

LOOK AFTER YOUR PRACTICE EDUCATOR!

GOOD PRACTICE GUIDANCE FOR
EVERYONE INVESTED IN PRACTICE EDUCATION



WHAT IS IT?

“Look after your Practice Educator” is about supporting one of the most important roles in the social work profession. Every social work programme requires students to spend a significant amount of their time in the field, and the quality of the practice learning experience largely depends on the work of Practice Educators. In order to support and regulate the practice educator role, in 2019 the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) worked jointly with NOPT (National Organisation for Practice Teaching) to produce the first refresh of the Practice Education Professional Standards (PEPS). A [further review](#) was undertaken in July 2022. In this joint practice guidance, we build on the PEPS to explore how organisations can support their Practice Educators (PE’s) in what is a rewarding but often demanding and complex task.

This practice guidance from BASW and NoPT explains the principles in the PEPS in more detail. It is intended for organisations in the statutory, private and voluntary sectors using the services of employed and independent social workers as practice educators. It is also essential information for all practice educators whether employed or in independent practice.

The Social Work England (SWE) Qualifying Education & Training Standards 2021 (Standard 2.6) and guidance

These standards are the requirements for Higher Education Institutions and Partnership’s to provide support for Practice Educators. The guidance can be used across teaching partnerships to fulfil these requirements by providing consistent and coordinated support to the practice education service and for individual agencies in assessing their current standard of support. BASW offers [Practice Educator & Assessor Programmes](#) available at our website.

WHY IS IT BEING PRODUCED NOW?

The quality of support provided to Practice Educators has been found to vary across the country and there is a need for a national standard of good practice. BASW surveys, feedback from NoPT members and research carried out by Gair et al (2020) from University Staffordshire and commissioned by the West Midlands Teaching Partnership has highlighted the differences in support given to Practice Educators across their area indicating that many practice educators feel their role is not recognised. Haworth’s (2018) review of literature identified “a lack of recognition of status and value of Practice Educators” and a need for “inclusive and holistic approach in supporting and promoting practice education”.

Evidence from the Evaluation Report of the Social Work Teaching Partnerships Final Report (Interface Associates UK, 2020) noted that an increased level of support for practice educators is linked to an increase of quality learning support to students. Evidence from in-depth case studies in the report show that developmental support for Practice Educators increased their confidence and support for students who are struggling. Social work education is continually changing with the development of new courses for example the introduction of a wider variety of routes into social work e.g. apprenticeships, fast-track programmes supported by central Government. The growth of apprenticeships is placing more responsibility on employers for the quality of practice education and supporting the educators delivering it. An excellent practice learning and education support system will assist in attracting and retaining high quality employees and a reflective learning culture will support professional commitment and high-quality practice. In a competitive environment, employers are increasingly marketing themselves to prospective staff on the support provided in ASYEs and onwards.

The research carried out for Social Work England by the University of East England and Research in Practice in 2023 aimed to gain a clearer picture of the Practice Educator workforce in England from the perspectives of Practice Educators, Student placement providers and course providers. The research recognised existing strengths such as strong local networks and relationship based working skills and identified recommendations for improvements. The recommendations include a strong national oversight for Practice Educators, fair and consistent remuneration, consistency of placement paperwork and assessment frameworks, and an improved pathway to Practice Education qualification, training, and CPD. These recommendations are synonymous with the message conveyed by our guidance document.

FEEDBACK

As a new development both BASW and NoPT expect that there may be queries about this document and will welcome feedback from teaching partnerships, individual agencies, practitioners and other interested individuals and groups. Feedback via admin@nopt.org and england@basw.co.uk

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the [Standards for employers of social workers in England 2020](#).

What Should Employers Consider?



Recompense for Practice Educators

Practice Educators should be given time to carry out their role and/or be financially rewarded for the role either as a stipend or promotion. Organisations should provide workload relief to Practice Educators to carry out their role. This can be facilitated in a number of different ways e.g., casework that the student carries out is counted in the Practice Educator's workload. Social Work England completed a [national scoping review](#) of practice education in March 2024.



Dedicated time to attend meetings and write reports

In supporting students, Practice Educators will be required to attend meetings and undertake tasks during the working day to assess the student, liaise with HEI and support the student with their ongoing casework. Their team commitments (e.g., duty rota) should be organised such that these can be incorporated into their week. There is some consensus in the profession that if the placement was straightforward and the student was progressing at an expected rate, a practice educator would spend half a day a week working on a placement responsibilities. If a Practice Educator is working with a student who is struggling, they may find themselves having to spend significantly more time offering support. Any additional time commitment for an employed practice educator should be recognised and discussed during the student review and supervision with the additional time included in their workload.



Access to research and up-to-date practice developments

Practice Educators need to keep up-to-date with changes in policy and current research in the field of practice education and social work in their specific service area (as referenced in Domain D of PEPS 2020 "Developing knowledge and continuing performance as a Practice Educator"). They should have access to practice information, books, and on-line resources. Some HEIs offer limited library access to learners and current Practice Educators and expansion of these resources this could be explored nationally.



Support from Managers and Team

Practice Educators should receive support from their manager and team in preparation for a placement, and in welcoming and involving the student in learning opportunities. Team members should be encouraged to be involved in the support and assessment of the student. Whilst all work allocated to student should be agreed first by the practice educator, the manager should support the Practice Educator through supervision.

Independent Practice Educators should be fully involved in preparation for a placement from the first placement meeting and be linked with a work-based supervisor.



Dedicated Internal Support within the Organisations from a Qualified Professional and their Peer Group

Agencies should support Practice Educators to achieve the standards set out in the Domains of the PEPS. Practice Educators will need support from a co-ordinator with experience of the role and links with local HEIs. The co-ordinator should be able to facilitate essential resources including: equipment, working facilities for the student and induction training. It is recommended that the co-ordinator is a PEPS 2 holder.



Strong Links with Local HEIs

Practice Educators should maintain strong links with the student's HEI and be able to attend Practice Educator support forums to access support from HEI placement co-ordinator and other Practice Educators.



Access to Continuous Professional Development to expand Practice Educator skills

Employers should be mindful that Practice Educators need to supervise students every two years to maintain currency, but in the absence of this can maintain currency through other activities detailed in the PEPS 2020 (3.10), including support to newly qualified social workers and providing teaching and learning opportunities.



Clear processes and support for Practice Educators with student issues

The organisation should have agreed processes to address any issues with the student. These processes should complement HEI processes and support the Practice Educator to arrive at a decision, which is fair, transparent, and based on a range of evidence sources.

INDEPENDENT & VOLUNTARY SECTOR

This sector provides a significant number of placements to social work students, and they are often much smaller organisations than local authorities or NHS employers. We acknowledge therefore that they may not be able to implement some elements of the guidance but recommend that they draw upon some of the principles.

Independent Practice Educators

1. Principles

- 1.1** Contracting agencies need to be clear about the qualifications and post qualification practice experience and registration required by independent practice educators as set out in the [PEPS guidance](#) (BASW 2022). The communication and support from the contracting agency should be provided effectively. Much of the support provided is in common with that given to employed practice educators and so should be addressed within existing procedures including the placement agreement provided by the agency for each placement.
- 1.2** Although the day-to-day agency contact role regarding the placement with the Independent Practice Educator (IPE) will be carried by the on-site supervisor, a designated individual who is suitably qualified and experienced in practice education should have overall management responsibility for placements including contact and liaison with independent practice educators who are providing a service under that contract.
- 1.3** Every IPE should be provided with general issues and feedback about the placement and their role and performance. Feedback should be provided using the BASW England [Quality Assurance in Practice Learning \(QAPL\)](#) documentation.
- 1.4** IPEs should have access to the same level of support offered to employed PE's, although this may need to be offered in a different way - possibly from the HEI or through agencies commissioned by the local teaching partnerships. This will include training and development opportunities in diversity and the support and assessment of neurodivergent students and those with a disability. IPE's could be offered opportunities to maintain or regain currency at the agencies discretion.

2. Procedures

In contracting and supporting Independent Practice Educators the following areas should be considered:

2.1 What is an Independent Practice Educator?

An Independent Practice Educator is a registered social worker at experienced level (BASW Professional Capabilities Framework) who has:

- Qualified as a stage 2 Practice Educator under the terms of the BASW Practice Educator Professional Standards (PCF) and is in currency as defined by the PEPS. We acknowledge national variation exists.
- Is now operating as an independent professional (either as a sole trader or limited company for tax purposes) and has made arrangements to pay tax

2.2 All Independent Practice Educators should have:

- A current DBS
- public liability and indemnity insurance, which can be provided through the [BASW Independents Service](#)
- tax arrangements as being self employed
- Current Registration with Social Work England

2.3 The following are useful for ensuring that the IPE can show their suitability for the placement in question:

- An up-to-date CV or Profile giving their qualifications, practice experience and confirming their currency to practice.
- An appendix/portfolio of anonymised practice evidence including examples of full and interim reports and feedback received.
- Evidence of experience with students and how this correlates with the PEPS Domains and Values statements.

2.4 The IPE will be expected to adhere to the Placement Agreement which should be clear about:

- The number of PE sessions, direct observations and placement meetings that should be attended including the Practice Assessment Panel (Practice Panel) which considers the assessment and recommendations.
- General requirements including completion of interim and final reports and feedback on reflective pieces of work.
- General Placement related workshops e.g., Midway meetings for practice educators and / or jointly with the student group.
- The completion of QAPL or similar form.
- Any other expectations e.g., completion of employer's references, completion of interim and final reports, feedback on reflective pieces of work.

PAYMENT

An IPE will need to be paid for their services. This should be very clear at the contracting stage (in a separate contract) including details of:

- The total fee, broken down into the daily rate
- Point of Payment(s) Should be paid at half way and on conclusion of placement unless agreed otherwise

Exceptional Circumstances affecting IPE payments

The contract should be clear on the following:

1. How payment will be affected if the student fails to finish the course.
2. The point in the placement when the full fee will be paid if student fails to finish the course later in the placement.
3. Reporting and involvement needed from the Practice Educator in any disrupted placement planning and support and payment for this.

FREQUENCY OF SUPERVISION

The frequency of supervision by the Practice Educator and the On-Site Supervisor should be clearly set out on the learning agreement. This should be agreed within three weeks of the placement commencing or in accordance with the requirements of the HEI and Social Work England's [guidance on practice placements](#).

The learning agreement will specify the number of sessions to be delivered face to face and on-line. Supervision should be underpinned by ethical, anti-racist practices, and supervision tools like this ([Relational & Anti-racist supervision template, student version](#)) and [supplementary guidance](#)) may be useful and supportive.

The Practice Educator will be expected to inform the contractor if they cannot fulfil their responsibilities at any time, giving 28 days' notice where possible.

The Practice Educator should be informed if the on-site supervisor is unable to fulfil their supervisory responsibilities. If the student is assessed as being marginal or at risk of failing, the frequency of supervision should be reviewed with the student between the Practice Educator, On-Site Supervisor and tutor as part of the placement review.

REGULARITY OF MEETINGS BETWEEN ON-SITE PRACTICE SUPERVISOR AND PRACTICE EDUCATOR

The Practice Educator and On-Site Supervisor should agree how information is shared and have a schedule of 3-way meetings with the student. An initial joint meeting should agree the expectations of the work-based supervisor including their role in direct observations of practice and the verification of evidence. 3-way meetings would normally be scheduled on a monthly basis (for best practice) and at a minimum be held as part of the mid-way and final assessment process (ideally in-person).

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

Practice Educators are required to work with social work students to explore and reflect upon issues of anti-discriminatory, anti-oppressive and anti-racist practice. They are a resource which could be drawn upon in organisations to advance work around equality, diversity and inclusion. We fully endorse the BASW England statement on '[Anti-Racism, Anti-Discrimination & Anti-Oppression in Social Work](#)'.

REFERENCES

- BASW England (2022) Black & Ethnic Minority Professionals Symposium (BPS) and School of Shabs (SOS) Relational & Anti-racist supervision template
https://new.basw.co.uk/sites/default/files/resources/181248_relational_and_anti-racist_supervision_form.pdf
- BASW England (2022) Black & Ethnic Minority Professionals Symposium (BPS) and School of Shabs (SOS) Relational & Anti-racist supervision template (student version)
<https://new.basw.co.uk/sites/default/files/resources/student-placement-supervision-template.pdf>
- BASW England (2022) Black & Ethnic Minority Professionals Symposium (BPS) and School of Shabs (SOS) Relational & Anti-racist supervision template supplementary guidance
https://new.basw.co.uk/sites/default/files/resources/181248_relational_and_anti-racist_supervision_form_overview.pdf
- BASW England (2020) Practice Educator Professional Standards (PEPS)
www.basw.co.uk/system/files/resources/peps-for-social-work.pdf
- Gair, C., Ford, R., Shannon, M. & Boath, E. (2020) "Sounding Boards" and "Temperature Checks": An Evaluation of Practice Education Across the West Midlands Teaching Partnership
- Haworth, S. (2018) Consideration of Practice Education Within a Regional Teaching Partnership Employing Communities of Practice Lens. *Practice*.31:3 p163-186
- Interface Associates UK (2020) Social Work Teaching Partnerships: An Evaluation, Final Report.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Amanda Fitchett
- BASW England
- Carol Dicken ([Vice-Chair of the Professional Capabilities & Development group](#))
- Colin Bright
- Gavin Moorghen (Social Worker & BASW member)
- Glynis Marsh (Senior Mental Health Practitioner in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services)
- Jenni Burton ([Co-Chair of the Professional Capabilities & Development group](#))
- Jenny Peddar (The Open University and NOPT)
- Kathryn Jones
- Keri O'Riordan (Practice Tutor at Frontline)
- Lynda McDonald (Manchester Metropolitan University)
- Marina Morgan-Birchall (Independent Social Worker)
- Mariete Uys
- Michael Chapman (Retired Practice Educator)
- National Organisation for Practice Teaching (NOPT)
- Polly Sykes ([Co-Chair of the Professional Capabilities & Development group](#))
- Ros Gowers (retired Social Worker)
- Sarah Brown
- Suzie Cooper
- Wayne Reid (BASW England Professional Officer & Social Worker)

