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Achieving Professional Standards

PAULA BEESLEY AND SUE TAPLIN

Authors of the first and second editions:
Pam Field, Cathie Jasper, Lesley Littler and Liz Munro

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Meet the **authors**

Paula Beesley is a registered social worker with a background in working within children services, particularly with parents with a learning disability. She is a qualified practice educator and has supported numerous students, both in her role in local authority teams and as an independent off-site practice educator (OSPE). She now works at Leeds Beckett University as a senior lecturer in social work, specialising in skill development and placement preparation and support. She has written her doctoral thesis on developing knowledge and skills in social work student supervision.

Sue Taplin is a registered social worker with 18 years' experience as a social work researcher and university lecturer. Prior to embarking on an academic career, Sue practised in the voluntary sector as a palliative care social worker and practice educator. Sue currently works at the University of Gloucestershire, where she brings her passion for practice and interprofessional learning and teaching to the undergraduate and postgraduate social work programmes. Sue is the editor of *Innovations in Practice Learning*, published by Critical Publishing in 2018.

Foreword

I am writing this Foreword as I celebrate a half-century since my own social work education. As a postgraduate, I was able to undertake a one-year training to gain an award called the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW), and in that single year I experienced no less than three placements. Each of these I remember as though it were yesterday. The first was two days a week at the Grimsby office of the Probation Service. I was the first student that my practice educator (or student supervisor as we called them) had taken on placement and it was here that I was able to kindle a growing love of groupwork. My second placement was residential – four weeks in the adolescent unit of a psychiatric hospital, where I sometimes did nights. It was very challenging in its intensity, and it was my first encounter with interprofessional team-work. The third and final placement was full time at Hull Social Services Department in the team that worked on the Bransholme estate, said to be the largest council housing estate in Europe. My supervisor was on the cusp of retirement and left me to sink or swim, in contrast to my Grimsby experience where I had been keenly nurtured. I benefited from both approaches in their very different ways.

Much has changed in 50 years. The context for my own practice learning was the community. Large social services departments had just been established, amalgamating all the specialist social work services into a unitary one in which generic social workers worked with people '*from cradle to grave*'. My student supervisors were experienced practitioners but they had very little, if any, training as teachers of practice. My practice learning was assessed as Pass or Fail in a brief report written by my supervisors, a report to which neither my clients (as we then called service users) nor I contributed.

I was exposed to groupwork from my very first placement, and probation work was still in the social work family, with about a third of my fellow students going on to practise in that field. There was much debate over the respective value of block and concurrent placements – whether we were in placement part time or full time, with my own training encompassing both types, plus the residential. The technology of placements relied on typewriters for recording (we had just one in the Hull Social Services team office and you had to wait your turn) and buses for transport – they were cheap, frequent and reliable.

Though much has changed, much is also the same. In particular, the value that students take from their learning in practice, as demonstrated by the way placements stay in our memories. Let us explore some of the other themes that were a feature of practice education then and that have remained consistently so.

The private nature of supervision sessions

Some years after my own education as a social worker, and following the 15 years that I supervised students on placement with me, I became an external examiner for practice education programmes. What this meant in practice was the sampling of work by the candidates, the practice educators in training. A couple of these programmes required the candidates to video record one or two supervision sessions – ie the time they spent one-to-one to facilitate the student's practice learning, usually once a week for about an hour and a half. This was a rare and privileged glimpse into an event that few others witness; apart from group supervision, which is rare, social work supervision is experienced only by the dyad of supervisor and student. This dyad writes about supervision, reflects on it and gathers evidence from it, but all of this is indirect as far as non-participants are concerned. What goes on in supervision, and how it goes on, remains intensely private and relatively unresearched (with some notable exceptions), just as it was 50 years ago, yet it is considered to be the lynchpin of the practice education relationship, and the core for reflective learning. We need to map what actually takes place in supervision and replace speculation with observation, in order to know better what works and what works well.

It is anecdotal evidence, but I drew two lessons from my own observations of the videoed supervision sessions that I witnessed: first, the most successful ones were those where the balance of talk was roughly even, and if not quite even, then slightly in favour of student over educator; and second, those practice educators who introduced activity into the session seemed to provoke better participative learning. I am thinking of a practice educator who used a sand-tray in the session and another who introduced a board game, tailored to the student's learning needs. Introducing an activity, often facilitated through an object of some sort, is evidence of other attributes, too: forward planning, imagination, thinking outside of the session about the student's specific learning needs, and stepping outside comfort zones. All of this seems to contribute to student learning. The least successful sessions were the cosy '*how's it going?*' ones, where neither party was willing or able to take a risk.

The private nature of practice, live teaching and the direct involvement of service users

As a student, much of my practice learning took place in the homes of the people I was working with. In parallel with the experience of the supervision session, this was almost always a private encounter, with my supervisor/practice educator relying

on my reports of these engagements in a subsequent supervision session. When I became a practice educator, I was determined that the two of us, the student and me, would spend as much time as possible working and learning together, certainly in those first few formative weeks of the placement. Initially, the student would take a back seat in the practice but would be expected to take the lead in the subsequent sharing of observations and giving feedback; as the student's confidence and experience grew, they would take the lead in the practice encounters, and I would facilitate the subsequent observations and feedback. With an able student, I would often find myself experiencing true co-working quite soon, but the model was flexible enough to accommodate different degrees of confidence.

This way of learning/working had been instinctive and unformalised. However, when I later became involved in practice educator training, I became interested in the notion of live teaching as a more formal model of helping students learn with service users in the same room. This brought the supervision session into the service user's own home, involving them as direct participants in the teaching – as experts by experience and not 'just' users of services. The model was popular when I taught it in the workshop setting, but it became evident in the follow-up workshops that it had been far from easy to put into practice. That is no discredit to live teaching as a model – worthwhile things often require effort, even struggle – but it does suggest that a live teaching model needs more work and perhaps different ways of practising it.

Direct observations have become embedded in practice education in a way that was absent 50 years ago. However, direct observation goes only so far – like the driving test examiner who is required not to intervene. On the other hand, live teaching gives the practice educator (and the service user) a parallel set of controls by which the car can be driven: in other words, the facility to intervene there and then to help the student's immediate learning in practice. Even an emergency stop if required!

Integrating academy and agency, theory and practice

If live teaching is a means of integrating supervision-session learning with learning on-site, how could this same integration be achieved in terms of class-based learning and practice-based learning? My own experience 50 years ago was of 'two courses', academy and agency, seemingly different worlds apart. Has this changed much in the half-century? Certainly, there are models that attempt to close that gap, like

apprenticeships – but perhaps the gap is something to be celebrated? One of the struggles for students in wholly agency-based learning is how to carve out a role as a student when they are still seen as a worker. In class, students might be exposed to role-played simulations and to presentations by practice educators and experts by experience as a way of bringing the field into the class. All of this is undoubtedly valuable, but it has a 'compensatory' feel to it.

A similar classic struggle is the integration of theory and practice. I have elsewhere likened many practitioners' perspectives on this as oil and vinegar: with vigorous shaking they will emulsify as one, but without continuous effort they soon part into their natural states of separation. I think this comes from seeing theory as somehow identified with the academy, and practice with the agency. There is talk of '*applying theory*' as though it were a dressing. Happily, we have developed more sophisticated – and yet, in some ways, simpler – notions of theory arising from practice. We – students, educators, service users – are theorising all the time. Certainly, we make hypotheses to explain what is happening. Making sense of this process and making it explicit in ourselves and in others is likely to be more valuable to practice development than exertions to squeeze it into a formal Theory with a capital 'T'. This process of starting with practice also enables us to move from the idea of evidence-based practice to that of practice-based evidence.

I mentioned that the structure of placement learning – block or concurrent – was contentious 50 years ago. That discussion is largely dormant now, but it is one that I would like to resurrect. Having been largely in favour of full-time placements, I have rebalanced my opinion. I think the opportunities for a greater integration of student learning by means of a week that is partly spent in class and partly in the field has much merit, depending on how that time is spent, of course. These thoughts have been crystallised by a recent sabbatical at a Chilean university where the students on the five-year BSW programme have concurrent placements through the last three years. The proportion of time spent on placement starts at one and a half days a week in Year 3 and grows with each year. The students are increasingly responsible for presenting and sharing their practice learning in student-led workshops during their classes in the university. Moreover, the first periods of practice learning are spent in the same community, working together with that community to identify needs and wants, followed by an action plan, and finally putting the plan into effect. Only after this year of community-based practice learning do students work with individual service users and families in Years 4 (two days a week) and 5 (three days a week).

Learning in non-traditional placements

The formal curriculum tells us something about a profession's current priorities and concerns – what it thinks it is about – but it is the settings for its placements that immediately reveal a profession's hand. Current priorities in the UK are for placements where students can experience statutory work (that is, work that is mandated and regulated by law) and with contrasting service user groups – usually one with children and one with adults. It is useful for today's students to learn that these priorities have changed over time, and to know that they will change again. As I have outlined earlier, the balance in my own placements was achieved according to the type of social work – groupwork, residential work, community-based practice.

Placements that break the contemporary orthodoxy of statutory and age-based divisions (children and adults) are referred to as non-traditional placements. There was a notable flowering of these after the introduction of the social work degree, with some of the most innovative ones developed in organisations led by service users. The availability of a daily placement fee enabled the payment for independent off-site supervision by qualified social workers, while day-to-day supervision was undertaken by service users in the organisation.

Another significant non-traditional placement is the international one. There were no opportunities for international placements 50 years ago (though Grimsby sometimes seemed like another land). In my cohort of 29 students, two were international students (Zimbabwe and Hong Kong) and the rest of the cohort was White, 16 women and 13 men, a gender ratio of 11:9. Placements abroad were a growing feature of social work practice learning, but the global pandemic and Brexit have clipped these wings. My experiences of Chilean social work recounted earlier demonstrate the significant learning that can come from exposure to different cultures and contexts, and we must do all we can to restore the opportunities afforded by international placements.

Contingency plans – the elephant in the room

Practice educators have a profound duty not just to help novice social workers develop their love for social work, but also to protect future service users and ensure they will be in safe hands. So, practice teaching cannot be separated from practice assessment. The placement is where an experienced social worker decides whether the student should continue their studies and, ultimately, be allowed into the social work profession.

Few students failed their practice learning 50 years ago, just as now. Whether this is a good thing or a bad thing, practice educators need to consider contingency plans for those relatively rare occasions when they have concerns about a student's ability or suitability for the profession. We recognise the ability to initiate and engage in difficult conversations as a significant skill for social workers, so it ought to be part of their repertoire when acting in the role of practice educator. It helps if the dyad has discussed this contingency from the very beginning of the placement: too often 'magical thinking' can encourage people to believe that talking about something will bring it on, while in fact the reverse is true. One practice educator keeps a stuffed toy elephant in view to remind him and others always to talk about any elephant in the room – taboo topics that will fester if they are not acknowledged.

Critical social work practice learning

It was 50 years ago that I first heard the phrase '*we want social workers who can hit the ground running*' and it's still up and running. It is understandable that hard-pressed managers want education programmes to turn out cogs that will fit their particular wheels and, of course, social workers must be competent to fulfil their duties. However, the best social workers are those who know how to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances – the '*moving carpet*' as it is described later in this book. They need to learn how to apply general values and principles to highly specific instances. To achieve this, social work education in general and practice education in particular must hone the student's capacity for critical thinking.

Social workers need to be competent to feed into the policy-making process, both at the local and the global level, and this requires a critical awareness. On a day-to-day basis, social workers' first loyalty is to their service users and a generalised notion of professional good practice. This has the potential to put them at odds with their employer, but the best employers know that assertive and purposively critical social workers who fight for best practices offer, in the long run, the best safeguard to the agency's reputation; and agencies that provide placements that nurture critical thinking will attract these same students as future employees.

I hope you have enjoyed this glimpse at the practice education album of 50 years ago, and the comparisons with today. Despite the obvious differences, what strikes me is how many of the fundamental themes endure and, no doubt, will do so for the coming years. Enjoy the journey ahead, as you explore these themes in further detail in the pages of this fascinating book.

Professor Mark Doel
Sheffield Hallam University

Chapter 1 | **Introduction**

Welcome and thank you for reading this book. This is a book for everyone involved in practice education in social work. It offers guidance on the key knowledge and skills that practice educators need in order to support and assess social work students, to enable their learning, and to manage their placements. It has been written by qualified and practising practice educators, who have extensive experience not only as practice educators but also in developing and delivering practice education courses.

This book is meant to be a handy guide for all that practice education and working with a student involves. Earlier editions of this book have been much valued, and this edition is written with respect for the previous authors while developing the book to reflect post-pandemic practice education.

The emphasis in this book is on the *application* of the key knowledge and skills which are embedded within the practice educator role; the *what* a practice educator needs to consider within the placement and the *how* of accomplishing it. Many of the theoretical considerations and objectives underpinning practice learning and education and the role of the practice educator that are mentioned in this book are covered in greater detail in other practice education texts, some of which are classics, and we have referred to them in this book. We would encourage you to read these books alongside this one for further insights and ideas, as many of these texts cannot be bettered and remain as relevant to practice education today as when they were initially published.

While aimed primarily at those practice educators who are at the start of their practice educating career, this book will also be helpful for more experienced practice educators, who may view this book as a refresher, and it may be useful for them in considering the requirements of the Professional Capabilities Framework (BASW, 2018), the Knowledge and Skills Statements (DoH, 2015; DfE, 2018) and the PEPS (BASW, 2022) in maintaining and developing their practice.

You may be reading this introduction and overview before reading other chapters in the book, or you may already have dipped into the book and are reading this at a later point. In whatever way you are using this book, this introduction and overview will inform you about the structure of each chapter and provide an explanation of terms used to help your navigation.

Practice education in social work

Practice education in social work in England has been through numerous transformations but is currently subject to the Practice Educator Professional Standards for social work (PEPS) (BASW, 2022). This section reflects on the history and complexity of practice education and will consider the current requirements for social work education, practice education in social work and social work registration. The professional standards outlined below relate to requirements for social work education, training and registration in England. Different requirements exist for the other UK countries.

A brief history of social work education

This section provides a brief historical introduction to social work education to enable an understanding of the foundation of the current social work qualification. While social work education began in social care, students studying social work today need to successfully complete a recognised and ratified social work course (SWE, 2019).

The historical foundations of social work can be traced back to social care, where a dependence on faith-based, class-based and industrial profit-based philanthropists established community-based support (Hill et al, 2018). The first formal social work education appeared within the settlement movement and the Charity Organisation Society (COS), where a series of lectures followed by a one-year university-based course were developed at the beginning of the twentieth century (Burt, 2018; Hill and Frost, 2018). In 1920, Clement Attlee, who prior to entering politics and becoming prime minister was a social worker, wrote a guidance paper on the profession of social work and devoted a chapter to social work training. He recognised that working with an experienced social worker was a positive way to develop social work skills and advocated the importance of a theoretical basis on which to base practice. This was followed by the last of the Younghusband reports (1959), which recommended cohesive national social work training and introduced the two-year social work qualification.

More recently, social work students have been expected to undertake a vocational professional course to qualify them to practise, such as the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW) commissioned by the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW), which ran from 1971 to 1994; the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) (CCETSW, 1991), which ran from 1992; and the introduction of the social work degree with a greater focus on practice (DoH, 2002), which is the current route to social work qualification and can be offered at either undergraduate or Master's level. Finally, the recent initiative of fast-track social work courses for postgraduate

students and apprenticeship routes that enable employed students to have time both in the university and in the workplace have been developed. All routes require the social work student to undertake the requisite number of placement days with a practice educator providing social work supervision and ultimately lead to the status of qualified social worker, with social work's new governing body, Social Work England (SWE), providing guidance in qualifying education and training standards (QETS) (SWE, 2019).

The introduction of the social work degree also saw the introduction of the National Occupational Standards (DoH, 2002), the first of a number of practice standards that social work students have been expected to meet in an attempt to standardise qualifying practice. Sadly, the profession cannot agree on the content of such standards and there are currently multiple frameworks against which universities have to map their courses: the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) (BASW, 2018), two Knowledge and Skills Statements (KSS) (DoH, 2015; DfE, 2018) and Social Work England's Professional Standards. Furthermore, for those students undertaking a social work apprenticeship, Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours (KSBs) (IATE, 2018) are also applied. While a joint statement was published to try to link the PCF and KSS standards (BASW, 2018), the situation remains conflicting and confusing for practice educators and social work students, leading to a shift away from the ongoing desire for consistency in social work education (Younghusband, 1959; Croisdale-Appleby, 2014; Narey, 2014).

In the early 2010s, two significant reports were commissioned and published on social work education (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014; Narey, 2014), both of which highlighted that the quality of both academic teaching and practical learning were critical for the development of the requisite knowledge and skills for the future provision of a quality social work service. This led to the Children and Social Work Act 2017 (section 46), which gives universities a duty to deliver '*adequate*' training for social work students. Furthermore, the development of teaching partnerships in 2016 provided a driver for good-quality social work placements, together with a professional commitment to practice education and the development of social work students' knowledge, values and skills. Social work teaching partnerships have seen local universities and social work service providers work together to ensure that social work education is relevant to service provision needs and that placements are of a high quality for all social work students.

Irrespective of these changes in social work education, the consistent theme has been the centrality of the placement, where academic teaching is applied to practice in a supported social work environment. The social work student must experience two contrasting placements, often interpreted as one in adult service provision and one in

children's service provision, with at least one enabling the student to undertake statutory duties (SWE, 2019) to prepare them for qualified practice. While on placement, the social work student should be supported by a qualified and registered social worker who is a qualified or qualifying practice educator (SWE, 2019). In order to promote the quality of social work placements, a mandatory practice educator qualification, the PEPS was developed by the now defunct The College of Social Work (TCSW) in 2013, but has been adopted, reviewed and updated by the British Association of Social Workers (BASW, 2022).

As social work education has evolved, so too has the terminology used within practice education in social work. The term '*student supervisor*' was replaced by '*practice teacher*' and an enhanced educational purpose to the role was designated within the requirements of the Practice Teacher Award (CCETSW, 1989); later, the term '*practice assessor*' was introduced and used with the introduction of the social work degree (DoH, 2002). The Practice Teacher Award was replaced by the revised Post Qualification Framework (GSCC, 2005) which included post-qualifying awards at different levels of specialism. The first '*specialist*' level incorporated a module in '*enabling others*', which required candidates to develop knowledge and skills in enabling the learning and development of others. The introduction of the PEPS in 2013 by BASW promoted practice education as a '*stand-alone*' status and achievement, thus giving the role the prominence and recognition it deserved. The PEPS terminology of practice educator is used throughout this book. Nevertheless, it is helpful here to note that off-site practice educator (OSPE) and on-site supervisor (OSS) are also used within the PEPS to recognise where a placement provides learning opportunities and is supported by an external off-site practice educator.

The Practice Educator Professional Standards for social work (PEPS) (BASW, 2022)

It is expected that all practice educators supporting a student on a social work placement are qualified social workers who are PEPS qualified or are working towards the PEPS qualification. The PEPS are a national minimum requirement for practice educators, and outline two stages of professional development and progression. The two stages are described by BASW (2022) as:

> » *Stage 1 Practice educators at this stage will be able to supervise, teach and assess social work degree students up to, but not being solely responsible for, the final assessment prior to qualification. Stage 1 practice educators supervising final placement students will need to have their decision ratified and overseen by a PEPS 2 qualified practice educator mentor or assessor.*

» *Stage 2 Practice educators at this stage will be able to supervise, teach and assess social work degree students up to and including the last placement. These practice educators will have the authority to recommend, based on appropriate evidence, that social work learners are fit to practise at the point of qualification.*

The PEPS (BASW, 2022) define the knowledge, skills and values that practice educators need to demonstrate at Stages 1 and 2, and which are outlined within Domains A–D and the Values for Practice Educators and Supervisors. Local and regional partnerships can decide how practice educators can demonstrate and meet the domain requirements and learning outcomes outlined at each stage. The link to the PEPS guidance can be found at the end of this chapter. There must be guidance and support available to practice educators who are undertaking Stages 1 and 2 from an appropriately qualified mentor (who must be Stage 2 qualified). When undertaking Stage 1 and Stage 2, practice educators must also be observed in their practice with a student teaching, supervising and assessing against the PCF (BASW, 2018), and this must be carried out by a Stage 2 qualified and registered social worker.

Social Work England

In December 2019, Social Work England took responsibility for the registration of social workers and the development of the profession. All qualified social workers must be registered with Social Work England in order to be able to practise and ensure that they meet annual CPD requirements. As such, all practice educators in England must be registered with Social Work England to be able to practice educate. They provide the Professional Standards (2020) which all social workers and practice educators must adhere to (see the link at the end of this chapter), thus reinforcing the PEPS (BASW, 2022) statement of values.

Contemporary practice education issues

Practice education in social work has a clear professional context and guidance. Nevertheless, there remain different contexts for placement provision. It should be remembered that social work education takes place within a wider context of changing configurations of social care and social work practice and within conditions of austerity, a post-pandemic world and uncertainty for many vulnerable people and social workers. The unsung work of practice educators within a wider historical narrative is not new. In 2005, Young and Burgess, writing about changes and challenges to teaching in higher education, likened the scenario to '*dancing on a moving carpet… and the challenge of mastering new dance steps*' (Young and Burgess, 2005, p 1). This view

is very apt when considering practice education and the role and remit of practice educators within the current landscape. The carpet is indeed moving beneath practice educators with varying degrees of fluidity and forcefulness and resulting from the impact of numerous changes. However, rather than having to learn '*new dance steps*', the role of the practice educator remains the same: to assist the student in creating a sense of the professional self in the social worker role, regardless of programme delivery structure, setting, location or role destination of the student.

It remains as relevant as ever that practice educators play an important part in helping to develop the next generation of social workers and the aim of this book is to assist practice educators in this task. Practice educators bring knowledge, skills and experience to the role through supervision, skill facilitation, case management, teaching and assessment. It is this that enables students to develop social work knowledge and skills so that they can practice effectively and efficiently, working according to the professional standards expected within the profession (SWE, 2019).

This section introduces the collaborative supervisory relationship, social work values, involvement of people with lived experience, and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on practice education. These themes will be incorporated throughout the book.

Collaborative supervisory relationship

The term 'supervisory relationship' is used throughout this book to denote the relationship between practice educator and student throughout the placement, not just within social work student supervision. The quality of the supervisory relationship between practice educator and student is a key factor for success in the development of social work knowledge and skills (Roulston et al, 2018; Ketner et al, 2017; Yeung et al, 2021; Beesley, 2022). Research has identified that the supervisory relationship engages students when it is comfortable, supportive, open and honest, accommodating, and friendly with professional boundaries applied, which enables a collaborative approach through which knowledge and skills can be developed (Beesley, 2022). However, there are some challenges in establishing a suitable climate where learners feel comfortable enough that they are willing to be challenged about their assumptions and also confident enough to explore new ways of thinking.

Social work values

Social work values underpin all work undertaken and are required to ensure professionalism. Practice education is no different and has its own statement of values.

PEPS (BASW, 2022) Values Statement of Practice Education

1. *Advise learners of their rights and actively lead on challenging oppression, discrimination and racist practices that may be experienced by learners. This may include overt expressions of racism, or more covert unconscious bias and microaggressions. Learners must be supported throughout the process by the learning provider and (Trainee) Practice Educator in the reporting and responding to such concerns. Where appropriate this will require the implementation of whistleblowing policies (BASW, 2014) to ensure an effective working environment for social work.*

2. *Manage professional and personal boundaries, appropriately using authority and power within the assessment relationship and recognising and acting upon the implications for assessment of practice. Fundamental to this relationship is an underpinning of the common principles of equality, diversity and inclusion in appropriately supporting learners by acknowledging and responding to their needs in an anti-discriminatory manner.*

3. *Update on best practice in assessment and research on adult learning and apply this knowledge in promoting the rights and choices of a diverse group of learners. Managing the assessment process whilst actively challenging oppressive practice which does not support learners to reach their potential.*

4. *Commit to the needs and interests of people with lived experience of social work when assessing the capability and skills of learners at all stages of the assessment process. As appropriate, those with lived experience should play an active part in assessing those being accepted onto and undertaking training in practice education.*

5. *Identify and question their own values and prejudices and respect, value and celebrate the uniqueness and diversity of learners such as those from different entry routes and with different personal and professional experiences. Actively challenge when oppressive practice is observed or reported. This is in line with the Professional Capabilities Framework (BASW 2018, PCF Domain 3).*

6. *Accept and respect learners' circumstances, understand how these impact on the learning and assessment process and make reasonable adjustments as required. Those involved in practice education should recognise and build on learners' strengths and consider individual learning styles and use a range of assessment methods (including those preferred by the learner).*

7. *Implement an holistic approach to assess in a manner that does not stigmatise or disadvantage learners and ensures equality of opportunity in line with the Equality Act 2010. Ensure that the views of those who have lived experiences of social work are central to this assessment process. Show applied knowledge and understanding of the significance of lived experience,*

> *poverty, racism, ill health, disability, sex, social class, age, gender reassignment, being married or in a civil partnership, being pregnant or on maternity leave, religion or belief and sexual orientation in managing the assessment process. Recognise and work to prevent and counter unjustifiable oppression, discrimination and disadvantage in all aspects of the assessment process. Be aware of the impact of poverty and associated issues such as food insecurity and how this might affect the experiences of learners and those accessing social work services.*
>
> 8. *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.*

(PEPS, BASW, 2022, pp 6–7)

Involvement of people with lived experience

While recognising that the term 'service user' is not always appropriate as it reflects the power differential between a person who uses services and the social worker as service provider, it is used where appropriate within this book to reflect where a student is the service provider. Generally speaking, however, the authors agree that the term 'person with lived experience' is most appropriately used to denote a person who uses services.

Explicit calls to involve people with lived experience in a meaningful fashion have been crucial to recent developments in social work education. A review of the participation of people with lived experience in social work education (Wallcraft et al, 2012) found that, although many universities had well-established partnerships with service users and carers as people with lived experience, there was little evidence of the impact of this on students' practice. It is imperative that practice educators consider their approach to ensure that placements maximise opportunities for students to learn alongside people with lived experience and receive their feedback. Calvin Thomas (2014) offers excellent guidance on how to involve people with lived experience in student placements and their work is referred to throughout this book.

The book will address the involvement of people with lived experience at all stages of practice education, and the practice educator is encouraged to critically reflect on and develop ways in which people with lived experience can be more involved in the student's development of knowledge and skills.

Furthermore, the practice educator has a responsibility to help the student make connections between the learning environment and service delivery. It is hard sometimes for students to understand that while their needs as learners are important, it

is the needs of the people who use the services that are paramount. On occasion, the practice educator may have to put the service user's needs before the student's right to a learning opportunity, be that to safeguard a vulnerable person or to respect their wishes, feelings and choices. However, a clear explanation of this prioritisation of the person's rights will support the student's understanding of the rights of vulnerable people and the norms and values of the organisation.

Post-pandemic practice education in social work

The world was turned upside down in early 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic swept across the globe and impacted every person's life in significant ways. For social work students on placement, this created initial confusion about placement security, followed by a range of responses that included terminating, suspending, shortening or adapting placements to reflect the needs of the students and placement providers. Variations across universities continued, but as the world adjusted to a 'new normal', practice education developed creative and flexible responses to supporting students to develop social work knowledge and skills (Beesley, 2022).

The first significant change that has been evidenced in relation to placement provision is a shift from office-based placement to a more blended location approach. Historically, students were not encouraged to work from home while on placement: this seemed to stem from an apparently unfounded lack of trust that students would engage with placement tasks during this time and, more significantly, that work-based learning should be in the workplace. This thinking was challenged in March 2020, and it has subsequently been proven that students can work and learn from home while on placement. Furthermore, the return to the office has been to a changed landscape, with many local authorities recognising that blended location working and hot-desking are viable, which has enabled a reduction in office space and impacted the ability of full-time office-based working for staff and students alike. That is not to say that blended location learning is without its difficulties, but it is now an accepted pattern of placement learning for many social work students. While many placement providers remained, or have returned to, being fully office based, the discussion is not intended to ignore these practices, but to consider where there has been change.

A benefit of home working and learning is reduced travel costs for the student who may be experiencing financial difficulties in a period where living costs have had a considerable impact on student poverty. However, an important proviso to the student working and learning from home is that they are still able to undertake home visits to service users as required. This means that they will still need access to transport,

and where the student is located a distance from the placement patch consideration should be given to whether this is viable. For some placements, home visits can be pre-organised on certain days each week, while other placements will require the student to be able to undertake emergency home visits where required. Nevertheless, the student must have a confidential space to work in when working at home, as professionalism and good practice dictates that communications with and about service users are not overheard by family members or housemates.

The second significant change was the profession embracing remote communication. It can be argued that social workers were reluctant to engage with technology (Haynes, 2019); however, the pandemic required everyone to engage with remote communication, primarily the use of video calls, including via Zoom, Skype and Teams (Mishna et al, 2021). While the telephone enables communication, it does not easily facilitate the development of a working relationship and the observation and assessment of service users that is fundamental to the role of social work. Similarly in practice education, the use of video calls, which will hereafter be referred to as remote communication, has been critical to the development of the supervisory relationship and the assessment of the student.

Many practice educators have developed a pattern of a remote daily check-in with the student during the pandemic, and this is good practice to continue where the student and practice educator are not in the office on the same day. The check-in enables the student to reflect on the previous day's work and ask any questions to ensure work is being completed as per placement expectations. It enables the planning of the coming day's work and learning opportunities. It also develops the supervisory relationship which, as discussed in Chapter 5, enables the student to engage more robustly with the learning opportunities, thus ensuring the development of knowledge and skills.

Finally, the student will need a strong internet connection to enable them to work and learn at home as remote communication requires a good connection. However, this is a further expense for the student and clarification should be sought if they can afford it. If the student is unable to provide an adequate internet connection, the practice educator and student should consider whether the student should be office based.

The practice educator's role here is to ensure that they are clear about the placement provider's accepted placement location and advise the student accordingly to ensure that their home working and learning is facilitated. As placement provision has adapted to a 'new normal', so too must the practice educator's role evolve to engage with different practice education styles that have emerged since the pandemic began (Beesley and Taplin, 2023).