Work-Based Supervisors Guidance

BASW England

The professional association for social work and social workers

Placements are central to the social work learning process, and it is only with the excellent learning opportunities offered by Placement Providers and Work-Based Supervisors (WBS), that we are able to produce capable and confident social workers.

This guidance is intended to provide an overview of the supervisory role for placement providers and for Work-Based Supervisors. While this guidance is tailored to social work placements, supervisors who are supporting learners at later stages in their careers, such as newly qualified social workers, may also find it helpful.

Social work programmes will each have a placement handbook, and many deliver training for the Work-Based Supervisor role. This guidance is intended as an accessible starting point, to complement and signpost existing information and training rather than replace or set prescriptive expectations. Please note that there can be some variation in terminology and expectations across different social work courses.

We would like to thank a number of social work programmes and organisations for providing access to their current Work-Based Supervisor course content which has informed this guidance. The guidance is the first step for practitioners who are interested in supporting social work students and learning about the social work training and development process and therefore can provide an excellent learning and development opportunity.

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1. What is a social work placement?

Learners are on placement to learn from and with you. As described in the WBL Workbook (Manchester Metropolitan University, 2025), learners on placement will be:

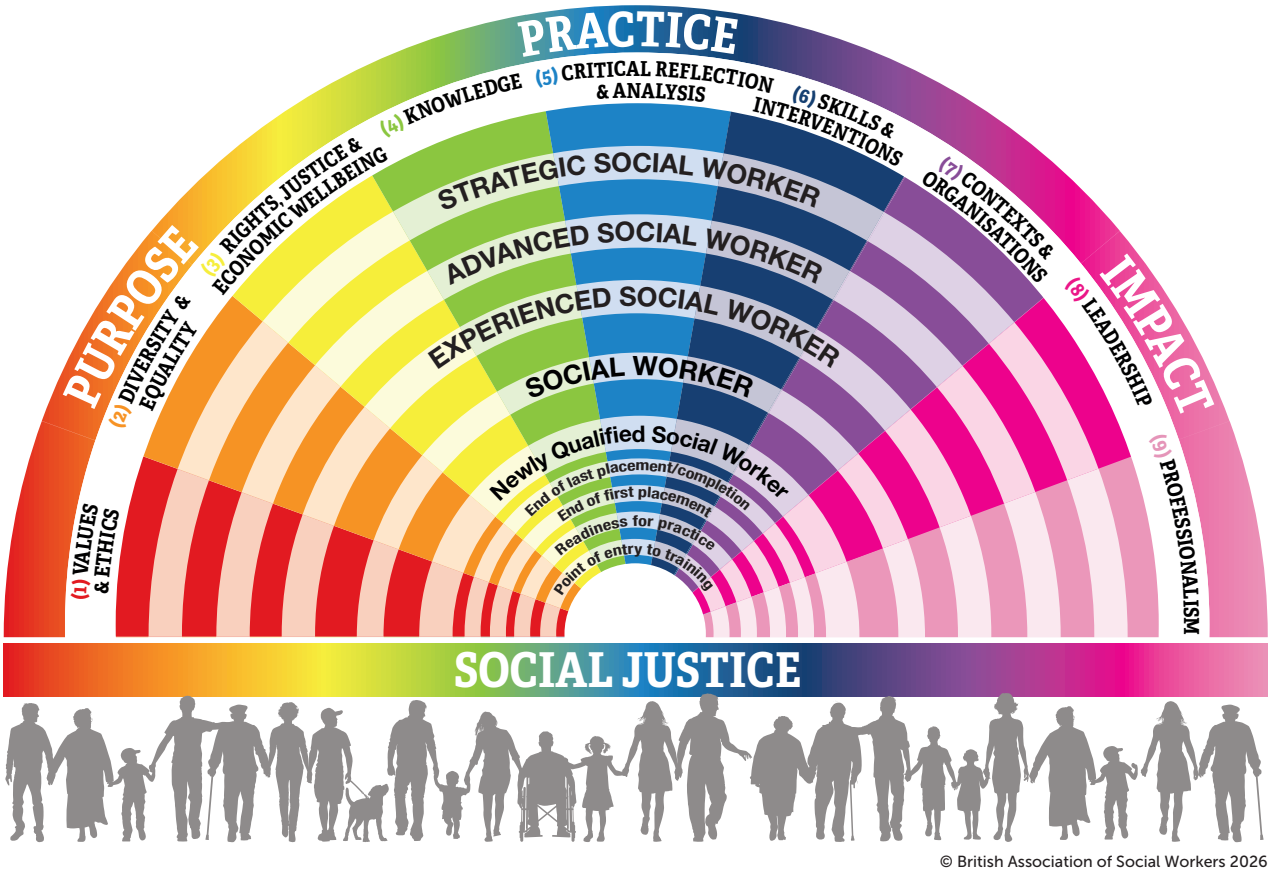
- **Doing:** refers to the occupation and occupational performance of an individual, which is essential for the individual to interact with others, develop their own identity and to create and shape society.
- **Being:** refers to being true to self, that people are required to spend time thinking and reflecting themselves. This helps an individual describe and sustain their own roles.
- **Becoming:** refers to how individuals redefine their values and rethink their priorities to prepare for transformation in their new roles. This concept of becoming may change continuously over time, reflective of how an individual sees their future.

A learners' time with you on placement will involve them **DOING** work related activities that will develop their skills and social work identity. They will need to spend time thinking and reflecting on what they do, to develop their sense of **BEING**. Their time on placement with you will contribute to their **BECOMING** closer to the social worker they envisage themselves to be by the end of their degree.

a. National Guidance

Placements give the opportunity for learners to develop the skills needed to meet the Professional Capabilities Framework (BASW, 2026) and Social Work England Professional Standards (SWE, 2021).

The Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF)



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PCF Refresh

The Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) consists of 9 domains of practice, knowledge and values. It outlines the work required at every stage of a social work career, from pre-training through to experienced and senior professionals, as can be seen in the below 'PCF Fan'.

Before coming on their first placement, learners will have already evidenced PCF - Readiness for direct practice, and before beginning their final placement they will have evidenced PCF - End of first placement

- The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) is the professional body for social workers. BASW provides professional guidance to learners on placement and supports the Professional Capabilities Framework and the Practice Educator Professional Standards (PEPS BASW 2022), which identifies the standards and values social workers must demonstrate in order to be a practice educator.
- Social Work England (SWE) is the professional regulator for social workers, and learners must meet the Social Work England Professional Standards (SW 2021) at all times. SWE outline their expectations of training providers in the Education and Training Standards (2021) and Guidance on Practice Placements (2023).

The relevant training provider will have their own 'Placement Handbook' and other placement-related guidance, providing detailed information around local expectations.

As specified by Social Work England, learners must undertake 200 practice days while training to be a social worker, which must include two contrasting placements. Although there may be variations depending on the social work course the following is the usual placement arrangement:

b. First placement

This placement should allow learners to demonstrate effective use of knowledge, skills and commitment to core values in social work in a given setting with supervision and support. See PCF End of First Placement. Often, this placement gives learners the opportunity to explore and understand the wider context in which social work takes place, gaining insight into provider organisations which may not themselves employ a social worker.

c. Final placement

Learners should demonstrate the ability to work with people who have a range of needs, to undertake a variety of tasks including statutory duties and to work with more complex situations. Learners should be able to work more autonomously, whilst recognising that final decisions will still rest with the practice educator. Learners will seek appropriate support and supervision. See PCF End of Final Placement.

2. Key people involved in the placement

Training and education providers may use a variety of terminology, but below are the key individuals that you may encounter.

- **Learners**
  Learners (e.g. students or apprentices) may undertake a variety of social work courses, including undergraduate, postgraduate, fast track and apprenticeship. There will be some variation in how placements are rolled out, according to the arrangements of education providers.

  Learners will generally complete a placement application form or similar document, outlining their prior experience and learning needs. This information will be shared with your organisation in advance of the placement starting.

- **Practice Educator (PE)**
  The PE is a qualified social worker who provides professional guidance while the learner is on placement. The PE will support the learner to make the connections between the learning opportunities provided by the organisation and the professional requirements (PCF, SWE PS), and they will make the final assessment about the capability of the learner.

  If the organisation has a social worker who has been trained as a practice educator, they can undertake this role providing weekly supervision, and a Work-Based Supervisor is not usually required. If the PE is off-site or a decision is made that additional supervision and support would be useful in order to share the workload, they will work alongside a Work-Based Supervisor to support the placement.

  If the PE is in training, a PE Mentor / Assessor will also be involved in the placement; they may be involved in placement meetings, and they will authorise reports and PE decisions. They provide guidance and support to the trainee PE and will undertake one or two observations of the trainee PE in practice.

- **Representative of the course provider**
  This is the individual assigned to support the placement, ensuring that learning opportunities are provided and that both the learner and the placement provider are satisfied with progress. They will go under a variety of titles.

3. Who can act as a Work-Based Supervisor?

The Work-Based Supervisor will be an experienced member of the placement team; they will need a clear understanding of the values, skills and knowledge expected of a social work learner in this context. The Work-Based Supervisor may be a social worker or have other professional qualifications or experience. The work of the Work-Based Supervisor supported by the wider team and the PE, is central to the learner experience. They facilitate the provision of learning opportunities to allow learners to become confident and competent to take on the challenges facing the profession; they offer a unique contribution to the learners' learning and development due to their understanding of the organisation and their position as a positive role model.

Questions for the organisation and the prospective Work-Based Supervisor to consider:

- Does the proposed Work-Based Supervisor have the time to complete this role in addition to their other duties; has the workload been reviewed and adapted to ensure capacity?
- Has the Work-Based Supervisor had appropriate training and been offered resources to support and manage the learners' needs and understand their role?
- Does the Work-Based Supervisor have any individual needs, or do they require

reasonable adjustments to complete this additional role?

The Work-Based Supervisor role provides excellent opportunities for staff to develop supervisory and leadership skills. It is an important component of staff development, retention policy and planning, for social workers who may wish to progress towards becoming a practice educator or for staff with other professional experience to move into more senior roles.

4. Work-Based Supervisor Responsibilities

The allocation of tasks will be agreed at the learner's Learning Agreement meeting (LAM), which usually happens within the first two weeks of the placement. Broadly the responsibility of the Work-Based Supervisor will be the day-to-day management of the learner and allocation of their work-related activities. Specifically, they will:

1. **General approach:**
   Presents as a role model for sound professional practice, demonstrating the application of values, skills and knowledge. The Work-Based Supervisor should be aware of the Social Work England Professional Standards and the requirements of the Professional Capabilities Framework at the relevant level, in order to ensure that work-related expectations are appropriate.

   Treat learners fairly whilst on placement with regards to specific duties under the Equality Act 2010, regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership or pregnancy and maternity.

2. **Work and learning opportunities:**
   The Work-Based Supervisor is responsible for coordinating the learner's induction with support from the PE, to ensure that learners become familiar with the work, values and purpose of the placement agency and to help them settle in. The induction should involve meeting and shadowing colleagues within the team, meeting colleagues from other related agencies, introduction to those using the service and familiarisation with agency policies and procedures.

   An appropriate workload for the learner needs to be agreed between the PE and the Work-Based Supervisor. It is helpful to have a shared agreement between the PE and the Work-Based Supervisor around how work will be allocated to the learner. The learners' workload should be reviewed regularly to enable them to meet the assessment requirements of the social work course and the requirements of the placement agency. The overall structure of the placement needs to be considered when work is being allocated to the learner. Remember that the learner is there to 'learn' not to 'work', so it is important to focus on the quality of the learning experience on offer to the learner.

   A team approach will provide a welcoming and supportive environment for the learner, where colleagues may be able to supplement the placement experience and contribute to the learning experience.

   Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) might be used in both training and practice related contexts. There should

be a clear agreement about when or if AI is used, and the potential impact on both the learner, the organisation and those using the service. Learners should ensure that they check the AI policy of both the organisation and the training organisation.

This includes understanding anti-racist, anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice and processes such as procedures for requesting reasonable adjustments.

3. **Support:**
The Work-Based Supervisor will have a supervisory role with the learner, although this may vary depending on the social work programme. The supervisory arrangements will be agreed at the learner's Learning Agreement meeting (LAM). Although the learner's supervision with the Work-Based Supervisor is often fortnightly it should be noted that a great deal of valuable informal supervision is often provided due to the close working nature of the Work-Based Supervisor role with the learner on placement.

The Work-Based Supervisor will be supported closely by the PE who is the primary person available for advice and support. It is good practice to have three-way supervision involving the leaner to share observations, agree progress and identify further areas for development. Meetings are recommended soon after placement begins, before the midway meeting and towards the end of the placement.

The Work-Based Supervisor will monitor the quality of the learners' work, along with their development and progress towards the appropriate PCF/SWE requirements and will provide written and verbal feedback on their progress.

4. **Contribute to the PE Assessment**
The Work-Based Supervisor will have oversight of the learners' practice but it is the PE who has the responsibility for the final assessment. The Work-Based Supervisor is well placed to monitor practice and attendance to ensure that the learner is providing the appropriate standard of service, in line with the PCF and with SWE requirements and the expectations of the organisation. The Work-Based Supervisor may undertake one of the formal 'Direct Observations' of the learners practice.

Learners are expected to attend the placement for the usual agency hours although they should be given an agreed amount of study time and reflection time which will be confirmed in the Learning Agreement meeting (LAM).

The Work-Based Supervisor will take into account feedback from a range of sources including People with Lived Experience (PWLE) and will share this with the learner and the PE, thereby contributing to the holistic assessment process which informs the PE's pass/fail recommendation.

5. **Managing any difficulties**
The Work-Based Supervisor will be expected to raise any concerns they have about the learner with the PE. Concerns may be in relation to the learner's ability or professional conduct, or other issues with the placement setting.

Good communication between the Work-Based Supervisor, their organisation, the training provider and the PE is central to a sound placement experience. The PE will take the coordinating role to ensure that any differences expressed are discussed to ensure that there are 'no surprises' for any party involved in the placement.

5. Practicalities

Pre-placement Processes	**Placement Audit:** The course provider will undertake a placement audit to ensure that both first and final placements are quality assured and learning opportunities to meet the PCF are in place. Reasonable adjustments should also be considered and implemented as ethically as possible. Work-Based Supervisors will need to have awareness of the processes to support learners requiring reasonable adjustments in case these are requested at any stage of the placement. **Application and Interview:** Learners will complete a placement application form for the course provider. The placement provider will then decide if the learner is acceptable. The WBL role in this process will vary although they will often be involved in this process. If accepted the learner will be invited for a pre-placement interview/discussion, meet key people and become familiar with the setting. While the Work-Based Supervisor will usually have involvement in the pre-placement meeting, they may not be involved in the interview process.
Placement	**Placement Meetings:** A Learning Agreement Meeting (LAM) will be organised about 2 weeks after the start of the placement. The LAM will involve all key people to map out the role and expectations of each person and to outline the learning opportunities that will be available and how teaching, learning an assessment will take place. Supervision, induction, training and attendance arrangements for the learner will be agreed, and practical details such as use of a car will be discussed. The placement portfolio, assessment process and use of reflective diaries or logs will be made clear. An interim/mid-way meeting will usually take place, attended by all key people to take stock of the learner's progress, any challenges experienced, and to agree goals for the remaining placement days. Some organisations will have a final meeting at the end of the placement. Action planning meetings may also be required (page 12) **Placement Induction:** The learner's induction period usually spans the first week or two of the placement and will be coordinated by the PE. **Assessment + Direct Observation:** Each course will expect the learner to produce a portfolio of evidence based on the placement learning provided. The PE will assess the learner's progress and will make a recommendation of capability based on the evidence gathered confirming if the placement has been passed. The Work-Based Supervisor will be involved in the assessment process by gathering information from a variety of sources including people with lived experience.

	The PE will carry out at least two direct observations of the learner during the course of the placement. The Work-Based Supervisor may carry out the third observation depending on the course requirements. When the observation is carried out by the PE, the Work-Based Supervisor will have a role in exploring with the learner how consent will be obtained from the PWLE for the PE to observe the learner. When the Work-Based Supervisor is observing the learner, a collaborative approach is recommended to agree the parameters and expectations of the observation with full support from the PE.
Learner Support and Supervision	Learners should expect 1.5 hours of supervision altogether from the PE and the Work-Based Supervisor every week. Where there is both a PE and a Work Based Supervisor the supervision will usually alternate, so that the Work-Based Supervisor will provide fortnightly supervision. This may include both formal and informal supervision. There are a number of theories to suggest the best ways to approach supervision and ensure that diversity is recognised and celebrated. The course provider and the PE will be able to provide guidance and opportunities for training. If learners have additional support needs they may require a Support Plan that identifies appropriate reasonable adjustments in the placement. The Work-Based Supervisor may have responsibility for checking this is in place. The learner will be encouraged to share the plan with the course provider and the PE to accommodate their needs where possible.
Action Planning	Sometimes challenges do arise over the course of the placement. The WSB and PE will need to be proactive in identifying any challenges, particularly if the learner is struggling. The PE will liaise with the course provider and an action plan will be agreed as early as possible during the placement. Action planning is intended to be a supportive process aiming to identify what challenges have arisen and how to work together to give the learner the best chance of success. An approach that prioritises support and transparency will enable the learner to gain a more positive learning experience, regardless of the outcome.

Remote Practice

Reasonable Adjustments: Some or even many learners will need the Work-Based Supervisor and Placement provider to agree 'reasonable adjustments' as per the Equality Act 2010 in order to enable to learner to make the most of their learning experience and consider their individual needs and intersectionality. Also, this should address the needs of Black global majority students and students from abroad (Cornish et al, 2025). Placements may include some remote working. This can be valuable, allowing learners to gain a realistic experience of current practice and to develop tools and strategies to manage remote working and learning. However, it is important for the Work-Based Supervisor to recognise the impact on learners and when they may feel isolated.

Some tips include:

- Avoid remote working during the induction period when possible so as to allow learners to gain as much on-site work as possible and gain in sight from observing experienced workers.
- Some providers have 'virtual office' technology where the learner can log into the system alongside colleagues. This facilitates discussion and guidance that would usually occur in person.
- Offer guidance on the best way to work remotely. This may include creating a dedicated workspace at home to create 'work' and 'relaxation' space and to ensure that confidentiality is maintained when needed. Guidance for the learner about structuring their day may also be helpful, encouraging the learner to take time to debrief and have breaks between appointments.
- To encourage learners to develop sound relationships across the team it can be helpful to arrange 'getting to know you' social activities. An example of this would be to ask the learner to put together a questionnaire of work-based and social questions to ask each member of the team.

There may also be challenges for learners to consider when they are working directly within the team particularly if this is a shared office environment. There may not be an allocated desk and the learner will be expected to 'hot desk'. There may not be many places for a learner to retreat to if they are struggling and need private space.

6. Adult learning

The Work-Based Supervisor will gain support and guidance from the PE and the training provider to understand how adults learn, to take into account learning preferences and the tools, theories and models which facilitate learning. Work-Based Supervisor training may be available prior to, or alongside, the learner being on placement although arrangements may differ. The PE should be able to suggest resources to help the Work-Based Supervisor understand adult learning concepts.

It is particularly important to reflect on the application of social work values. The power differential and dilemmas around learner assessment vs learner support should be discussed in supervision in order to identify and work on any potential obstacles to progress.

7. Equity, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

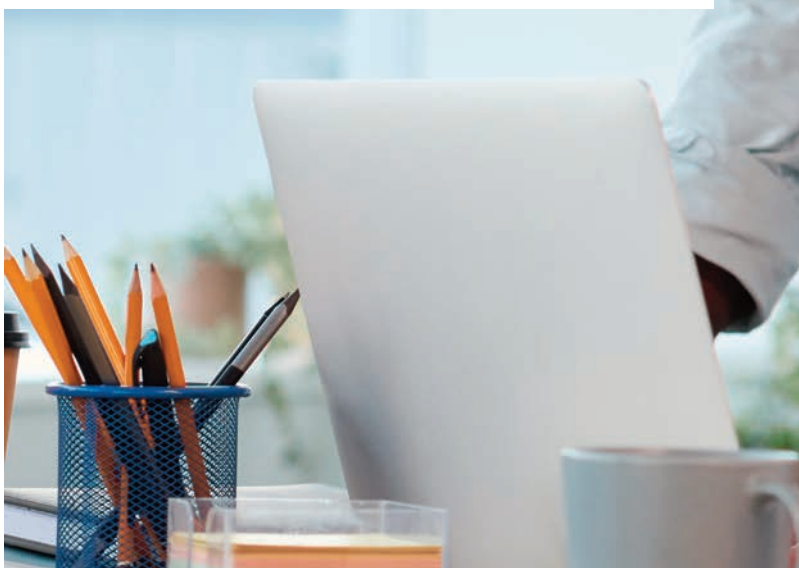
Anti-oppressive practice is at the core of social work values. This stance considers how power operates in personal, family, community, organisational and structural levels and serves to create disadvantage for many. Whilst the PE will take the lead to explore and support the learner to apply these principles in supervision, it is important for the Work-Based Supervisor to also ensure anti-oppressive practice is followed. The following is suggested:

- Always consider the views of oppressed individuals and groups.
- Collaboratively consider the oppressive nature of organisations and how that is experienced by the learner and the people they are working with.
- Encourage the learner to reflect on and have open discussions about the issue of power on both a personal and structural level.

Anti-discriminatory practice is more concerned with how discrimination, based on protected characteristics, might be addressed in the moment. The wider causes might be understood within a broader anti-oppressive framework, but anti-discriminatory practice is about direct action, and discussions may include the following:

- An exploration of how discrimination is being experienced (either their own experiences of those in the workplace).
- Consideration of the measures which may be taken on an individual or organisational level to address this inequality. This includes whether reasonable adjustments are required for fair and equitable learning in the practice placement.
- Opportunity to discuss, explore and celebrate diversity of experience and what can be learnt from it.

Anti-racist practice underpins social work education. Whilst the Work-Based Supervisor may not necessarily be a registered social worker, they will be expected to both demonstrate anti-racist practice and encourage their learners to do so as well. Research tells us that social work learners who are not White are more likely to experience placement difficulties and failures so it is important that those involved in practice settings are aware of this and actively create an anti-racist culture (Tedam, 2020) by ensuring the following:



- Make time for the learner for formal and informal supervision, make sure that arrangements and timings for supervisions are agreed collaboratively.
- Acknowledge needs, both personal and professional, which might impact on the placement experience.
- Explore the learners perspective and celebrate difference and diversity and any implications for practice.
- All adults learn in a different way. Find out formative educational experiences and the best way the learner can learn on placement and when support is needed.
- Explore previous life experiences and consider those as a source of knowledge to inform their practice e.g. family, employment, racism.
- Reflect on the differences between you and the learner – age, ethnicity, experience, gender – how will this impact on your relationship/the learning experience?

8. Finally

Thank you very much for your interest in working with social work learners, and we hope that you enjoy hosting learners on placement.

Appendix A: Key terms

This page contains brief descriptions and explanations of terms frequently encountered during the placement period, in alphabetical order. Terminology may vary so consult the electronic guidance or handbook provided by the specific course provider.

Direct Observation	Often abbreviated to 'DO'. A DO is an essential method to assess a learners' practice. The aim of DO is to assess how the learners' social work skills are developing, how they are progressing towards meeting professional standards, and for the observer and the individual or family receiving the service to provide feedback. Observations also provide opportunities for the learner to critically reflect on their practice.
Interim, mid-point or midway Review Meeting	This is a formal review of the placement at around halfway through the placement. PE and learners will submit a report, with input from the Work-Based Supervisor.
Off-site Practice Educator	Often abbreviated to IPE, the Off-site Practice Educator is a registered, experienced and qualified social worker who is physically located away from the Work-Based Supervisor and has the overall responsibility for teaching and assessing the learners' practice. They will work closely with the Work-Based Supervisor and be available to advise and guidance
Person(s) With Lived Experience (PWLE or PLE)	Person(s) with lived experience are regarded as 'experts by experience' in the scope of their first-hand experience of using social work & related services and/or having direct experience of an aspect of life relevant to social work practice for example, a health condition, disability, care experience etc.
Learning Agreement Meeting (LAM)	This meeting, often abbreviated to 'LAM,' is scheduled to take place about two weeks after the placement begins. The purpose of the meeting is to record the agreements made by everyone involved in the placement. During the meeting general details of the placement should be recorded including times of placement, contact details of the agency and all people involved, the learners' learning needs, available learning opportunities, frequency of supervision - this is not an exhaustive list. This may be completed by the course tutor or the learner.
Practice Educator (PE)	Often abbreviated to PE, this is a qualified, experienced and registered social worker who takes overall responsibility for assessing learners in practice education against relevant frameworks including the Social Work England Professional Standards and the PCF. The PE is likely to be located on the same site as the learner but may be off-site depending on different course arrangements.

Practice Learning Lead	For course providers, and larger placement providers which may offer multiple placements, the Practice Learning Lead for an organisation has overall responsibility for the placement process and oversees the placement from start to finish. The first point of contact on placement is between the learner, PE, Work-Based Supervisor or tutor. The relevant Practice Leading Lead should be contacted as necessary, and will be available to offer advice and support.
Practice Placement	The usual arrangements for placements is 200 days of practice experience across the duration of the degree programme, although this may vary.
Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF)	The Professional Capabilities (PCF) is a key framework for social work practice teaching and learning in England. It sets out 9 common domains of capability expected to be developed throughout social work education and practice. The PCF promotes and underpins social work as '*one profession*' across all specialisms and roles' (BASW, 2018).
Recall days	Learners have several recall days where they return to the University to review progress and draw on their learning to date. The PE, Work-Based Supervisor and tutor will be made aware of the dates of the recall days at the learning agreement meeting. Learners **MUST** attend the recall days as they are part of the 200 mandatory placement days.
Social Work England	Social Work England is the regulator of the social work profession in England and sets the required professional standards of practice and the qualifying education and training standards. These are the standards against which the regulator assesses and approves social work education and training courses. Social Work England is sometimes abbreviated to 'SWE'.
Social Work England Professional Standards (SWEPS)	Social Work England Professional Standards became the standards for all social workers in England on 2 December 2019. These standards apply to registered social workers in all roles and settings. The standards are the threshold standards necessary for safe and effective practice. Learners are not regulated by Social Work England but are expected to work towards the standards throughout the degree.
Student in Social Work Training	An adult aged 18 years or above who meets the relevant entry requirements of the University. **NOTE:** '*Social worker*' is a protected title. That means that learners cannot use the title unless they have completed the required training and are registered with Social Work England.

Supervision	Supervision is protected time for the learner to meet with their PE or Work-Based Supervisor to discuss their work on placement in detail. It can be formal or informal. Other individuals on the placement may be a source of peer or informal supervision. Supervision is vital to learner learning and development.
University Tutor	All learners are allocated a representative of the university prior to going out on placement. They will support the learner, PE, and Work-Based Supervisor throughout the placement period.
Work-Based Supervisor	Often abbreviated to 'WBS', and sometimes referred to as On-Site Supervisors (OSS), are responsible for the day-to-day support of the learner and will work closely with the PE in their overall assessment of that learner.

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Appendix C: Reference list

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