



# **Northern Ireland Social Care Council**

## **Practice Learning Requirements for the Degree in Social Work**

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# Contents

	Page
Introduction	1
Definition of Practice Learning	1
Principles of Practice Learning	1
Requirements for Practice Learning	2
Teaching and Assessment Requirements for Practice Teaching	4



## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Social work education and training prepares students to become confident and competent social workers. Social workers aim to make a difference to the quality of life for users of services, their carers and the communities they live in. In order to do this it is essential for social work students to develop knowledge and skills that help them work with a wide range of people. Practice learning must therefore be an essential and major component of a student social worker's training.
- 1.2 The Northern Ireland Framework Specification for the Degree in Social Work (the Framework) determines the practice learning as well as the academic content of the Degree. It also specifies the value base as an integral part of the knowledge and practice requirements. Course providers must develop a curriculum that includes both academic learning and practice learning and fosters the integration of knowledge, skills and values in teaching, learning and assessment. The academic learning curriculum must support practice learning.

## **2. Definition of Practice Learning**

- 2.1 Practice skills can be learned through real-life practice in a workplace and simulation. Techniques such as action learning, e-learning, skills teaching, case studies, project work are among the range of simulated techniques that can be used to assist students develop their practice skills.
- 2.2 Practice learning must include a significant period of supervised, assessed practice in the workplace using real-life experiences. Assessed practice must include face to face work with individuals and families and participation in the full range of associated professional activities expected of a practising social worker. It should also include work with groups and communities.
- 2.3 The balance between real-life practice learning and learning through simulation is specified in these requirements.

## **3. Principles of Practice Learning**

- 3.1 Practice learning must:
  - 3.1.1 Promote student learning while safeguarding the rights of service users;
  - 3.1.2 Support the development of confident and competent practitioners who can take responsibility for their own practice and their continuing professional development; and
  - 3.1.3 Promote good social work practice.

## 4. Requirements for Practice Learning

- 4.1 Course providers must ensure that students' practice learning needs and achievements are recorded in an individual learning plan that accompanies the student throughout their training into the assessed year in employment and their future career.
- 4.2 Course providers must structure the course in ways that facilitate a progressive and incremental approach to practice development as indicated in the table below.

<b>*Level 1</b>	<b>Foundation</b>	<b>Preparation for direct supervised practice</b>
<b>*Level 2</b>	<b>Application</b>	<b>Learning in and through direct supervised practice</b>
<b>*Level 3</b>	<b>Integrated application</b>	<b>Critical analysis of application and integration of knowledge, skills and values in direct supervised practice</b>

\*These levels should not necessarily be interpreted as years

- 4.3 All students' readiness to undertake direct supervised practice must be assessed to ensure they are safe to practise as a student social worker in the workplace.
- 4.4 Course providers must have assessment arrangements in place to credit students with prior experiential learning consistent with agreed regional arrangements.
- 4.5 All students must be assessed as competent at one level in order to progress to the next.
- 4.6 Students without credits for prior experiential learning will normally undertake **240 days** of practice learning, of which:  
**25 days** must be spent in **preparation for direct work**;  
**185 days** must be in **direct supervised practice**; and  
**30 days** to be used for **individual practice development**.
- 4.7 All students will normally be required to complete a minimum of **185 days** in direct, supervised practice except where they have been assessed for exemption at Level 2.

4.8 Overview of practice learning requirements is presented in the table below.

<b>Level</b>	<b>Students with no prior experience</b>	<b>Students eligible for APEL</b>	<b>Progression</b>
<b>Level 1 – Foundation</b>	<b>Minimum of 25 days</b> in preparation for direct practice	<b>Credit up to 25 days</b>	All students' readiness to undertake direct practice at Level 2 must be assessed
<b>Level 2 - Application</b>	<b>Minimum of 85 days</b> in direct supervised practice	<b>Credit up to 85 days</b>	Progression to Level 3 is subject to assessment for all students
<b>Level 3 - Integrated application</b>	<b>Minimum of 100 days</b> in direct supervised practice	<b>No credit may be claimed.</b>	All students must be assessed at Level 3
<p>In addition there are <b>30 days</b> to be used flexibly by all students for individual practice development. This could include simulated court work, action learning in respect of community development, additional preparation for practice learning, visits of observation, paid or voluntary work. Course providers are required to indicate in their submissions for approval how the 30 unspecified days for practice development are to be used.</p> <p>Individual practice development must be assessed for all students.</p>			

4.9 Assessed practice learning should be contrasting in order for students to understand, acquire and demonstrate transferability of knowledge, skills and values in practice. This contrast will normally be achieved through variations in assessed practice learning experiences. Practice learning should therefore be structured over the course of the Degree to allow students to gain experience of:

- 4.9.1 Carrying out statutory social work tasks;
- 4.9.2 At least two different settings;
- 4.9.3 Providing services to at least two user groups;
- 4.9.4 Group care;
- 4.9.5 Working with at least two other professions;

- 4.9.6 The contested nature, scope and purpose of social work in a diverse society;
- 4.9.7 Participating in formal decision-making forums;
- 4.9.8 Participating in and presenting evidence in courts or tribunals or other formal hearings; and
- 4.9.9 Applying community development approaches in social work.

Experiences 4.9.1 to 4.9.7 listed above must be gained during the period of supervised direct practice.

Experience 4.9.8 may be gained through simulation where sufficient opportunities are not available in practice.

Experiences 4.9.9 may be gained through action learning or project work where sufficient opportunities are not available in real-life practice.

## **5. Teaching and Assessment Requirements for Practice Learning**

- 5.1 Teaching and assessment requirements for practice learning will be specified.