organisations by over- or under-dressing. You may also need to consider how people such as co-workers, managers, service users and other professionals may view the wearing of short skirts, shorts, strapless tops, open shirts or other items of clothing that could be seen as being unsuitable. Your practice educator will be able to advise you on these issues and you need to remember that you are representing yourself and your profession on placement. The key is to dress modestly in a way that is most suitable for the professional work you are undertaking.

It is also important to make sure you are organised for your journey to placement. Thinking about what time you will need to get up, making sure you set your alarm clock, planning your travel route (via public transport or car) and having a trial run of the journey are all essential aspects of your planning. Your placement may provide you with a diary or give you access to an e-diary. If not, you will need to purchase one as maintaining an up-to-date diary will be essential if you are going to effectively manage your time on placement and fit in the demands of practice and academic work.

If applicable, you might need to make arrangements for family and caring commitments. This tends to be less stressful if you know well in advance the start date of your placement and whether there will be any breaks during the placement (e.g. Christmas or half-term holidays). Negotiating time off for school holiday periods may not always be possible and will be dependent upon the academic timetable. If in doubt, speak to your module coordinator for placements as they will know the key dates for placement-related activities (e.g. marking, practice assurance/assessment panels, examination boards) and will be able to tell you if there is any flexibility on the placement dates. You might need to plan, or at the very least consider, how you are going to manage the work/life demands that you will face. Home commitments will vary from student to student, but *all* students need to think about how they will

find time for study whilst being on a full-time placement, how to ensure they have some leisure time and how they will manage relationships with family and friends when they are extremely busy.

A real student, who we refer to as David, offers the following advice about how to manage a work/life balance:

Student voice – David

The majority of people have to find a balance between work/life. Whilst on placement I have had to find a work/life/academic balance which has been incredibly difficult and the only way I found to do this is through being incredibly organised. It's not just a case of organising your working day, but also organising your 'free time', the closer you get to the end of placement the more every hour counts. Book your academic work into time slots just as you would your work appointments, but make sure you also have time slots for you and your family.

Consider David's advice and your reading so far in this chapter as you complete the following activity.

Activity 1.4

Managing work/life pressures



Spend some time thinking about your personal commitments and write a list of the things you will need to manage or organise prior to placement and then consider some potential solutions to how you might manage these.

Managing work/life pressures	
Issue to manage	Possible solutions

COMMENT

Of course, it is not possible for us to know the particular challenges that you may face, but commonly students completing this activity are struck by the level of goodwill and support they are likely to need from family and friends during their studies. This informal support is crucial to completion but is often unacknowledged (Mathews et al., 2009).

ORGANISING ACADEMIC WORK

Prior to starting placement, you need to make sure that you have all of the documentation relating to placement. This may seem a particularly obvious recommendation, but from our experience it is one that students often neglect. There might be a number of documents which will guide you through placement. Students usually focus on portfolio building during placement to evidence their skills in relation to the PCF. It is sensible to organise a folder for your portfolio and make sure you are familiar with its requirements. However, there might also be other placement documentation that you need to be familiar with such as those which outline people's roles or explain what to do in the case of absence from placement.

You need to be aware of what you are being assessed against whilst on placement, so make sure you read the placement documentation with care. Keeping up to date with portfolio work throughout the placement is the most effective way of managing the practice and academic assessment elements of placement and at the heart of this are good organisational skills.

Top tips – Preparing for placement

- Read all of the placement documentation
- Prepare folders or files (electronic or paper) to put placement documentation and evidence in
- Start as you mean to go on – get organised and stay that way
- Keep on top of the portfolio requirements throughout the placement – never leave this until the last minute

UNDERSTANDING PLACEMENT ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Reading the placement documentation will provide you with the necessary information about who is who in placement. You will be allocated a practice educator who

will be responsible for assessing your practice during placement, writing the final report on your progress and making a decision about whether you have passed or failed the assessment in relation to the PCF. Eventually all practice educators will be registered and qualified social workers with additional training in teaching students (TCSW, 2012e). Until these changes are fully implemented, however, your practice educator may not be a qualified social worker. You might be based with your practice educator all the time but some students will be placed in settings where their practice educator is not present full-time. In these circumstances you will be provided with an 'off-site' or 'long-arm practice educator'. The practice educator will also provide you with supervision which tests out and supports your learning regarding application of theory and values. If your practice educator is in placement all the time, they will supervise the work allocated to you and sometimes this element of supervision is shared with the manager of the team. You should be prepared that supervision will be both supportive and challenging, as part of the practice educator's role is to challenge your thinking, your developing knowledge and values.

If you have a placement where the practice educator is off-site or long-arm, then there will be someone who is based in placement who will take responsibility for day-to-day management, support and supervision; this role may be called practice assessor, practice supervisor, on-site supervisor or work-based supervisor. We use the term 'on-site supervisor' in this book. The on-site supervisor will allocate work to you, as well as providing daily guidance and support. They will write reports for your portfolio, but do not make the decision to pass or fail. On-site supervisors may also supervise work allocated to ensure you adhere to agency standards.

As a student social worker in placement, you will be required to adhere to professional standards of behaviour (e.g. the PCF as well as the HCPC Guidance on Conduct and Ethics for Students) and also agency policies and procedures (e.g. recording policies). Placements will expect you to show a beginning level of professionalism and you will be expected to be accountable for your practice. This will mean making sure you undertake the work allocated to you (with support and guidance) and adhere to placement work practices (e.g. signing in and out of the office; keeping to health and safety requirements). If you cannot go into placement, you will need to let your practice educator, and possibly the university module coordinator, know and provide a valid reason for this. If absence is because of illness and is prolonged (more than seven days), you may be asked to obtain a doctor's certificate to explain this absence.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has introduced you to the key processes in preparing for a placement. Placements are an exciting component of the social work degree, but the requirements and expectations prior to placement may seem rather onerous; however, the placement team/coordinator and academic staff will guide you through these steps in a sequential manner, which will hopefully mean that the tasks involved seem less

overwhelming. Preparing for placement is a lengthy process that takes place over many months and it is important that you engage with these requirements in a proactive way. Being organised is key to successfully managing some of these processes and will certainly be beneficial when you start placement and have to manage the concurrent demands of placement and academic work.

FURTHER READING

Doel, M. (2010) *Social Work Placements: A Traveller's Guide*. London: Routledge. Renowned for his work on practice learning, Doel uses the analogy of a 'travel guide' and takes the reader through the placement journey. This is an accessible and easy to read book which will appeal to those who think conceptually using metaphors.

Lomax, R., Jones, K., Leigh, S. and Gay, C. (2010) *Surviving Your Social Work Placement*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

This is a highly practical book which covers all aspects of student placement. It is well grounded in practice wisdom and experience.

INTERNET RESOURCES

The Social Work Reform Board (SWRB): www.education.gov.uk/swrb

The SWRB was established to build on the work of the Social Work Task Force (SWTF) which made 15 recommendations about the reform of the social work profession that considered initial education, a continuing professional development framework for qualified practitioners, supportive employment infrastructures, workforce planning models and the creation of a College of Social Work.

The College of Social Work (TCSW): www.collegeofsocialwork.org/

From the beginning of 2012, The College of Social Work became the lead professional organisation for social work. The college represents social work as a profession and advocates on behalf of its members and the profession as a whole. The PCF and the relevant domain capability levels can be found on this website at: www.collegeofsocialwork.org/pcf.aspx

The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC): www.hpc-uk.org/

The HCPC became the regulatory body for social work on 1 August 2012. It maintains the register of qualified social workers and ensures that social workers are fit to practise, that they do so in a manner that is commensurate with professional standards and maintain their continuing professional development. Originally known as the Health Professions Council the regulatory body was renamed to reflect the inclusion of social work.