



**Social Policy  
and Social Work  
(SWAP)**

## Introducing students to a practice setting: university and field staff jointly evaluate students' readiness for practice

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### Course details

**Course title** Learning for Practice 1

**Level** UG & PG

**Year** 3rd year UG & 1st year PG

**Discipline/Subject areas** Social work

### Activity details

#### What we did

This case study outlines an initiative between the University of Edinburgh and local social service agencies in which a prepractice opportunity has been devised to develop students' awareness of service provision and to evaluate their readiness for practice.

#### Why we did it

The Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE, 2003) within the Scottish Social Work degree place great emphasis on the importance of learning in practice. 'Development of the students' skills and abilities in practice is based on the fact that practice is *a setting* for learning, *a way* of learning and *an essential part* of the learning that students must complete' (SiSWE). Moreover they require that social work education providers must 'make sure that students undergo assessed preparation for direct practice to make sure they are safe to carry out practice learning in a service delivery setting. This preparation must include the opportunity to develop a greater understanding of the experience of service users and the role of social workers' (SiSWE).

In order to meet these new requirements, and indeed to improve the overall quality of student's learning, the University consulted with practice agencies to consider how this could best be achieved, and developed a model that would act as an early transition from academia to practice.

## What we wanted to achieve

Together we aimed to contribute to students' understanding of the social work role and the breadth of contexts and settings in which social work is practised, introduce them to the many professional dilemmas inherent in the work, offer them an early insight into the demands of a student placement and thereby ensure that they felt ready to start their first practicum.

## A short description of what we did

At the end of semester 1 (year 3 undergraduate, year 1 postgraduate) students go out to 6 agencies, statutory and voluntary, for a period of 15 days. Students go out in groups, introducing students to a practice setting: university and field staff jointly evaluate students' readiness for practice creating small communities of learning, and engage in a programme of activities which include observation, shadowing, group discussions and inputs from professionals and service users. Each student completes an agency profile in order that they can demonstrate their knowledge of the organisational context, and a community exploration which encourages them to consider local communities' needs. Finally, each group of students produces a video diary of their experience, which is later edited and presented to the whole class.

The students keep a reflective journal which is shared with the Practice Teacher who in turn provides formative feedback. Each student is provided with an introduction to supervision.

Each student is assessed against core professional criteria which include time keeping, communication skills, and levels of energy and enthusiasm.

Students return to the university for one day per week over this period to be involved in group sessions to further develop self reflection and to contribute to each others' learning.

## What worked well

- Students confirmed social work as the right career choice
- Students' confidence and organisational skills grew
- Issues of vulnerability requiring support emerged
- Practice and university colleagues worked together constructively

## Problems and/or issues

- Tendency for students to negatively compare their experiences and feel disappointed that uniformity of experience could not be given
- Some students were frustrated that they could not get on and 'do'

## What students thought about it

- 'I now definitively know that I want to be a social worker'
- 'Watching social workers do their job made all the theory come to life'
- 'I've learnt that I need to work on my time-keeping and reflective writing'
- 'I hadn't realised it would be so exhausting. I will need to manage my energy levels better when I move into the practicum'
- 'I started to see past the problem and past the label, to the real person'

## Key messages

- Pre-practice evaluation prepares students for assessed practicum
- It leads to more effective use of practicum resources
- It requires careful planning and clear rationale

## Related documents or links

Scottish Executive (2003) *Framework for Social Work Education*, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive. Available at [www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk).

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