



BIRMINGHAM
City University

SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE ASSESSORS' TOOLKIT

A toolkit for the use of mentors, assessors, supervisors and students working together



WELCOME

Welcome to the Social Work Practice Assessors' toolkit

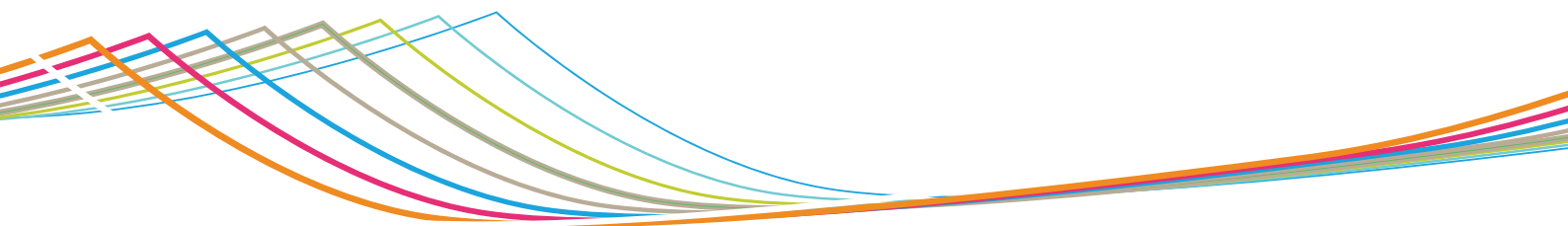
The information contained in this pack aims to provide you with some of the essential information required when supporting students on placement. The format of the toolkit is based around questions that are often asked by practice assessors and is aimed to help you navigate the whole process of supporting a student.

Why are Practice Assessors so important?

The public have a right to expect qualified social workers to be safe and competent. As a Practice Assessor it is your role to ensure that each student social worker (who qualifies) meets this criteria. This toolkit will help you apply practical assessment processes fairly and equitably to all student social workers that you assess. You are asked to use your professional judgement to regulate the social work profession by ensuring those who enter it are suitable to do so.

Who are the Department of Practice Learning (DPL)/allocations team?

The Department of Practice Learning is part of Birmingham City University and supports professional courses by organising and administering the practice elements. We are an expanding team consisting of allocation administrators and tutors across many social care and health professions.





What is the role of the Practice Learning Team/Agency Educational Developers?

Practice learning teams consist of individuals who are dedicated to finding and matching placements to students. They are an integral part of the organisation of the practice element of the BSc (Hons) Social Work course and work closely with the University to provide clinical partnership and ownership in the course.

How do the placement areas know students are coming on placement?

Placement application forms are submitted electronically by the student and sent to the partnership agencies and independent partners. The partnership agencies match the students' preferences and experience with the available learning opportunities. This is often done by DPL for the independent partners. Once a placement has agreed that they are interested in a student, the student is then invited for interview to ensure that both the student and the placement are able to commit to the placement.





Are students CRB checked before coming onto a placement?

It is not possible to offer a student a placement of any type unless the University has undertaken an enhanced check with the Criminal Records Bureau. We are unable to accept any similar checks that may have been made by another organisation such as a previous employer.


Can a student be placed with a positive CRB?

Depending on the seriousness of any offences or other information revealed by the check, it may still be possible to offer a placement. This will be decided in a joint meeting between representatives of the Faculty and the partner organisations that provide placements.

Students are made aware that the enhanced check undertaken by the Criminal Records Bureau might reveal information of a sensitive nature other than criminal convictions. The nature of any such revelations might also have serious implications for the student being allowed to continue on the degree. The registration of students with the General Social Care Council means that they too will have approved the CRB status of the student.

All students are informed that they need to keep their personal copy of the Enhanced CRB and take it with them to ALL pre-placement interviews, as it is becoming an increasingly common practice that agencies will ask to see it and have the right to refuse a placement to students who have convictions that they regard incompatible with their service users.

It remains the student's responsibility to inform the Education Support Social Work/Department of Practice Learning of any charges, offences or convictions which may arise during the course of their programme at the University. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction, offence or charge is regarded as unprofessional behaviour and is therefore grounds for termination of professional training.



Identification of convictions that have not previously been disclosed has resulted in students being required to leave the course. Such matters will always be reported to the GSCC and might have implications for future registration as a social worker.

Who advises the student what to expect on a placement?

DPL and the year tutor run preparation sessions prior to placement plus there is guidance and support on the DPL website. In addition, placements are able to complete a short form (available on the DPL website) that contains information regarding the speciality of the placement plus any essential reading, knowledge or information - this could include shift times.

How many interviews should the Practice Assessor conduct with the student during the placement?


Once the placement has been agreed there should be a minimum of three interviews to allow for the assessment process, however more than three can be arranged to support the student.

1. Contact meeting – with personal tutor, student and practice assessor in attendance.
2. Midway meeting – with personal tutor, student and practice assessor in attendance.
3. Final Interview – with student and practice assessor to ensure everything is signed.

These are in addition to the weekly supervision sessions.

Can a placement have a student if there is no social worker on site?

It may be possible for a placement to offer a learning opportunity without a social worker by providing an off-site practice assessor. This person will have regular meetings with the student and supervisor and be responsible for the assessment.





What are the responsibilities of an Off-Site Practice Assessor?

An off-site independent practice assessor is someone who is hired by an agency/university which is providing a practice learning opportunity for a social work student, specifically to support the student's practice learning, to provide teaching and to compile the assessment.

What's the criteria for becoming a Practice Assessor?

Assessor courses are available from Birmingham City University and would be the minimum recommended qualification for assessors. See the DPL website www.health.bcu.ac.uk/dpl/socialwork for details of the next course.

What are the main responsibilities of the Practice Assessor?

The practice-based assessment will examine the student's achievement of the National Occupational Standards for Social Work. However before this can be done the practice assessor is there to support and develop the student, both in the work of social work and as an example of the professional behaviour.

What standards are the students assessed at?

Year 1 – Students must be provided with ongoing support and development through supervision and exposed to working practices with service users, carers and interprofessional agencies. They will be assessed against a few of National Occupational Standards for Social Work, based on communication skills. Students are expected to reach a level of **Identification and Understanding** (Blooms Taxonomy).



Year 2 – Students must be provided with ongoing support and development through supervision, enabling them to Apply, Interpret and Analyse interventions and evaluations when working with service users, carers and interprofessional agencies. Students will be assessed against the National Occupational Standards 1-3 at a level of Application, Interpretation and Analysis.

Year 3 – Students must be provided with ongoing support and development through supervision, enabling them to Evaluate and Critically Reflect on interventions and evaluations when working with service users, carers and interprofessional agencies. Students will be assessed against the National Occupational Standards 1-6 at a level of Evaluation and Critical Reflection.

What are the students working hours?

Working day, leave and absence from placements

Students are expected to work agency hours while on placement. 35 hours per week is a usual working week and students are informed that shift work, evening or occasional weekend work may be expected as part of some placements. Students are advised to make suitable arrangements in advance of placements to meet their personal circumstances.

Agency Hours

We would expect all students to be available for a normal 9.00am to 5.30pm working day. If the agency commences work before 9.00am the student is required to adhere to the normal working practice of the agency.



Who do I need to inform when my student reports sickness?

The student is expected to notify the Department of Practice Learning (DPL), the agency and the practice teacher/assessor if they are away sick - cancelling any appointments where possible. The student is expected to telephone the agency and DPL by 9.30am on the first day of illness and should notify the agency regularly, indicating further appointments requiring cancellation. The student should also indicate, where possible, the likely date of return.

Students who do not return to placement after five working days should obtain a doctor's note and submit this to the course director with the appropriate course deadline extension form completed. Either the practice teacher/assessor/workplace supervisor or the student should inform DPL and the course director or education support social work of periods of absence for whatever reason, and indicate how the time lost will be made up to ensure that the attendance requirements are met.

Extended absences may cause the student to be referred in practice at a Social Work Practice Sub Examination (see later) and for decisions on the suitable course of action.

If a student social worker is a seconded student do they have to follow the same procedure as above?

Yes but they must also comply with any additional policies from the seconding agency.

Do students have study leave whilst on the placement learning opportunity?

Yes students are entitled to receive half a day study per week, however students are being encouraged to account for this time by completing a study sheet. Suitable activities would be to write up meetings and evidence for the completion of NOS'.



Can I give my student additional 'study time' whilst on placement?

Due to the GSCC requirement for 200 days in practice, time allocated for the practice of social work should be used for just that. It must also be borne in mind that it would cause inequalities for the students if some are permitted extra study time whilst others are refused. Call back days and any additional study days will be notified either through the placement report or by letter.

Are students allowed special leave or carers' leave?

Students can arrange special or carers' leave in negotiation with the programme director and DPL, however prolonged arrangements may interfere or jeopardise the success of a placement.

How does student attendance affect the practice assessment process?

The GSCC day/hours requirements are monitored by DPL to ensure they are met.

ALL STUDENTS ARE NOW SUBJECT TO THE NEW SICKNESS AND ABSENCE POLICY and have been informed of this by email, letter and during lectures.

The assessment process is dependant on the student's ability to complete the necessary experiences to the required years' standard, rather than just being dependant on completing the number of days allocated. DPL will ensure that by the end of the course all of the necessary placement time has taken place.

To read the full policy visit our website www.health.bcu.ac.uk/dpl/socialwork

If a bank holiday falls within placement time are the students to work it?

Students should not work bank holidays without specific negotiation with DPL.



What should I do if a student has alternative employment whilst on a placement learning opportunity?

Some students have genuine hardship difficulties and work additional hours to supplement their bursary/student loan in order that they can complete the course, however alternative employment should not impact on the student's placement.

However, it is at the discretion of the placement to negotiate the duty with the student, and it is always appreciated, by the students, if you discuss any particular problems or concerns they may have at the contract meeting and reviewed at other meetings to monitor the impact on the placement learning opportunity.

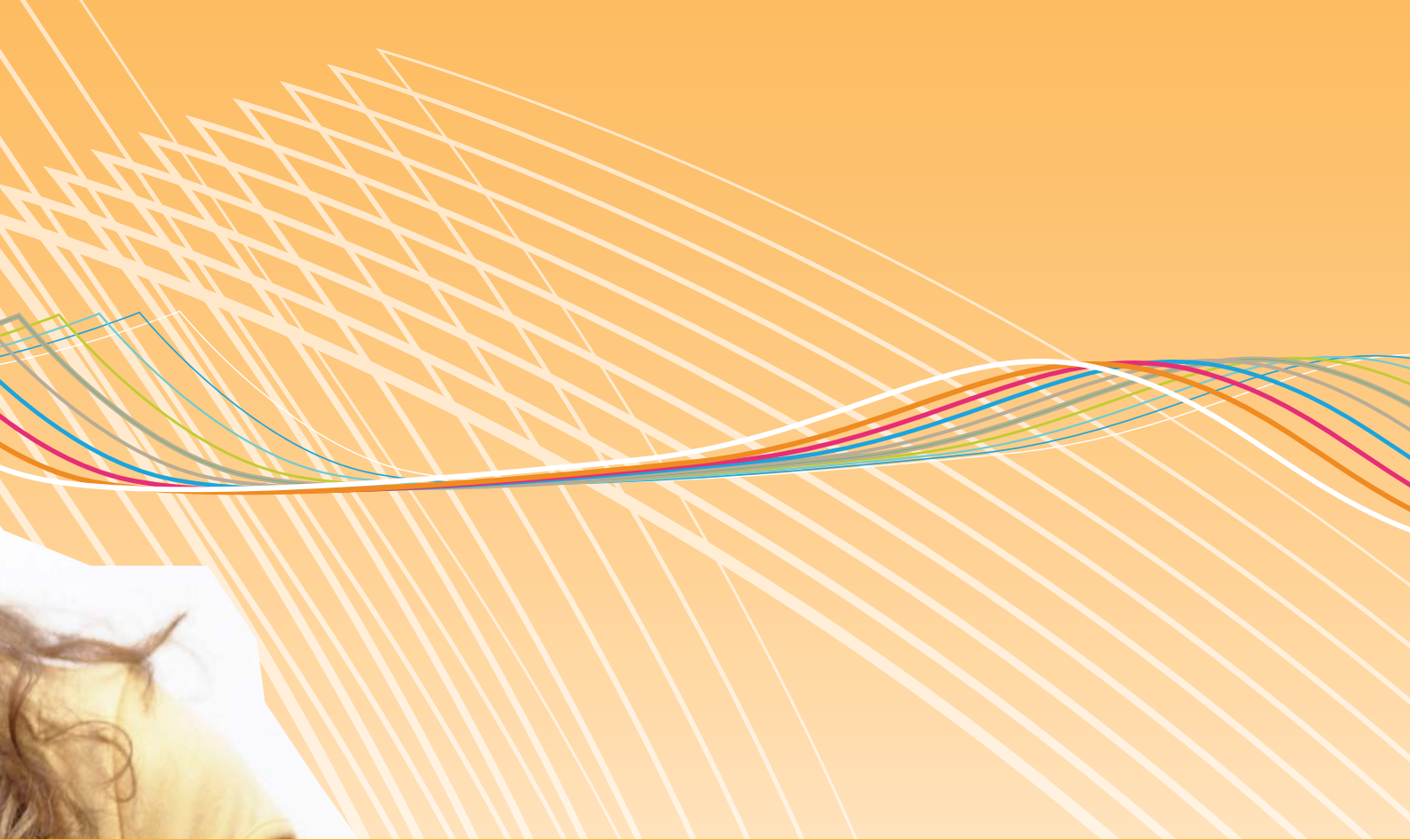
The following is an extract of the learning agreement which the student will have signed up to:

- 2.2 Under no circumstances should you engage in any form of employment during designated placement hours or theoretical sessions.
- 2.3 If you choose to work during your own time, for example, as a care assistant, you must not represent yourself as a student of the University or your programme.

What do you do if you think a student is underachieving/failing in practice?

If you are concerned about a student's progress and feel that they will not achieve their learning outcomes for the practice learning opportunity then please contact the agency educational developers/ practice learning team or DPL to provide an action plan for the student as soon as possible.

It is essential that the student is made aware as soon as possible that they are not yet achieving the required standard and action plans are used to support the student giving every opportunity to achieve in their remaining time in placement.



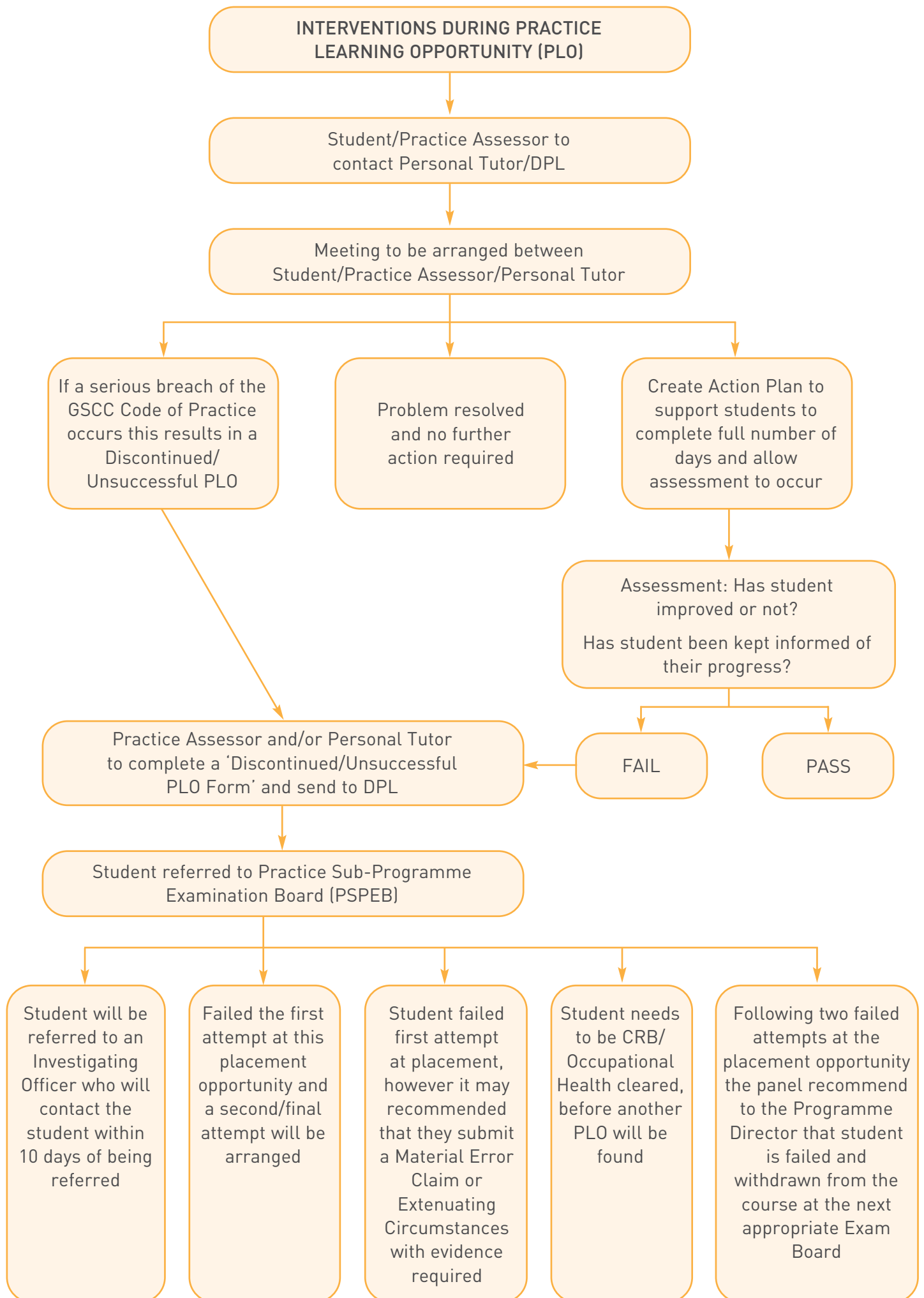
The Agency Educational Developers/Practice Learning Team will help both the mentor/assessor and the student develop the action plan. It is vital that you remember that 50% of the course is practice-based and as a mentor/assessor you are accountable to your profession for your decision when passing a student as 'competent in practice'.

It is not acceptable to pass the student by giving them the benefit of the doubt because they have other learning opportunities ahead of them or because the placement is too busy to sort out and follow through the action plans for the student. If you make the decision that a student is underachieving or failing you must follow the process below.

It is not acceptable to discontinue a student's placement early because they are not achieving. They should be given the full amount of days to achieve but kept aware of where they are not yet meeting the standards.

If any student is unsuccessful in practice what happens after they leave the placement?

Practice competence is considered to be as equally important as academic ability in assessing students. All students who are unsuccessful will be discussed at the next Social Work Practice Sub Programme Board. To aid the discussion at this board completion of the Discontinued/Unsuccessful Placement form by the Practice Assessor and/or Personal Tutor should be forwarded to DPL as soon as possible. Reasons and possible pathways as shown in the flowchart overleaf.





Problems with student behaviour e.g. poor attendance/punctuality/refusal to work shifts, poor attitude towards learning etc.

Do you have concerns about a student's conduct whilst in placement?

If you have concerns about a student's professional conduct whilst in placement e.g. poor attendance/punctuality/refusing to work shifts, or poor attitude etc. please record these on the Fitness for Practice sheet and discuss with the student. It might be useful to refer to the FLOWCHART to see how this can be progressed if the issue remains unresolved.

Are students given any advice about a suitable dress code?

Yes, however many PLO's will have individual dress codes which should be discussed at the Learning Agreement Meeting. An indication of this could also be given in the Placement Learning Directory.

Completing the Admin Pack and Portfolio

Guidance for these documents are contained within the documents themselves, further assistance can be sought at the briefing days advertised on the DPL Social Work website, you may be able to access assistance from a local authority practice learning team (for further information contact DPL on 0121 331 7150) or Birmingham City University tutors during the Learning Agreement Meeting. There will also be a powerpoint on completing the documentation available on the website.

How do I know what my student has been studying in University prior to placement?

A brief description of each module is available on the DPL Social Work website filed under the appropriate year.

How do I know how my student performed on placement before?

Students from Years 2 and 3 should have a copy of the previous PLO report to hand to the Practice Assessor. Students should also be able to show you their Programme Portfolio which accumulates all their progress on the course.



How can I help the student plan their learning and meet the NOS?

This should be discussed at the Learning Agreement Meeting, bearing in mind the NOS that the students are required to meet, students' previous experience and the learning experiences available at the agency.

How do I ensure that the student has achieved each competency?

You should expect the student to provide knowledge and evidence of completing tasks to meet the NOS requirements. Each year has its own standard of practice to be achieved:

Year 1 – Identify and Understand

Year 2 – Apply, Interpret and Analyse

Year 3 – Evaluate and Critically Reflect

What can be used as a piece of evidence?

Letters, supervision minutes and observed practice - other examples are provided in the portfolios.

- Care assessments
- Extracts from case recordings
- Case summaries
- Referral letters to other agencies
- Minutes of meetings
- Court reports
- Review or case conference reports
- Carer assessments
- Family assessments
- All must be anonymised



Do students evaluate the quality of their PLO?

Yes, to speed up the feedback process to partners this is now going to be completed online but students are still required to print out a copy for the portfolio. At the present time Practice Assessors still complete a paper copy only, however this will eventually be collected online as well. The feedback is provided to the Agency Educational Developers/Practice Learning Team who then pass this onto individual areas, for independent or charitable organisations it will be provided to the Birmingham City University contact.

If a student informs me that they are pregnant what should I do?

Inform the manager of the placement area as a local policy should be referred to regarding risk assessment, however health and safety must be maintained and students should not be on work or university premises after 35 weeks without a doctor's note allowing them to continue. Similarly no student should attempt to attend placement or university until after their six week post natal check.

If a student approaches me and informs me that they have a disability what should I do?

This is an area that is still being developed however, ideally the PLO should be aware of any reasonable adjustments before the student is placed. However, if this has not happened then ask the student to contact DPL and the Programme Director who can refer them to the relevant services for assessment and support as soon as possible.

Are the students visited by their university tutors whilst they are at PLO's?

At the present time university tutors attend the Initial Contract meeting, and the Interim meeting, (midpoint) however if a student or PLO require further support, the University will endeavour to meet this need. This method of supporting placements and students is currently under review and further developments will be notified during updates and on the website.

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Acknowledgement and thanks

This document was constructed from a framework produced by the Practice Placement Managers of the Birmingham Focus Group.

This toolkit is also available online at www.health.bcu.ac.uk/dpl/socialwork

The information in this leaflet is intended as a general guide to faculty (Birmingham City University) courses and forms no part of any contract between you and the University. Terms and conditions apply; for full details please see our prospectus or log on to www.bcu.ac.uk/misc/legal.html

Birmingham City University's Disability Service aims to enable students with disabilities or learning support needs to make the most of their time at university. We regard disclosure of a disability as a positive thing and think it is important that you feel you can tell us about any disability you may have so we can try to support your individual needs.

If you have not made us aware of your disability or you feel you may have a disability please contact the Disability Service on 0121 331 5128, or email disability@bcu.ac.uk

Birmingham City University promotes equality of opportunity in respect of every aspect of its provision. For full details of the University's Equal Opportunities Policy please log on to www.bcu.ac.uk

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