

Best
Practice
Guide:
disabled social
work students
and placements

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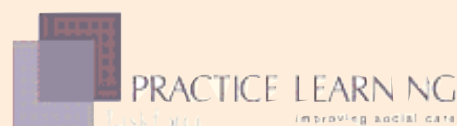
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This guide has been designed to be divided, copied and distributed to four groups.

These are :

- ▶ Disabled social work students
- ▶ Practice assessors/teachers
- ▶ Academic staff on social work programmes including placement co-ordinators
- ▶ Disability support staff in higher education

A DOWNLOADABLE VERSION OF THIS GUIDE IS

AVAILABLE AT

www.hull.ac.uk/pedds

Please note: The legal information in this guide should not be treated as comprehensive and may be superseded by case law. Details of expert resources and assistance with the law are contained in the accompanying resource sections and specific legal questions should be addressed to a legal expert.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

This guide was developed as part of the PEEdDS [Professional Education and Disability Support] Project, undertaken by the Faculty of Health and Social Care and Disability Services at the University of Hull. The project aimed to explore, assess and deliver learning support to disabled social work students undertaking professional education in the practice placement environment.

The evidence in this guide is based upon a series of interviews with disabled social work students, academic staff [including placement co-ordinators from social work programmes], practice assessors/teachers and university disability support staff. The research focused on the needs of, and responses to, students with unseen disabilities and therefore addressed questions of disclosure and confidentiality as well as identifying what made for positive placement experiences. The full report '**The PEEdDS Project: disabled social work students and placements**' (2005) is available on the project website (www.hull.ac.uk/pedds). Disabled students are increasingly welcomed by the social work profession as their potential contribution to practice is highly regarded by practitioners and educators. The research undertaken for this Best Practice Guide provided numerous examples of ways in which disabled social work students are positively valued and demonstrated the knowledge, skills and experience that they bring to the profession.

In this guide we have used the legal definition of a disability as provided in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995⁽¹⁾ : That is; "A disabled person is someone who has a physical or mental impairment, which has an effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. That effect must be:

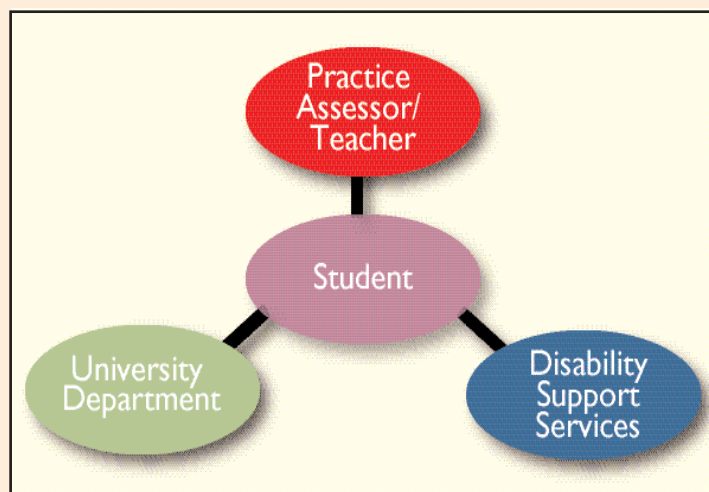
- ▶ Substantial (that is, more than minor or trivial); and
- ▶ Long-term (that is, has lasted or is likely to last for at least 12 months or for the rest of the life of the person affected); and
- ▶ "Adverse"

⁽¹⁾Taken from Disability Rights Commission (2002) 'Disability Discrimination Act 1995 Part 4: Code of Practice for providers of post-16 education and related services. New duties (from September 2002) in the provision of post-16 education and related services for disabled people and students'. Norwich : The Stationary Office. (see www.drc.gov.uk/thelaw/index.asp)

We accept that this definition is limited and, although it does encompass a wide range of impairments, it is not all-inclusive. This definition is considered narrower than that proposed by the social model of disability. It is not the intention of this guide to debate the limitations of the definition as these have been discussed at length elsewhere (see for example, Sapey et al, 2004 - available at www.swap.ac.uk/widen/accesstopractice). The language and terminology used by disabled people has undergone many changes in recent years and we have therefore endeavoured to use socially inclusive and appropriate terminology wherever possible.

It was within the context of recent changes to DDA legislation including Part 4 (Education), Part 2 (Employment and Occupation, Qualifications Bodies and Trade Unions) and more recently the Disability Discrimination Act (2003) that the PEdDS Project was undertaken. The Act imposes a positive duty to eliminate discrimination and harassment and to promote equity of opportunity by moving away from risk-avoidance activities to developing and implementing practices that actively promote the inclusion of disabled people. This guide therefore constitutes a pro-active response to the changing expectations of students and staff across higher education regarding practice learning and placement support. The guide is aimed primarily at those working in the field of social work education and practice, and provides practical advice and guidance as well as case studies and examples of best practice. However, many of the recommendations and best practice examples are equally applicable to other professional education courses which have placements, for example, nursing, teaching and medicine.

The guide is divided up into the following sections and each is aimed at a different readership. We anticipate that the guide will be divided up and that the sections will be distributed to the four relevant groups:



SECTION 1: GUIDANCE FOR STUDENTS

This section of the guide has been written for disabled students at various stages of their student careers. This includes disabled students considering whether to apply for social work courses, and students already enrolled on courses and about to go on placement or already undertaking placements. This section of the guide is also relevant to students who may not consider themselves to have a disability or an impairment (though may be

considered disabled according to the DDA legislation), or may or may not have declared their disability to the course or placement. The key areas explored in this section are:

- ▶ Definition of disability
- ▶ Disclosure
- ▶ Professional placements: what to expect
- ▶ Rights and responsibilities

SECTION 2: GUIDANCE FOR PRACTICE ASSESSORS/TEACHERS

This section of the guide is aimed at practice assessors/teachers and is based on interviews with twenty-five members of staff undertaking this role. Key recommendations are made in the areas of:

- ▶ Practice assessment
- ▶ Workload
- ▶ Practice assessors/teachers in their agency
- ▶ Disclosure
- ▶ Planning for students
- ▶ Training

SECTION 3: GUIDANCE FOR ACADEMIC STAFF

This section of the guide is for staff of social work training programmes, including teaching staff, personal tutors and placement co-ordinators. We address five key issues for disabled students on placement identified by the research study that academic staff need to address. These themes are:

- ▶ Promoting disclosure
- ▶ Working with staff in university disability services
- ▶ Planning and monitoring placements for disabled students
- ▶ Making adjustments
- ▶ Valuing disabled students

SECTION 4: GUIDANCE FOR DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES

This section of the guide focuses on information and advice for staff working in Disability Support Services in universities. The section covers a number of key areas that are relevant to staff in their continued support of disabled students on placement:

- ▶ Assessment of need and recommendations in Access reports
- ▶ Working with students
- ▶ Working with academic and placement staff
- ▶ Institution wide policy and procedures
- ▶ Staff development and training

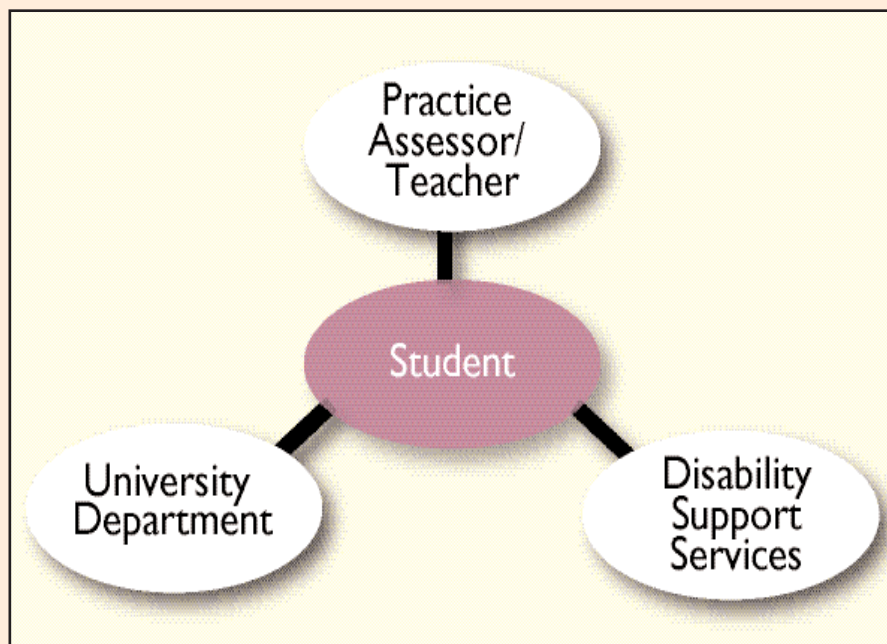
The final part of each section provides 'signposts' to further sources of information and advice. The PEdDS Project website www.hull.ac.uk/pedds contains various links to external sites and downloadable documents that are relevant to this guide. In addition, a

number of appendices conclude this document. These can be distributed with the different sections of the guide.

1. Case studies of student support/reasonable adjustments
2. Institutional procedure - flowchart (University of Hull)
3. Members of the Advisory Group

Jane Wray, Benedict Fell, Nicky Stanley, Jill Manthorpe, Emma Coyne, and Jeanette Gilchrist. June 2005

Section I: Guidance for Students



This section of the guide has been written for disabled students at various stages of their student careers in social work. You may be a disabled student considering whether to apply to one of these courses, or a student already enrolled on one of these courses and about to go on placement or already undertaking your placement. You may not consider yourself to have a disability or impairment, or you may or may not have declared your disability to the course or placement. Disabled students are increasingly welcomed by the social work profession as their potential contribution to practice is highly regarded by practitioners and educators. The research undertaken for this guide provided numerous examples of ways in which disabled social work students are positively valued by those in education and practice.

This guide makes the following recommendations to disabled students:

Would-be applicants should proactively research courses

- ▶ Students should research prospective courses and ask about the department's past experience of providing support for disabled students including whether they have any priority system for allocating placements to meet disabled students' needs.

Disclosure should be made to the course and the placement as early as possible

- ▶ Disclosure of disability is a matter of personal choice and it is important that you consider the valid reasons for and against disclosure. However, if your course or placement is not aware of your disability it may not be able to make reasonable adjustments to help you. In addition, not telling the course or placement about a disability may work against you if it is later thought you were deliberately misleading. Most courses and the General Social Care Council (GSCC) require that you declare any health conditions or disability from the outset. You should note that failure to disclose might be viewed as a serious professional misdemeanour by a professional qualifying body.
- ▶ If you are anxious about potential discrimination, remember that the profession of social work is committed to anti-oppressive practice.

Early disclosure allows time for adjustments to be put in place

- ▶ Early disclosure can allow pre-placement planning (e.g. to find out what the placement will entail and what you may need) and will also enable placements to put reasonable adjustments in place.
- ▶ If you have made links with the disability support staff at your university, they might be able to speak on your behalf about your needs if you wish.

Get what you are entitled to as a disabled student

- ▶ Although you may not think of yourself as disabled, you may be disabled as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and therefore entitled to support such as the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) (see www.dfes.gov.uk/studentssupport), a fund to assist with costs incurred in attending your course, as a direct result of your disability. This funding is available to eligible students on under-graduate and post-graduate courses, both full and part-time routes. For undergraduate students, an assessment of needs, arranged through your Local Education Authority, will establish your entitlement. The GSCC handles funding for most UK postgraduate students.

Tell your DSA assessor that your course will include time on placement

- ▶ You should inform your assessor (during your assessment of need at the Access Centre) that your course will include time on placement and so your needs assessment can take account of this.

Ask for a re-consideration of your needs before going on placement

- ▶ If your original assessment of needs at the Access Centre does not account for time spent on placement then ask that you be re-considered to account for this core requirement of your course.

Clarify your support needs at your pre-placement meeting

- ▶ We recommend that you use your pre-placement meeting to clarify the adjustments available to you, any requirements you have and who you can approach for support. The mid-point placement review also offers an opportunity to formally discuss any provisions made and their appropriateness.

Inform someone if you are having difficulties

- ▶ If things are not working, be honest and let someone know as soon as possible. Also, if you think you are being treated unfairly on the grounds of your disability, consult your university's Equal Opportunities Policy and department's complaints system (the GSCC requires that accredited courses at universities have such systems in place).

Be aware of your responsibilities

- ▶ The Disability Discrimination Act gives you rights as a disabled student. With rights also come responsibilities. A professional education course is different from other courses as you will engage in direct work with service-users - being upfront and honest about your needs and any potential risks is good practice for a developing professional.
- ▶ The GSCC has certain rules and regulations that you will need to comply with as a requirement of registration (see links to this information in the resource section).

This guide aims to provide useful information for disabled social work students and to enable you to make informed choices. A list of other resources at the end of the guide offers signposts for further information and advice. Throughout this section, examples are given from interviews with disabled social work students who were consulted by the Professional Education and Disability Support (PEdDS) study about their experiences on placement. You may find that their experiences confirm some of your own fears, concerns or experiences (the full research report, 'The PEdDS Project : disabled social work students on placement' (2005) is available at the PEdDS website - see resource section). First, we will start with a definition of disability.

DEFINITION OF A DISABILITY

The legal definition of a disability is provided in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995⁽²⁾:

A disabled person is someone who has a physical or mental impairment, which has an effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. That effect must be:

- ▶ Substantial (that is, more than minor or trivial); and
- ▶ Long-term (that is, has lasted or is likely to last for at least 12 months or for the rest of the life of the person affected); and
- ▶ Adverse

A large range of disabilities, impairments and medical conditions can be included under this definition. It is typical for people to think of disabled people in terms of the visible aids and adaptations which indicate a person is disabled e.g. wheelchairs, walking aids, guide dogs. However, the legal definition also includes disabilities that are unseen. These include;

- ▶ Specific learning difficulties e.g. dyslexia

⁽²⁾Taken from Disability Rights Commission (2002) 'Disability Discrimination Act 1995 Part 4: Code of Practice for providers of post-16 education and related services. New duties (from September 2002) in the provision of post-16 education and related services for disabled people and students'. Norwich : The Stationary Office. (see www.drc.gov.uk/thelaw/index.asp)

- ▶ Mental health difficulties
- ▶ Medical conditions such as epilepsy or diabetes.

You may not think or feel that you are disabled. However, you may fall into this category according to DDA legislation. This means you have rights (and, as we shall discuss, responsibilities) under the disability legislation. Whether you choose to accept this definition is a matter for yourself to decide and will involve issues of your own personal identity.

A student with a mobility difficulty told us...

"I think the reason I don't use it as a label is because part of me would feel a bit of a fraud. I suppose that is my interpretation of disability, but having worked with people with disabilities I just think that I don't see myself in that category. Even when I am really ill I suppose I could say I am, but on the whole I don't like to put myself in that category because in a way I feel that that is demeaning to them."

This student had a disability according to the legislation but did not feel disabled.

DISABILITY DISCLOSURE

'Disclosure' is the term used in legal and disability literature for letting people know about your disability or impairment. You may have various fears about stating your disability on your application form at the initial application stage or on your placement application form. Some of the things that students who contributed to PEEdDS told us made them reluctant to disclose their disability to their course/placement included:

- ▶ Fear of being stigmatised and treated differently from other non-disabled students:

A student with a medical condition told us...

"The other thing is the stigma attached because with a disability, you tend to think that people will judge you and they do judge you. People do judge other people. I think that has been a big thing as to why I have not personally said anything about it. There must be many more like me."

- ▶ Concern about being seen as less 'appealing' to practice assessors/teachers and placement agencies or as requiring 'extra work' (being seen as a burden on already overworked staff):

A student with a specific learning difficulty told us that...

"I always worry that if you put dyslexia on the form you may get put aside for somebody that's not."

- ▶ Placement choice being restricted as a result of a disability, for example, students with a visual impairment being told they are unable to work in child protection because they might not spot physical signs of non-accidental injury such as bruises:

A student with a medical condition mentioned...

"Especially on my 50 to 80 days placement, I thought if I am picking and choosing on what I can and can't do I am not going to get placed. Or I am going to be placed so late...you are made to feel a bit of a nuisance really."

For students with potentially stigmatising impairments, such as mental health difficulties and dyslexia (for example, fear of being judged 'stupid'), these fears were heightened. There can often be a perception that people in professional occupations have to be strong and that to admit "weakness", for example in the form of a mental health difficulty, is a sign of an inability to be an effective helper:

A student with dyslexia stated her concerns...

"People perceive it as you being incapable of being able to keep up with the rest of the team. Or not being able to write as well as the team, that you were a hindrance to the group. That they would have to pull you through."

However, students also described the benefits of disclosing their disability, including:

▶ Disclosing as a means of accessing the necessary support:

One student with a rare medical condition told us:

"As far as I'm concerned once I let people know and asked for the support, the mechanisms that kicked in were great really - I can't really fault it. I wished I'd asked for it sooner"

▶ Because the nature of their condition meant that people needed to know so they could take the necessary emergency action:

A student with a heart condition commented:

"It is not necessarily a comfortableness it is a necessity. For my own safety because if I go into Cardiac Arrest it is imperative that people around me know."

▶ Others felt that they should disclose to break down myths about disability and felt secure in their identity as disabled people:

A student with a specific learning difficulty stated:

"Why not? Nobody's making me ashamed...I know who I am ...I don't mind having dyslexia, I don't mind working on strategies, I've had to come to terms with that."

POSSIBLE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF DISCLOSURE

Table I sets out some possible advantages and disadvantages of disclosing your disability.

Table I. Some possible advantages and disadvantages of disclosure

FOR DISCLOSING	AGAINST DISCLOSING
Adjustments and technology can be arranged and put in place well before the placement begins.	You feel that 'disability' or 'disabled' is a label that only applies to others who are much worse off than you.
The Practice Teacher and placement agency will be expecting you and you will have had the chance to discuss with them what the particular impact of your disability is/will be and how they can best support you.	You feel that by disclosing you will be treated as a client and not a fellow professional by placement colleagues and fellow students.
Disclosure can demonstrate a sense of professional responsibility and ability to reflect on one's practice and the potential impact of one's impairment on others.	Placements and Practice Teachers may begin to view you as the disability 'expert' and/or automatically allocate you to work with service users with a disability.
Disclosure as part of the mandatory health check can act as a form of added protection. Once accepted onto the course you are deemed 'suitable' and the university enters into a contract with you to deliver the course in its entirety (unless there is a significant deterioration over the duration of the course).	You feel that your impairment is controlled and does not have any impact and so there is no need for anyone to know.
It can help to break down the myths that disabled people can't become professionals.	You don't want to share the information with a stranger (i.e. on an application form) because you think the information is personal, private or potentially embarrassing.
It could help you secure a placement where personal experience of an impairment/disability is viewed as advantageous e.g. some mental health groups working with psychiatric 'survivors'.	
Disclosing will make people less likely to make assumptions about your performance on placement or incompetence.	

SKILL: the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities, provides a range of advice for and against disclosure. It states in its advice concerning disclosure to a potential employer, "There is no clear-cut answer as to whether you should tell an employer that you are disabled. You must use your own judgement." (SKILL, Info sheet, page 1)⁽³⁾. However, as has been noted, this judgement must be informed by professional requirements to disclose. You may feel that you want to 'practice' disclosure with a friend or with a member of staff from the Disability Service at your university, before you talk to the placement co-ordinator or your practice assessor/teacher. The pre-placement requisite of undergoing assessed preparation for practice will include the chance to shadow a social worker (DoH, 2002, requirement K - see resource section). This may provide an opportunity to think about what your needs might be on placement.

When making a disclosure, be clear about who will be informed: will those 'in the know' include specific people or all members of staff? You may want to make sure this is documented in your Learning Agreement with the placement. Try and clarify with your tutor or placement co-ordinator on your course who will let the placement know about your disability. Remember, disclosing at an early stage makes it more likely that you will receive appropriate support on placement and allow the necessary time for things to be arranged.

To summarise, we recommend that:

- ▶ Disclosure should be made to the course and the placement as early as possible.
- ▶ Disclosure of disability is a matter of personal choice and it is important that you consider both the reasons for and against disclosure and also the professional requirements of your course/qualifying body.
- ▶ If your course or placement is not aware of your disability it may not be able to make reasonable adjustments to help you. Not telling the course or placement about a disability may work against you if it is later thought you were deliberately misleading. In addition, most courses (and professional bodies) require that you declare any health conditions or disability from the outset.
- ▶ You use your pre-placement meeting to clarify the adjustments available to you, any requirements you have and who you can approach for support. The placement mid-point review is another opportunity where support and adjustment arrangements can be formally discussed or modified as appropriate.

THE LAW - A BRIEF OUTLINE

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 Part 4 (as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001) states that you do not have to disclose a disability, unlike for example, a criminal conviction. However, if the Higher Education Institution (HEI) does not know about it then it may not be able to do anything to help you, although it should also be putting in place a number of general measures to improve the university

⁽³⁾ Available online at www.skill.org.uk/info/infosheets?emp_disclose.doc

and courses for disabled students. The law places an 'anticipatory' duty on universities to strive to find out about a student's disability. The legislation also says:

- ▶ Professional practice placements are covered under the Act under 'provision of services provided wholly or mainly for students enrolled on courses' (DRC, 2002)
- ▶ Universities have a responsibility not to discriminate against students because of their disability.
- ▶ Discrimination can occur in two ways:

- 1) When the HEI treats a disabled person 'less favourably' for a reason relating to the person's disability
- 2) When the HEI fails to make a reasonable adjustment placing the disabled student at a disadvantage compared to their peers

- ▶ If the HEI did not know and could not 'reasonably have known' that the student was disabled, then failure to make any adjustments is not discrimination.

Some possible 'reasonable adjustments' might include the following;

- ▶ Having documents printed on coloured paper and/or large print .
- ▶ Lowering shelf heights in an office.
- ▶ Having an office on the ground floor so stairs don't have to be negotiated.
- ▶ Taking a laptop into work and having agency forms (e.g. assessment forms, applications, record keeping) on a proforma so that they can be typed and printed off.
- ▶ Allowing a student, for example, with diabetes, to take regular breaks throughout the day to eat.

These were all examples of adjustments that had been made for disabled students who contributed to the research for the PEEdDS Project.

In October 2004, the DDA 1995 was extended to cover Qualifications Bodies (such as the General Social Care Council, General Medical Council, Teacher Training Agency and the Nursing and Midwifery Council). These bodies now have duties to avoid discrimination in awarding, extending or withdrawing a professional qualification. It also extends to work placement providers. The Disability Rights Commission webpage has more information and resources including information on this new legislation (see the section on further information and guidance).

Professional Placements: What to expect

A placement can be a daunting and anxious experience for all students. For many it represents their first foray into the world of professional practice. There can often be an acute sense of responsibility about being involved in the lives of vulnerable individuals. However, planning in advance can assist with reducing some of the anxiety that a placement can bring. For example, visiting the placement, chatting with staff and students who might have done placements there previously will furnish you with information that might help reduce the unknown factors and some of the attendant anxiety.

A student with a medical condition spoke about the value of pre-placement planning:

"Prior to my placement I discussed the matter once or twice with my Practice Teacher. When I had a Practice Placement Agreement Meeting with my Practice Teacher, Tutor and Link Worker I raised the subject there and made a formal record and agreed that should any problems arise I would note it at the time and act appropriately. It is all in the open."

Informing others about your disability, as we have seen, can be a source of anxiety. Arguably, this is increased when the course being studied is a professional course where not only your academic ability is being assessed but also your professional suitability by the same people (e.g. social workers, doctors, nurses) you work alongside.

You and Your Responsibilities

- ▶ You are the expert on your disability, how it affects you and what will be helpful and/or unhelpful. It is your responsibility to articulate your needs and to communicate if you feel that a placement is inappropriate and not able to meet your needs and make reasonable adjustments.
- ▶ It is important to bear in mind that your particular needs may limit placement choice if a practice assessor/teacher does not have the adjustments or skills to offer you adequate support. There is also currently a national shortage of placement learning opportunities⁽⁴⁾.
- ▶ Use opportunities such as the pre-placement visit to discuss your needs and stress that these may change (depending on your disability) and may need to be reviewed at a later date.

The General Social Care Council Code of Practice for social work employees state that;

"As a social care worker, you must be accountable for the quality of your work and take responsibility for maintaining and improving your knowledge and skills. This includes:

6.3: Informing your employer or the appropriate authority about any personal difficulties that might affect your ability to do your job competently and safely.

6.4: Seeking assistance from your employer or the appropriate authority if you do not feel able or adequately prepared to carry out any aspect of your work, or you are not sure about how to proceed in a work matter."

We recommend that:

- ▶ **You familiarise yourself with your rights under the DDA.** With rights also come responsibilities. A professional education course is different from other courses as you will engage in direct work with service-users - being upfront and honest about your needs and any potential risks is good practice for a developing professional.
- ▶ **You should consult the requirements of the General Social Care Council (GSCC) about disclosing health conditions and providing evidence of 'good character'.**

⁽⁴⁾The Practice Learning Taskforce was established to address this issue - see www.practicelearning.org.uk

What to do if things don't go to plan

Effective pre-placement planning can hopefully minimise the potential for difficulties. However, if difficulties arise, we recommend that you let those in a supportive role know as soon as possible. You might feel that adjustments that have been made are not appropriate (for example, your needs may have changed) but feel worried that asking for more help will be 'causing trouble'. This problem can be avoided by ensuring that your pre-placement agreement states that adjustments will be monitored continually throughout the placement. If you do feel that you are being treated unfairly on the grounds of your disability you can consult your own university's Equal Opportunities Policy and the department's complaints system.

Depending on your course structure and network of support around you, who you approach for support may vary. You might feel uncomfortable approaching your practice assessor/teacher and feel that you have a better relationship with staff at the university disability support services. Alternatively, you may have developed a good working relationship with your practice assessor/teacher and may feel comfortable sharing information within supervision. Students told us that they valued flexibility and ongoing monitoring from placement staff.

A student described what she perceived as a lack of flexibility from placement staff:

"What I would've liked was probably more flexibility and I suppose for them to think about reasonable adjustments, rather than it seeming to be on my shoulders to ask for things. It would have been nice if things were offered, or whether there was a policy so that there was something written down or says, 'well these are what we could consider, come back to us when you've had a think about it'."

A student with mental health difficulties praised the approach of his practice assessor/teacher on one placement:

"I felt supported the whole way through the placement and I suppose he took extra care to ask me if I was alright and how I was feeling and if I was okay and if I needed any time out. No specific occasion, just generally."

FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES FOR DISABLED SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS

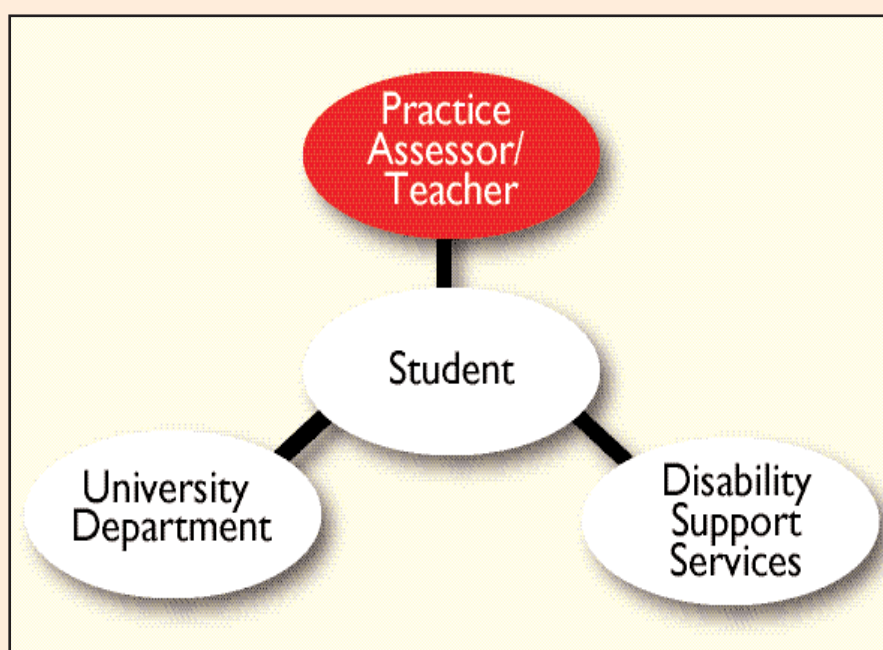
- The **PEdDS Project website** contains various links to external sites and downloadable documents that are relevant to this guide.
 - Available at <http://www.hull.ac.uk/pedds>
- Also see the full project report : Wray, J., Fell, B., Stanley, N., Manthorpe, J. and Coyne, E. (2005) '**PEdDS : Disabled students and placements**', Hull : The University of Hull. (ISBN : 1-904176-11-9)
 - Available at <http://www.hull.ac.uk/pedds>
-
- **The Association of Disabled Professionals.** Offers resources, support, advice and general information for disabled professionals and students.
 - Available at <http://www.adp.org.uk>
- Department for Education and Skills (2004) '**Bridging the Gap: a guide to the disabled students' allowances (DSAs) in Higher Education in 2004/2005**'. London : DfES.
 - Available at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/studentssupport>
- **The Disability Rights Commission (DRC)** - offers advice on measures to prevent disability discrimination.
 - **Website available at <http://www.drc.gov.uk>**
 - Helpline : Telephone - 08457 622 633
Textphone - 08457 622 644

We also recommend you consult the following three Codes of Practice from the DRC...

 - Disability Rights Commission (2002) '**Disability Discrimination Act 1995 Part 4 : Code of Practice for providers of Post 16 education and related services**', Norwich : The Stationary Office.
 - Available at <http://www.drc.gov.uk/thelaw/index.asp>
 - Disability Rights Commission (2004) '**Disability Discrimination Act 1995 Code of Practice : Employment and Occupation**', Norwich : The Stationary Office (see section 9.42 onwards for duties placed on placement providers)
 - Available at <http://www.drc.gov.uk/thelaw/index.asp>
 - Disability Rights Commission (2004) '**Disability Discrimination Act 1995 Code of Practice : Trade Organisations and Qualifications Bodies**', Norwich : The Stationary Office.
 - Available at <http://www.drc.gov.uk/thelaw/index.asp>
- **Dis-Forum** - an email discussion list for disabled students and disability support staff.
 - Available at <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/DIS-FORUM.html>
- Department of Health (2002) '**Requirements for Social Work Training**', London : DoH.
 - Available at <http://www.dh.gov.uk>

- **The General Social Care Council (GSCC) website** - the social care workforce regulator and the first port of call for information relating to standards of competence and fitness.
 - ▶ Available at <http://www.gsccl.org.uk>.
- **'Health Care Professionals with a disability' website.** A site dedicated to promoting, supporting and providing information about disabled people as healthcare professionals in the UK.
 - ▶ Available at <http://www.shef.ac.uk/~mdl/djw/HCP-disability/>
- Sapey, B., Turner, R. and Orton, S. (2004) **'Access to Practice: Overcoming the barriers to practice learning for disabled social work students'**, Brighton: SWAP.
 - ▶ Available online at www.swap.ac.uk/widen/Accessstopractice.asp
- **SKILL: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities website** containing many useful resources
 - ▶ Available at <http://www.skill.org.uk>. Recommended resources include:
 - ▶ **'Into Work Experience: Positive experiences of disabled people'**. (Skill, 2003) A guide designed to tell you all you need to know about doing work experience.
 - ▶ **'Into Higher Education 2005 : A guide for disabled people considering applying to Higher Education Courses at University or College'**. (Skill, 2005)
 - ▶ An information sheet **'Looking for Work: Disclosing disability'** - online at www.skill.org.uk/info/infosheets?emp_disclose.doc
 - ▶ Skill also run a telephone information service on Tuesday and Thursdays (open 11.30am - 1.30pm and 1.30pm - 3.30pm). Freephone 0800 328 5050.
- **Social Work Students.com** - a free website and Forum area for students in social work in the UK and Ireland.
 - ▶ Available at <http://www.socialwork-students.com>
- **The Practice Learning Taskforce (PLT)** - a government agency set up to increase the amount of placement learning opportunities for the new social work award.
 - ▶ Available at <http://www.practicelearning.org>
- TOPSS : Training Organisation for The Personal Social Services (2003) **'National Occupational Standards for Social Work'**, Leeds: TOPSS.
 - ▶ Available at <http://www.topssengland.net/files/cd/England/Main.htm>

Section 2: Guidance for Practice Assessors/Teachers



In social work training, practice experience is universally agreed to be important. Our review of the literature and our interviews with students, academics and practice assessors/teachers generally revealed high levels of praise and appreciation for practice assessors/teachers. At the time of writing this guide, the language used in the profession is changing. Here we have used the term practice assessors/teachers to describe all those involved in supervising social work students on placement, including those not employed by the practice setting itself, but who also offer supervision (for example, off-site practice assessors/teachers who may work elsewhere or may be self-employed in this role but do not work for the placement agency).

These recommendations are for those in the role of practice assessor/teacher in England. We hope they will be useful to practice assessors/teachers in Scotland and to others in similar roles. This guidance is aimed primarily at practice assessors/teachers but the recommendations are also relevant to managers and those working in training/human resource departments which have some responsibility for ensuring that support for disabled students is delivered.

We have outlined six key recommendations and explain how we reached these below. In summary, we recommend that:

Practice Assessment

- ▶ Disability support services and academic staff should be able to provide advice concerning possible difficulties of assessment to new and existing practice assessors/teachers.
- ▶ Practice assessors/teachers raise any concerns early with the academic staff or placement co-ordinator and there is careful recording and discussion of any matters giving cause for concern.

Workload

- ▶ Extra work may result from the preparation and supervision of a disabled student. Employers should acknowledge this in terms that are relevant (e.g. workload adjustment).
- ▶ Practice assessors/teachers should feed back to the professional training body their views about which competence tasks are particularly difficult, relevant or meaningful in relation to the core requirements for qualification.

Practice assessors/teachers in their agency

- ▶ Practice assessors/teachers should recognise that they may have a key role in communicating the needs and abilities of a disabled student to the wider staff team.
- ▶ Those responsible for human resources staff should consider their role to play in assisting practice assessors/teachers to undertake placement supervision.
- ▶ Human resources training on disability issues should be extended to the wider team, not just social work colleagues.
- ▶ Practice assessors/teachers should have a clear sense that their role is sufficiently valued. This is the responsibility of their agency (managers and colleagues), the profession and higher education providers.

Disclosure

- ▶ Practice assessors/teachers recognise the difficulties but also the importance of disclosure of an unseen disability.
- ▶ Their experiences and supportive attitudes should be communicated to students and disability staff to encourage disclosure.
- ▶ Information on the sources of support available to students should be communicated to practice assessors/teachers regularly, and should include the name of a key contact from the student's academic programme.

Planning for students

- ▶ Practice assessors/teachers need to be provided with opportunities to plan for students with unseen disabilities.
- ▶ Those organising placements should give priority to students with particular learning needs or circumstances as this gives more time for planning. This should continue where it happens, and other organisations should give it consideration.
- ▶ Reviewing and monitoring students, formally and informally, are essential.

Training

- ▶ Whatever training for practice assessors/teachers takes place it should specifically address the impact of disability legislation on their responsibilities, the obligations of their agencies, assessing practice, disclosure, planning and arrangements together with approaches that are helpful.

RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER THE LAW

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001) requires higher education institutions (HEIs):

- ▶ Not to discriminate against disabled students
- ▶ To find out about a disabled student's possible needs
- ▶ To make reasonable adjustments

Recent amendments to the Act mean that placement providers and the General Social Care Council (GSCC) are also required not to discriminate against disabled students on professional practice placements. Placements therefore have joint responsibility with HEIs not to discriminate against disabled students. For practice assessors this means that disabled students should be well supported by both HEIs and the placement agency.

However, if a student chooses not to disclose a disability then it will not be possible to put arrangements or adjustments in place. The HEI does not have to tell you if a student is disabled if the student does not want this information to be shared but, if the HEI thinks this might put anyone at risk, then it should conduct a risk assessment and, as a result of this, may decide to tell you. You will have to decide with your managers about the implications of this for your role, agency and service users.

If you think that the arrangements required by a disabled student are not 'reasonable' for your agency you should seek advice about the legal implications of this from your employer, having of course established precisely what the situation is with the HEI. Joint responsibility is a new and important part of the practice assessor's role.

Guidance on the law is available (see Information and Resources section).

Practice assessment for students with unseen disabilities provides challenges at times. These should not be downplayed but more could be made of the skills learned by practice assessors/teachers, their own sense of achievement, and their opportunities for professional development in working collaboratively to address these challenges. The practice assessors/teachers interviewed in this research acknowledged the extra work sometimes required for preparation and supervision of disabled students. They were also able to identify benefits for their own professional development, for their team and agency, and for the profession by providing a challenging and rigorous placement for the next generation of social workers.

PRACTICE ASSESSMENT

Practice assessors/teachers interviewed for this research reported occasionally experiencing difficulties in disentangling the impact of a student's disability from his or her

performance generally. This led to questions of whether the student was competent. For example, one practice assessor/teacher recalled:

"There was a student who was struggling to produce written work to the appropriate standard and the issue was whether it was dyslexia or whether it was the fact that the student didn't understand the assessment process. What would happen was the student wasn't producing written assessments to the required standard and that was clear. People were struggling to know whether it was an issue of disability or whether it was the fact that she just didn't understand what was going on, or whether it was the two together."

(Practice assessor/teacher)

Practice assessors/teachers need to ensure that they raise any concerns early with the academic programme. Many of the problems they encounter may have been addressed already within the assessment of the student's academic work. This may be relevant especially to dyslexia and other specific learning difficulties.

However, some of those interviewed in the course of this study reported that problems with competence only started to emerge once the student was outside the academic institution. This could be problematic for agency staff if they were unaware of the student's disability. For example, one placement co-ordinator reported:

"If you haven't disclosed to people on placement you can have people making assumptions about you as being to do with the level of education and intellectual ability."

(Placement co-ordinator)

Again, we advise contact with the academic staff and careful recording of the matters giving cause for concern. This can help practice assessors/teachers think through possible issues around duty of care to service users and students being fit to practice. This approach will be particularly important for those who have had limited experience of students on placement and informs our recommendation that placement co-ordinators give priority to the placement of disabled students. This may mean that they seek experienced practice assessors/teachers who may have had broad experience of students' abilities.

We recommend that:

- ▶ Disability and academic staff may need to provide advice concerning possible difficulties of assessment to new and existing practice assessors/teachers.
- ▶ We recommend that practice assessors/teachers raise any concerns early with the academic staff or programme co-ordinator and there is careful recording and discussion of the matters giving cause for concern.

WORKLOAD

We found that some practice assessors/teachers considered that disabled students represent extra work. This may extend to sorting out equipment but more often may lie in extra time needed for liaison and negotiation. For example, one placement co-ordinator told us of the extra meeting she arranged with practice assessors/teachers in respect of some disabled students:

"Those who declare some kind of additional need I would call in to see...to explore more what extra help will be needed, what kind of placement, something nearer rather than further... so that when I am matching I am not inappropriately matching... I would also speak to their own personal tutor and make sure that we know quite clearly what the student needs beforehand and then there is more liaison with agencies once you start looking for a match than there would be otherwise." (Placement co-ordinator)

In another example, a set of systems had to be developed in advance around recording of notes. We suggest that these arrangements are raised early and that good practice and anonymised case studies of 'success' are distributed locally (and thus with credibility). Where practice assessors/teachers have made particular efforts or there have been difficulties causing extra work this should be recognised, verbally and in writing, and by their employers as well as the university. None of the practice assessors/teachers we interviewed reported receiving particular letters of appreciation, or similar; this seems to be a missed opportunity. The extra work may not be attributable to disability and we recommend that training for practice assessors/teachers should make it clear that often very little extra work is involved.

Finally, practice assessors/teachers have an important role to play in feeding back to the professional training body their views about which competence tasks are particularly difficult, relevant or meaningful in relation to the core requirements for qualification. Practice assessors/teachers are in an excellent position to think about how practice assessment impacts on students with disabilities. Their views and experience should be harnessed to make assessment as rigorous, fair and appropriate as possible.

We recommend that:

- ▶ Extra work may result from the preparation and supervision of a disabled student. Employers should acknowledge this in terms that are relevant (e.g. workload adjustment).
- ▶ Practice assessors/teachers have an important role to play in feeding back their experiences and views to the university and the professional training body. These should reflect comments on the assessment of competence and whether there is an adequate range of assessment tools.

PRACTICE ASSESSORS/TEACHERS IN THEIR AGENCY

Most practice assessors/teachers have front-line experience in social work and work collaboratively with colleagues from a wide range of disciplines and agencies. Most work in social services offices or in other team settings. They therefore have a key role in functioning as the means by which a student understands the agency and by which others can understand more about the potential contribution of disabled students and practitioners. This research identified a number of ways in which practice assessors/teachers acted as intermediaries to explain the circumstances of the student, often in fairly informal moments. These included, for example, times when support staff did not understand why certain 'allowances' were being made.

We advise that this matter be explored with human resources staff, or the person responsible for making sure that programmes of induction and similar include information

about disability rights in the workplace. One example presented by a practice assessor/teacher reflected the discussions necessary around such information sharing with the team:

"The agreement we came to was around confidentiality and how he wanted knowledge about his disability to be handled and we agreed that he would choose if and when we shared information about the fact the student has epilepsy with team members." (Practice assessor/teacher)

A number of practice assessors/teachers identified one of the benefits of having a disabled student on placement as increasing their own knowledge and skills. But they also acknowledged the pressure this might place on students. One practice assessor/teacher commented about disabled students:

"I think to some extent they can actually enhance a team and can help a team and help to enlighten people in terms of disability awareness, but I'm not always sure that should be their role because it can be an added burden to a student when they're on placement." (Practice assessor/teacher)

We recommend that the students' experiences are used in general ways and that, if possible, human resources training on such issues be extended to the wider team, not just social work colleagues. One practice assessor/teacher expressed this well:

"Well, I think that some of the benefits might be that they teach a team to change their value perspective towards disability. Not necessarily disability in general, but on managing the difference in social workers and that not all social workers need to be physically able and need to run around like mad as social workers are often expected to do. They bring a positive attitude change." (Practice assessor/teacher)

However, caution needs to be exercised to ensure that disabled students are seen as colleagues not 'clients' in these situations.

We recommend that;

- ▶ Practice assessors/teachers should recognise that they may have a key role in communicating the needs and abilities of a disabled student to the wider staff team.
- ▶ Those responsible for human resources should consider the role they can play in assisting practice assessors/teachers to undertake this role.
- ▶ Human resources training on such issues should be extended to the wider team not just social work colleagues.
- ▶ Practice assessors/teachers should have a clear sense that their role is sufficiently valued. This is the responsibility of their agency (managers and colleagues), the profession and higher education providers.

DISCLOSURE

It was evident from interviews that many practice assessors/teachers had encountered dilemmas about disclosure among students, not all related to disability but extended to a number of areas. It is essential that practice assessors/teachers know whom to advise the student to contact if a disability is suspected or emerges, and recognise that the

placement may be a time where this information first comes to light. Details of such contacts should be in written form and available to the practice assessor. Just as students seem to value a flexible approach, so too do practice assessors/teachers, who appreciate the academic department being available in the person of the practice co-ordinator or equivalent named person.

We found some examples where students were uncertain or fearful about disclosure, but the benefits and costs of doing this appeared to be recognised by practice assessors/teachers. One reported:

"I would hope that the student would feel comfortable enough to do that but I can understand that it is not easy. I think when you go to your first placement it is so important that you pass this placement, even for anybody, not just if you have a disability, everybody feels like that."
(Practice assessor/teacher)

However, there have been many recent developments in support as well as legislation and it is important that information on the sources of support available to students is communicated to practice assessors/ teachers regularly, and with examples.

In the interviews we detected some confusion about 'who knows' of an unseen disability. Three areas that may need clarification are:

- ▶ If a student has told the academic staff, will this information be passed to the placement?
- ▶ If a student tells the practice assessor/teacher, will this mean that the university will know?
- ▶ If the student tells the practice assessor/teacher, will that constitute telling the agency?

The answers to this are generally 'no' unless there is an issue of risk. Practice assessors/teachers need to be clear about what to do if they suspect there are risks, including Health and Safety (to the student or others). We recommend that a key named contact from the student's academic programme is available (with deputy) and that this information is available in practice assessors/teachers' written materials, but we also acknowledge that communication is more likely to be effective if it is built on personal contact.

We recommend that:

- ▶ Practice assessors/teachers recognise the difficulties, but also the importance of disclosure of an unseen disability.
- ▶ Their experiences and supportive attitudes should be communicated to students and disability staff to encourage disclosure.
- ▶ Information on the sources of support available to students is provided to practice assessors regularly, and should include the details of a key contact from the student's academic programme.

PLANNING FOR STUDENTS

Practice assessors/teachers reported positively on opportunities to plan before the start of a placement. At some agencies this was part of well-structured planning for all students.

This expectation of planning needs to be communicated for the fairly obvious reason that it is more likely to result in a placement where the student can make the most of the experience. Many examples of reasonable adjustments located in this research were found to be simple or straightforward, such as the provision of a laptop computer funded by the GSCC. Reasonable adjustments can take time to implement, of course, and expectations on all sides need to be addressed in respect of time-scales.

Where equipment and support are needed these can usually be funded through the Disabled Students' Allowance via the student's LEA (Undergraduate) or the General Social Care Council (Postgraduate); this point may not be known to all practice assessors/teachers. While some individuals benefit from personal support, this too needs to be organised, as much as, for example, equipment such as flashing lights (to alert students with a hearing impairment to the phone ringing or fire alarm activation) or specific chairs.

This research found that placements require continued negotiation, flexibility and goodwill. Therefore any extra time required for planning should be acknowledged so the expectations are clear. The practice learning agreement is the ideal time for expectations to be clarified and for information about any reasonable adjustments to be agreed and recorded. Consequently it is important that placements for disabled students receive priority from placement organisers or co-ordinators. For practice assessors/teachers this may mean that they consider requests somewhat ahead of what they are used to. We suggest that the benefits of this be communicated (e.g. certainty, being able to plan when in the year to have a student, and so on). Finally, while planning is important, we do not underplay the importance of reviews and monitoring, formally and informally. For example, one student reported on her experience of this positively:

"And my practice teacher's been absolutely brilliant with it, she's been really, really good and says to me, 'is there anything we can change, or amend anything?'" (Student with a mobility difficulty)

We recommend that:

- ▶ Practice assessors/teachers need to be provided with opportunities to plan for students with unseen disabilities.
- ▶ Those organising placements should give priority to students with particular learning needs or circumstances as this gives more time for planning. This should continue where it happens, and other organisations should give it consideration.
- ▶ Procedures for reviewing and monitoring, formally and informally, are accepted by all as essential.

TRAINING FOR PRACTICE ASSESSORS/TEACHERS

Post-qualifying programmes for social workers wishing to develop their skills and careers as practice assessors/teachers provide an important opportunity for new requirements in respect of disability to be communicated. Our student respondents favoured general disability awareness training as an integral part of the practice assessment award. While

the law, information and resources all may form important elements of such training, the students interviewed in this study also spoke of the value of thinking through attitudes and behaviour. For example, some indicated that practice assessors/teachers should not 'go over the top' in attempts to be helpful:

"My practice teacher marked me before I'd actually gone on placement, before I'd actually even met him, he wrote to me. A letter came on size 14 font and I'm OK reading 12, and I said, "oh, what's he expecting from me?" because I was being treated as somebody with a disability. He'd made allowances and he'd gone out of his way to provide something he thought was going to be useful for me and it really was over the top. I felt a bit uncomfortable about that because I've never received size 14 font letters." (Student with a visual impairment)

A member of disability support staff drew on her experience that practice assessors/teachers might, in their enthusiasm or through being 'well meaning', think of the disabled student more as a 'case' than colleague:

"...being treated by people in the placement as a client rather than a colleague; that is a big one." (Disability support staff)

Practice assessors/teachers may be experienced but not all are aware of the new requirements about disability in the workplace and in educational settings. These may usefully form the subject of professional updating. This type of training or professional development needs to build on experience and we suggest that the information produced in this section of the guide might form helpful learning materials.

Specifically we recommend that training for practice assessors/teachers (and those involved in their training) needs to cover the law relating to their responsibilities, the obligations of their agencies and the responsibilities of students and academic programmes. Key areas that must be considered are Part 4 of the Disability Discrimination Act (SENDA - Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001) requirements, such as the responsibility of academic staff through disability support staff to ensure that the nature of the placement is understood and that reasonable adjustments are organised.

We also suggest that training events for practice assessors/teachers are a key opportunity for disability services staff to explain the purposes of their roles, such as being able to attend and to contribute to pre-placement meetings. This general preparation should alert practice assessors/teachers to issues and we suggest that this approach includes 'success stories' as well as likely issues or problems. In the light of possible developments in case law, we suggest such introductory sessions become part of continued professional updating for practice assessors.

Finally, we suggest that practice assessors/teachers might wish to contribute themselves to the training of disability services staff (see Section 4). Many such staff will not be aware of the demands and variety of social work placements.

We recommend that:

- ▶ Training for practice assessors/teachers (and for those delivering such training) should specifically address issues of the law relating to their responsibilities, the obligations of their agencies, assessing practice, disclosure, planning and arrangements together with approaches that are helpful.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES FOR PRACTICE **ASSESSORS/TEACHERS**

- The **PEdDS Project website** contains various links to external sites and downloadable documents that are relevant to this guide.
 - Available at <http://www.hull.ac.uk/pedds>
- Also see the full project report : Wray, J., Fell, B., Stanley, N., Manthorpe, J. and Coyne, E. (2005) '**PEdDS : Disabled students and placements**', Hull : The University of Hull. (ISBN : 1-904176-11-9) -
 - Available at <http://www.hull.ac.uk/pedds>

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- **Association of Disabled Professionals.** Offers resources, support, advice and general information for disabled professionals and students.
 - Available at <http://www.adp.org.uk>
 - Campbell, J. and Cowe, T. (1998) '**Working with DipSW Students with Dyslexia : a guide for Practice Teachers**', Strathclyde : University of Strathclyde.
 - Available at http://www.hull.ac.uk/pedds/documents/Dyslexia_Guide_000.doc
 - Department for Education and Skills (2002) '**Providing Work Placements for Disabled Students : a good practice guide for further and higher education institutions**', Nottingham : DfES.
 - Available at <http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/placements/placement1.pdf>
 - **The Disability Rights Commission (DRC)** - offers advice on measures to prevent disability discrimination.
 - Website available at <http://www.drc.gov.uk>
 - Helpline : Telephone - 08457 622 633
Textphone - 08457 622 644

We also recommend the reader consults the following three Codes of Practice from the DRC...

- Disability Rights Commission (2002) '**Disability Discrimination Act 1995 Part 4: Code of Practice for providers of Post 16 education and related services. New services (from September 2002) in the provision of post-16 education and related services for disabled people and students**' (also known as the SENDA Code of Practice), Norwich : The Stationary Office
 - Available at <http://www.drc.gov.uk/thelaw/index.asp>
- Disability Rights Commission (2004) '**Disability Discrimination Act 1995 Code of Practice : Employment and Occupation**', Norwich : The Stationary Office (see section 9.42 onwards for duties placed on placement providers)
 - Available at <http://www.drc.gov.uk/thelaw/index.asp>
- Disability Rights Commission (2004) '**Disability Discrimination Act 1995 Code of Practice : Trade Organisations and Qualifications Bodies**', Norwich : The Stationary Office.
 - Available at <http://www.drc.gov.uk/thelaw/index.asp>

- **Dis-Forum** - an email discussion list for students and staff working with disability in education.
 - ▶ Available at <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/DIS-FORUM.html>
- **The General Social Care Council (GSCC) website** - the social care workforce regulator and the first port of call for information relating to standards of competence and suitability.
 - ▶ Available at <http://www.gsccl.org.uk>
- **'Health Care Professionals with a disability' website.** A site dedicated to promoting, supporting and providing information about disabled people as healthcare professionals in the UK.
 - ▶ Available at <http://www.shcf.ac.uk/~mdldjw/HCP-disability/>
- Kearney, P. (2004) **'A framework for supporting and assessing practice learning'**, London : SCIE.
 - ▶ Available at <http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/positionpapers/pp02.pdf>
- Maudsley, L. and Rose, C. (2003) **'Disclosure, Confidentiality and Passing on Information'**, London : Learning and Skills Council.
 - ▶ Available at www.sussex.ac.uk/equalities/documents/dda_disclosure_guidance.pdf
- Sapey, B., Turner, R. and Orton, S. (2004) **'Access to Practice: Overcoming the barriers to practice learning for disabled social work students'**, Brighton: SWAP.
 - ▶ Available online at www.swap.ac.uk/widen/Accessstopractice.asp
- **SKILL National Bureau for Students with Disabilities website.**
 - ▶ Available at www.skill.org.uk

SKILL has a useful site with a list of resources and also runs a telephone information service on Tuesday and Thursdays (open 11.30am - 1.30pm and 1.30pm - 3.30pm). Freephone 0800 328 5050.
- **'Teachability' website-** this site promotes the creation of an accessible curriculum for students with disabilities through making freely available informative publications for academic staff.
 - ▶ Available at www.teachability.strath.ac.uk (Section 5 focuses on placements).
- **TechDis website-** for information on making electronic materials accessible.
 - ▶ Available at <http://www.techdis.ac.uk>
- TOPSS : Training Organisation for The Personal Social Services (2003) **'National Occupational Standards for Social Work'**, Leeds : TOPSS.
 - ▶ Available at <http://www.topssengland.net/files/cd/England/Main.htm>

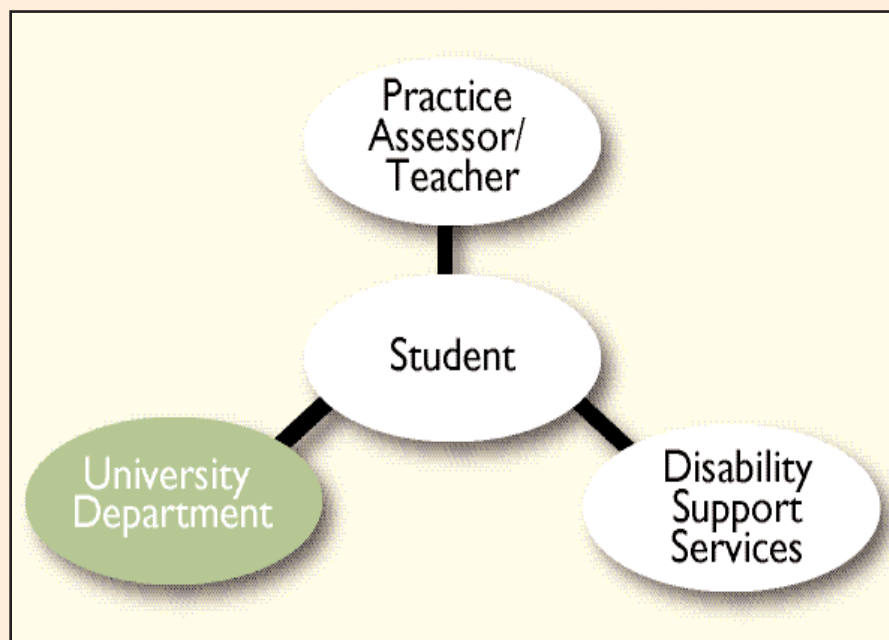
-
- West of Scotland Consortium (2003) **‘Disabled Students on Placement : Information for Placement Providers, Colleges and Universities’**, [online].

- ▶ **Available at**

- ▶ **http://www.hull.ac.uk/pedds/documents/Disability_Handbook_2002_000.doc**

3

Section 3: Academic Staff



This section of the guide is for staff on social work training programmes, including teaching staff, personal tutors and placement co-ordinators. We address five key issues for disabled students on placement identified by the research study. The key themes are:

Promoting Disclosure

- ▶ Programme handbooks and websites should alert applicants to the fact that they are required to undertake two to three placements in different agencies.
- ▶ Handbooks and websites should include examples of support and adjustments that have been provided to disabled students on placement.
- ▶ Programme staff need to be familiar with the range of support and adjustments that can be offered to students on placement. They also need to be familiar with the university's written procedures for the disclosure of information.
- ▶ Students need clarity concerning:
 - Whether disclosure to programme staff or disability staff means that information about a disability will be automatically passed on to a placement provider.

- Whether they can choose to withhold that information from placement staff and what the consequences of doing so might be.
- Whose responsibility it is to inform the placement provider about a student's disability.

Working with university disability services

- ▶ Programmes need to establish mechanisms for on-going communication with disability staff with regard to students' needs on placement.
- ▶ Academic staff should undertake training in disability rights and awareness.
- ▶ Placement selection and planning for disabled students needs to start early and involve disability support staff.

Planning and Monitoring Placements

- ▶ Placement allocation for disabled students should be prioritised over that for other students in order that adequate planning time is available.
- ▶ Details of adjustments or support offered to disabled students should be incorporated into placement agreements.
- ▶ Robust systems for monitoring disabled students' needs on placement and the continued appropriateness of adjustments are required.

Making Adjustments

- ▶ Students' needs for adjustments on placement should be considered by programme staff and practice assessors/teachers, working in collaboration with disability support staff.
- ▶ The impact of any aids or adaptations on the placement setting as a whole needs to be addressed and managed as part of placement planning.
- ▶ Adjusting the pace of placements may be an appropriate form of adjustment.
- ▶ Where there are concerns about the impact of a student's disability on their level of competence, programmes should ensure that reasonable adjustments have been made.
- ▶ Where there are concerns that a disability may affect a student's fitness for practice, a careful risk assessment which can be communicated to others, including the students themselves, should be completed.
- ▶ Those organising placements should prioritise disabled students in order that they can be allocated practice assessors/teachers with a wide range of relevant experiences.

Valuing Disabled Students

- ▶ Academic staff need to be aware of the contribution which disabled students can make to both placement setting and the profession and should be able to communicate this to others, including students themselves.
- ▶ Staff should monitor placement allocation to ensure that disabled students are not being offered less attractive placements than other students.

RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER THE LAW

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001) requires higher education institutions (HEIs):

- ▶ Not to discriminate against disabled students.
- ▶ To find out about a disabled student's possible needs.
- ▶ To make reasonable adjustments.

This responsibility extends to students on professional practice placements. Placement providers and the GSCC are also required not to discriminate on grounds of disability.

If a student is known to be disabled, there is a responsibility on the HEI to ensure that s/he has been appropriately assessed and that adjustments have been made. This duty cannot be exercised if the student has not told the HEI about his/her disability and students are not required to do so. However, if the student has disclosed a disability to one individual in an HEI, s/he is deemed to have informed the institution as a whole. Therefore, it is essential that information is, with the student's permission, communicated to relevant persons such as disability support staff, the placement co-ordinator and practice assessors/teachers in order that appropriate adjustments can be made. That information should be treated as confidential and the student's agreement to pass the information on to others should be sought.

If a student refuses permission for information to be disclosed to others, it may not be possible for adjustments to be made on placement and the student should be made aware of this. There may be health and safety reasons for disclosure: for instance, in the case of a student with a life-threatening condition. In such circumstances, the academic staff may consider that disclosure of the condition to placement staff is a necessary condition for undertaking the placement and that health and safety concerns demand this. Academic staff should seek the advice of both disability support staff and the university's health and safety officer in such instances.

If the adjustments required appear 'unreasonable' in the light of a practice setting's capacity, another placement may need to be identified. If the adjustments needed are not compatible with achieving competence in practice or with the GSCC's requirements, this will need to be carefully discussed and negotiated with the student, the practice assessor/teacher and the university's disability support service.

PROMOTING DISCLOSURE

Students with unseen disabilities such as dyslexia, epilepsy or mental health difficulties, have a choice as to whether they disclose their disability to others and when they do so. A number of factors act as disincentives to disclosure. The stigma attached to disability was frequently cited as one such factor.

"I am terrified of putting down on that form 'Open Heart Surgery'. You would never prove it, but if there are two applicants and one is fit and well and one has an alien part and is on medication, even though I work as hard as anybody else, if not harder, I am frightened I might not get that opportunity." (Student with a medical condition)

However, other students recognised that informing placement staff about their disability could result in appropriate support or adjustments being provided:

"You can't expect people to support you in placement and to understand if they're not aware. You've got to give people the information." (Student with a specific learning difficulty)

Since disclosure is the first step in delivering appropriate support for disabled students,

programmes need to promote disclosure by making its benefits explicit and known to students.

We recommend that programmes:

- ▶ Make use of programme handbooks and websites to provide students with previous examples of support and adjustments that have been provided to disabled students on placement.
- ▶ Ensure that all staff are familiar with the range of supports and adjustments that can be offered to students on placement.
- ▶ Ensure that programme staff are familiar with the university's written procedures for the disclosure of information.

Disclosure of an unseen disability is a demanding and risky process for students. Some students found it difficult to disclose disabilities to placements prior to starting there:

"I think students find it difficult to say what their needs are especially before they know anybody. It is humiliating." (Student with a specific learning difficulty)

Others were more confident about taking this task on:

"I would imagine employers are more aware of the legislation and more aware of unseen disabilities and I think more provision is made now in the work place. The authority I work for is pretty hot really and I certainly wouldn't have any qualms about disclosing it at all." (Student with a medical condition)

Students need to know:

- ▶ Whether disclosure to programme staff or disability staff means that information about a disability will be automatically passed on to a placement provider.
- ▶ Whether they can choose to withhold that information from placement staff and what the consequences of doing so might be.
- ▶ Whose responsibility it is to inform the placement provider.

Answers to the above questions may vary between programmes - academic staff need to consult their university's confidentiality or data protection policy which should specify whether confidential information can be communicated to an external agency without the student's consent. The nature of and risks attached to the student's disability may be relevant here. However, it is essential that the university's disability services are aware of the academic department's procedures for sharing information.

WORKING WITH DISABILITY SERVICES

Disability support staff will arrange for an assessment of a disabled student's needs at an Access Centre as soon as possible following the disclosure of a disability. This may be at the outset of the course before a student knows where his or her placements will be. However, disability services may be able to advise on portable aids or adaptations, such as laptops, which the student can take to the placement setting. Exceptionally, disability support staff may be able to organise additional assessments in relation to a particular placement setting. Adjustments for UK undergraduate students are funded by Local Education Authorities (LEAs) through Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) while the

GSCC will be the usual means of funding adjustments for postgraduate students. Disability support staff can provide advice about alternative sources of funding for international students. Disability support staff also have a role in informing disabled students of their rights and acting as an advocate for them. This aspect of their work can sometimes leave them feeling 'caught in the middle' between the student and the academic programme:

"We see the individual who comes and tells us something and quite often the department says something else and we find out that the student has told us something completely different or whatever. So sometimes it can be difficult being a go-between and maybe communication could be better." (Disability support staff)

Most of the disability support staff interviewed for the study were in favour of students disclosing hidden disabilities to programme staff and indicated that they would encourage them to do so.

Programme staff need to remember that disability staff are unlikely to be familiar with specific placement settings or with the expectations for students on placement, including the competencies that they are required to meet. Many of the disability advisers participating in this study were astonished by the lack of IT resources in social work offices. They also felt that they would like more feedback on the demands and requirements of placements:

"What we are picking up are the difficulties but it would be helpful to know exactly what is required of them because then you can tailor your support during the time that they are in college to the things that they are going to have to face when they are in placement." (Disability support staff)

Disability staff reported that staff on social work programmes were not always fully informed about disabled students' rights and needs. Academic staff were described as sometimes failing to take up training opportunities offered by disability staff. In particular, disability staff emphasised the need for programme staff to adopt flexible approaches to enable disabled students to undertake placements:

"I would say in the social work department there is a lack of awareness despite the field they're in, it is quite hard really and I think because there's learning outcomes that students have got to achieve, a lot of the attitude is if they can't achieve it they won't offer it in an alternative way and I think trying to get across to them that the learning outcomes can be achieved but maybe by putting in a reasonable adjustment in an alternative way, that student can still succeed just the same as a non-disabled student can and I think that awareness is a big issue, a very very big issue and I do think there's a lot more that could be done" (Disability support staff)

Early planning and collaboration between disability and academic staff were identified as key to ensuring positive experiences on placement for disabled students:

"We met with one student at a very early stage and we did a lot of liaising with the Department prior to her starting because obviously there was a lot of support that needed to be in place and for staff to be aware that there could be communication problems and how best we could overcome those problems." (Disability support staff)

We recommend that programme staff:

- ▶ Establish mechanisms for on-going communication with disability staff with regard to students' needs on placement.
- ▶ Ensure that they undertake training in disability rights and awareness.
- ▶ Ensure that placement selection and planning for disabled students starts early.

PLANNING AND MONITORING PLACEMENTS

Early Planning

All those participating in the study - students, practice assessors/teachers, disability and placement planning staff - emphasised the importance of early planning for disabled students' placements:

"It is very helpful to me as a practice teacher if students do disclose that information and being able to do that thinking and planning and discussing in advance rather than confronting the situations as they arise" (Practice assessor/teacher)

Without early planning, there will be only limited opportunities for a student's needs to be assessed and the appropriate adjustments put in place. The shadowing of a practising social worker undertaken by students as part of their preparation for practice (see DoH (2002) Requirements for Social Work Training, Section K) may offer an opportunity for disabled students to consider their needs on placement at an early stage of the course. If the student has disclosed their disability at the outset, it is the academic department's responsibility to ensure that sufficient planning time is available for meeting a disabled student's needs on placement.

Written agreements

The value of written agreements which specified the nature of the adjustments to be made for a disabled student on placement was cited by respondents from all groups:

"Yeah, I think that a written agreement at the initial stage would be helpful and verbally go through it with the students so that they are left with a document that says that this is it, black and white, without picking out the things that are of great importance, that they are absolutely certain who to turn to and deal with." (Disability Support Staff)

"Prior to my placement I discussed the matter once or twice with my practice teacher. When I had a Practice Placement Agreement Meeting with my practice teacher, tutor and link worker I raised the subject there and made a formal record and agreed that should any problems arise I would note it at the time and act appropriately. It is all in the open."
(Student with a medical condition)

Agreements spelling out the needs and adjustments for a disabled student can be incorporated into placement agreements and should cover the following issues:

- ▶ the nature of the disability
- ▶ what adjustments will be made
- ▶ how adjustments will be funded
- ▶ what action will be taken if adjustments are not provided
- ▶ who is to be informed of the student's disability at the placement
- ▶ systems for maintaining communication between the practice assessor/teacher, the student, the placement staff in the university and the disability advisor.

Monitoring

Written agreements also facilitate monitoring of support and adjustments. Once on placement, new needs may emerge or the student's needs may change. The midpoint review can provide a useful opportunity for arrangements to be formally discussed and confirmed or modified if necessary. The importance of ongoing monitoring and the capacity to respond flexibly to changes or new emerging needs were identified as a feature of positive practice by a number of the PEdDS respondents:

"I was talking to one yesterday who has dyslexia and I said how is it going, is there anything in this session that is not okay? Tell me and I'll do it. That is the kind of dialogue we need to create. I am not a mind reader but if you tell me I will do it." (Placement co-ordinator)

"It was just constantly checking out how was I feeling, are you alright? He (practice teacher) ran the computer, you know making a laptop available to me and stuff like that, giving me the space and not giving me grief when I was saying I was feeling a bit rough." (Student with a medical condition)

We recommend that programme staff;

- ▶ Prioritise placement allocation for disabled students ahead of that for other students in order that adequate planning time is available.
- ▶ Incorporate details of adjustments or support offered to disabled students into placement agreements.
- ▶ Establish and identify robust systems for monitoring disabled students' needs on placement and the continued appropriateness of adjustments.

MAKING ADJUSTMENTS

A wide range of adjustments can be offered to students on placement. Disability support staff will draw on their specialist knowledge and experience to suggest appropriate adjustments but they are likely to need information about the demands of a specific placement setting. Students themselves will be able to identify what adjustments would be most helpful for them. The research study offered useful examples of flexible and imaginative practice but also identified some of the dilemmas which can arise in relation to adjustments for students on professional programmes.

Providing physical adaptations and resources

Many adjustments are straightforward and require the provision of single pieces of equipment or a particular type of workstation, for example:

"They've made sure that shelf space for me is at the right height so I am not bending, any of the other workers will pick up files or anything else that I can't lift."

(Student with a mobility difficulty)

The need for additional resources specific to a placement should be identified well in advance of a placement starting if specialist aids or equipment are to be supplied, as placements will rarely have on-site access to such items. Practice assessors/teachers and placement co-ordinators commented on the lack of access to such resources in the workplace:

"I would say in terms of resources, the lack of access to appropriate facilities for example, computers...and hearing as well, we have no computers with microphones."

(Practice assessor/teacher)

Providing such resources for disabled students may therefore stir up some resentment in social work offices - this needs to be anticipated and managed.

There may be other implications for the whole staff team when a disabled student joins them on placement. The implementation of adjustments may require all the staff in the placement setting to be informed of the student's disability and to make changes. Students will need to know who is being informed and such adaptations confirm the need for disability awareness and positive attitudes among all office staff:

"I think with the first one it was the way they put themselves out to make sure that I had all the paperwork enlarged if I needed it and that was as much the admin staff as much as the practice teacher. It was the whole team which were really supportive."

(Student with a visual impairment)

However, not all adjustments will be substantial, hi-tech and attract the attention of others. The example provided here involved the student developing a particular strategy for recording in addition to using a tape-recorder:

"We had to do preparation work and make sure that supervision was reinforced with notes and though I didn't find any problem with her short term memory, we set up systems and as soon as she had done visits she wrote notes up in her car and not wait and then she had to verbally tell me straight away so that we had two lots. We also got a tape recorder so she could tape the notes straight away without waiting to come back. We tried to set up a lot of systems." (Practice assessor/teacher)

Adjusting the pace of the placement

The requirement for students on social work programmes to complete 200 days in practice settings makes adjustments to the length of the placement or the placement day

more contentious. However, adjustments to the length of the working day such as those described below can be made if the length of the placement is extended using vacation times/additional days:

"...they can say come in later, say come in at lunchtime one day and then work till say eight o' clock or something. But we would negotiate that with them and we don't expect them to be working the rota and we don't... they might take a duty shift during the day but that would really depend on where they'd got to with their placement." (Practice assessor/teacher)

(See also, the example provided in Appendix I: case study two).

Assessment and suitability to practice

Dilemmas can arise when practice assessors/teachers and placement co-ordinators find it difficult to distinguish between the student's level of competence and the effects of their disability:

"There was a student who was struggling to produce written work to the appropriate standard and the issue was whether it was dyslexia or whether it was the fact that the student didn't understand the assessment process. What would happen was the student wasn't producing written assessments to the required standard and that was clear. People were struggling to know whether it was an issue of disability or whether it was the fact that she just didn't understand what was going on, or whether it was the two together." (Placement co-ordinator)

When a student's inability to achieve a competency is clearly attributable to their disability, doubts may remain about their fitness for practice. This concern was raised by study participants in relation to report writing for dyslexic students:

"I have massive problems with mathematics and figures on the kind of level with someone with dyslexia. It is a massive barrier for me. I wouldn't go into accountancy; do you know what I mean? You have to ask if you can't write reports to a professional standard. I have struggled with this for a while and my questions at the end of the day are...we have to write reports to court, we have to be cross-examined upon our understandings and we have to achieve a professional standard which goes under scrutiny and gives the social work profession either a good or bad name. Then I have to ask myself the question how far along the line do we go with students, any students, in terms of providing additional support?" (Practice assessor/teacher)

However, there were also concerns expressed about suitability for practice in relation to students with mental health difficulties. Practice assessors/teachers and placement staff were likely to emphasise the vulnerability of service users when raising such issues:

"I think the problem is we have an obligation to our clients...being a practice teacher you have to protect your client because they're vulnerable. Now if somebody has issues that they've not dealt with then the possibility is that they're not going to be able to deal with the client's issues either because they still have to work through things themselves and they're not going to be able to enable people if they're not enabled themselves. It's not only oppressive to them it's oppressive to the client also." (Practice assessor/teacher)

In such cases, practice assessors/teachers and programme staff need to ask the question: "have appropriate adjustments been made?" If adjustments have not been made it may be necessary for programme staff to liaise with the disability service, identify what adjustments may be appropriate and implement them. If adjustments are in place and students with disabilities are considered to represent a risk to service users, the nature, seriousness and likelihood of any such risk should be specified and made explicit.

Disentangling the effects of disability from issues of competence and suitability or 'safety' to practice can be complex and demanding for academic staff and practice assessors/teachers. Prioritising placements for disabled students will allow programmes to seek practice assessors/teachers who can bring experience of a broad range of students' abilities to the task of assessing the practice of disabled students. Some social work programmes reported already adopting this approach.

We recommend that:

- ▶ Disability support staff are consulted about any additional adjustments required for students in placement settings.
- ▶ The impact of any aids or adaptations on the placement setting as a whole is addressed and managed as part of placement planning.
- ▶ Attention is given to adjusting the pace of placements where appropriate.
- ▶ Where there are concerns about the impact of a student's disability on their level of competence, programmes should ensure that appropriate adjustments have been made.
- ▶ Where there are concerns that a disability may affect a student's fitness for practice a risk assessment which can be communicated to others, including the student themselves, is completed following consultation with disability services and other staff.
- ▶ Those organising placements should prioritise disabled students in order that they can be allocated practice assessors/teachers with a wide range of relevant experience.

VALUING DISABLED STUDENTS

Benefits for the Placement and the Profession

All groups participating in the research study emphasised the contributions which disabled students can make to both placement settings and to the profession as a whole. These

can include increased empathy with service users as a result of both their experience of disability and their experience of using services:

"I have keen observation skills and I can interpret the body language displayed by both clients and colleagues faster than a hearing person and in this way I can often tell whether or not a person is lying or withholding information."

(Student with a hearing impairment)

Identified benefits for the placement setting included raised awareness and a re-evaluation of the image of the profession for a social work team. Such benefits could be perceived as extending to service users as well:

"...sometimes service users might have a stereotypical view of what a social worker is and looks like and what their image is and what their abilities are and that a student with a disability, whatever that disability might be could well dispel some of those myths and stereotypes."

(Practice assessor/teacher)

However, social work students were clear that they wanted to be treated as colleagues not clients.

Placement choice

Despite programme staff's awareness of such benefits, some disabled students felt that they received less than first class treatment when it came to the allocation of placements. A third of the students interviewed for the research study considered that their choice of placements had been restricted as a result of their disability. Some felt that it was not the direct effects of their disability but others' attitudes which had limited their opportunities:

"Yes, I feel that my placement choices have been very limited as a direct result of my disability. I believe that many social service departments did not want me because they would have to 'find room' for my support team and my hearing dog and were not prepared to put up with the inconvenience."

(Student with a hearing impairment)

"I feel that I was put with placements with over 65s because I was then 'out of the way'. I don't think that's fair. It shocked me after we had been taught about anti-discriminatory practice that the department were acting in this way. It happened years ago and I wasn't receiving treatment for it anymore."

(Student with history of mental health difficulties).

We recommend that programme staff:

- ▶ Are aware of the contribution which disabled students can make to both placement settings and the profession and can communicate this to others, including students themselves.
- ▶ Monitor placement allocation to ensure that disabled students are not being offered less attractive placements than other students.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES FOR ACADEMIC STAFF/PLACEMENT CO-ORDINATORS

- The **PEdDS Project website** contains various links to external sites and downloadable documents that are relevant to this guide.
 - ▶ Available at <http://www.hull.ac.uk/pedds>
- Also see the full project report : Wray, J., Fell, B., Stanley, N., Manthorpe, J. and Coyne, E. (2005) '**PEdDS : Disabled students and placements**', Hull : The University of Hull. (ISBN : 1-904176-11-9) -
 - ▶ Available at <http://www.hull.ac.uk/pedds>.
-
- Campbell, J. and Cowe, T. (1998) '**Working with DipSW Students with Dyslexia : a guide for Practice Teachers**', Strathclyde : University of Strathclyde.
 - ▶ Available at http://www.hull.ac.uk/pedds/documents/Dyslexia_Guide_000.doc
- Department for Education and Skills (2002) '**Providing Work Placements for Disabled Students : a good practice guide for further and higher education institutions**', Nottingham : DfES.
 - ▶ Available at <http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/placements/placement.pdf>
- Department for Education and Skills (2004) '**Bridging the Gap: a guide to the disabled students' allowances (DSAs) in Higher Education in 2004/2005**', London : DfES.
 - ▶ Available at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/studentssupport>
- **The Disability Rights Commission (DRC)** - offers advice on measures to prevent disability discrimination.
 - ▶ Website available at <http://www.drc.gov.uk>
 - ▶ Helpline : Telephone - 08457 622 633
Textphone - 08457 622 644

We also recommend the reader consults the following three Codes of Practice from the DRC...

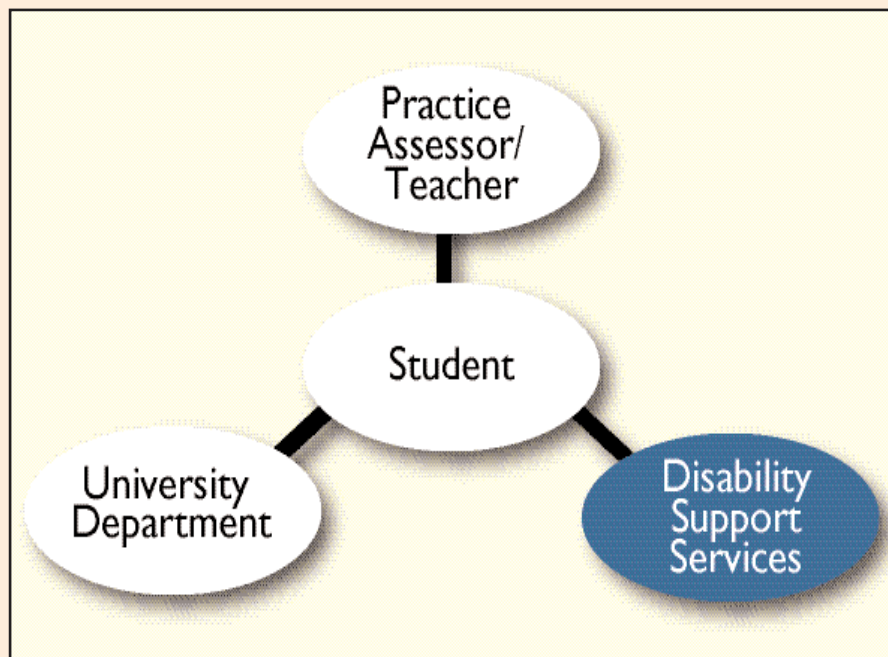
- ▶ Disability Rights Commission (2002) '**Disability Discrimination Act 1995 Part 4: Code of Practice for providers of Post 16 education and related services. New services (from September 2002) in the provision of post-16 education and related services for disabled people and students**' (also known as the SENDA Code of Practice), Norwich : The Stationary Office
 - ▶ Available at <http://www.drc.gov.uk/thelaw/index.asp>
- ▶ Disability Rights Commission (2004) '**Disability Discrimination Act 1995 Code of Practice : Employment and Occupation**', Norwich : The Stationary Office (see section 9.42 onwards for duties placed on placement providers)
 - ▶ Available at <http://www.drc.gov.uk/thelaw/index.asp>
- ▶ Disability Rights Commission (2004) '**Disability Discrimination Act 1995 Code of Practice : Trade Organisations and Qualifications Bodies**', Norwich : The Stationary Office.
 - ▶ Available at <http://www.drc.gov.uk/thelaw/index.asp>

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- **Dis-Forum** - an email discussion list for students and staff working with disability in education.
 - Available at <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/DIS-FORUM.html>
 - **The General Social Care Council (GSCC) website** - the social care workforce regulator and the first port of call for information relating to standards of competence and suitability.
 - Available at <http://www.gsc.org.uk>
 - Kearney, P. (2004) '**A framework for supporting and assessing practice learning**', London : SCIE.
 - Available at <http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/positionpapers/pp02.pdf>
 - Maudsley, L. and Rose, C. (2003) '**Disclosure, Confidentiality and Passing on Information**', London : Learning and Skills Council.
 - Available at www.sussex.ac.uk/equalities/documents/dda_disclosure_guidance.pdf
 - Sapey, B., Turner, R. and Orton, S. (2004) '**Access to Practice: Overcoming the barriers to practice learning for disabled social work students**', Brighton: SWAP.
 - Available online at www.swap.ac.uk/widen/Accessstopractice.asp
 - **SKILL National Bureau for Students with Disabilities website.**
 - Available at www.skill.org.uk

SKILL has a useful site with a list of resources and also runs a telephone information service on Tuesday and Thursdays (open 11.30am - 1.30pm and 1.30pm - 3.30pm). Freephone 0800 328 5050.
 - '**Teachability**' website - this site promotes the creation of an accessible curriculum for students with disabilities through making freely available informative publications for academic staff.
 - Available at www.teachability.strath.ac.uk (Section 5 focuses on placements).
 - **TechDis website**- for information on making electronic materials accessible.
 - Available at <http://www.techdis.ac.uk>.
 - West of Scotland Consortium (2003) '**Disabled Students on Placement : Information for Placement Providers, Colleges and Universities**', [online].
 - Available at http://www.hull.ac.uk/pedds/documents/Disability_Handbook_2002_000.doc

4

Section 4: Disability Support Staff



This section of the guide focuses on information and advice for staff working in disability support services. The research undertaken by the Professional Education and Disability Support (PEdDS) project identified a number of key issues for staff to consider in their continued support of disabled students on placement. Our recommendations for disability support staff are as follows:

Assessment of Need and Access reports

- ▶ Disability support staff should discuss the issue of placements with students prior to their formal assessment of needs undertaken by the Access Centre.
- ▶ Disability support staff need to ensure that the assessor at the Access Centre is aware that the student will be on placement as part of their course and that this should form part of their recommendations.
- ▶ In the absence of specific recommendations from the Access Centre, disability support staff need to communicate with departmental staff to identify learning support recommendations that are transferable to, and appropriate for, the placement area.

Working with students

- ▶ Disability support staff should discuss with and advise the student on the potential benefits of disclosure to the placement agency as well as the implications of not disclosing.
- ▶ Disability support staff should take a role in advising the academic department on involving students in discussions and/or disclosure of their disability to the placement agency.
- ▶ Disability support staff should identify which member of academic staff will undertake responsibility for disclosure if the student wishes to disclose but does not feel confident to do so. This also involves agreement as to what information about a student's disability can be disclosed and to whom.

Working with academic and placement staff

- ▶ Disability support staff should work with the academic department to establish mechanisms to ensure that student needs are considered prior to a placement being selected.
- ▶ Disability support staff should support and advise academic staff in identifying and delivering appropriate reasonable adjustments in the placement agency.
- ▶ Disability support staff should provide advice on additional funding for supportive technology and/or other aids and adaptations for the placement - whether supplied through the General Social Care Council (GSCC) or other sources.
- ▶ Disability support staff should consider contributing to training programmes aimed at practice assessors/teachers.

Institutional policy and procedures

- ▶ Disability support staff need to make explicit and clarify their own institution's confidentiality policy and its stance on disclosure of disability and whether that includes (or not) disclosure to the placement agency.
- ▶ Disability support staff should provide advice to institutional committees responsible for developing guidance documents on placement learning.
- ▶ Disability support staff should consider their role in developing a procedure which outlines the university's approach to managing disclosure to external agencies and developing and delivering reasonable adjustments on placement.

Staff development and training

- ▶ Disability support staff should actively seek advice from departments on the learning approaches and assessment methods that take place in social work placements.
- ▶ Disability support staff should familiarise themselves with the requirements of professional regulatory bodies such as the GSCC including National Occupational Standards and issues relating to suitability to practice (see resource section for links to this information).

The interviews were conducted with the staff from disability support services included those acting as university disability officers as well as disability co-ordinators or advisors, specialist advisors (e.g. dyslexia) and generic student support and welfare staff. The generic term 'disability support staff' is used to cover all these roles. It was evident that all staff were familiar with the recent changes to disability legislation and were aware of the gaps in provision in relation to the area of placement support.

ASSESSMENT OF NEED AND RECOMMENDATIONS IN ACCESS REPORTS

All students undertaking courses in professional education will spend a significant proportion of their time undertaking learning in placement settings. It is essential that when a student's learning support needs are assessed at an Access Centre, the assessor is aware of this and considers the implications of practice learning and the placement experience for the student. Disability support staff can help this process by personally communicating that information when the appointment is made for a student either by phone or by letter. e.g. "This student will be undertaking learning on placement as part of their course and will therefore need to have this taken into consideration when their needs are assessed".

This is not without its difficulties: the PEdDS study found that when students are formally assessed they will often not know what their placement will entail i.e. what type of client group they will work with, what sort of agency (statutory/voluntary) or speciality they will be based within, the travel involved, or the tasks requiring completion e.g. what sort of written reports they will need to complete.

"I think the assessment report is usually very vague. The trouble is the student doesn't necessarily know what they're going to need on the placement either at that stage, not until the first day that's always the problem."(Disability support staff)

Disability support staff often meet with or talk to students prior to their formal assessment of needs at an Access Centre and this provides an ideal opportunity to discuss placements and to ensure that they are prepared to discuss their practice learning needs when they meet the assessor. The Access Centre assessor may not be able to make specific recommendations at the time of assessment due to insufficient information; however, he or she can ensure that the report makes specific reference to placement learning and to the importance of a student's needs being reconsidered prior to the placement commencing.

Where possible, assessors should recommend adaptive technology, aids/adaptations or other equipment that are 'portable' (e.g. laptops). This will mean that the student can make use of them whilst on placement. In the absence of specific recommendations from an Access Centre, disability support staff can use their knowledge and experience to advise academic staff and identify learning support recommendations that are transferable to, and appropriate for, the placement area. There will be some students whose needs have yet to be formally assessed by an Access Centre but are about to go onto their placement. In these cases disability support staff may need to make some interim recommendations for the placement until an Access Centre assessment is conducted.

We recommend that disability support staff:

- ▶ Discuss the issue of placements with students prior to their formal assessment of needs at the Access Centre.
- ▶ Ensure that the assessor is aware that the student will be on placement as part of their course and that this should form part of their recommendations.
- ▶ In the absence of specific recommendations from the Access Centre, disability support staff should communicate with and liaise with academic staff to identify learning support recommendations that are transferable to and appropriate for the placement area.

WORKING WITH THE STUDENT

Disability support staff play an important role in advising students as to how best to manage disclosure of disability to the placement manager, practice assessor/teacher, tutor or mentor. (Disability support staff might also want to look at the other sections in this guide on disclosure. The section for students has a useful summary of issues around disclosure - see Section One). Many disability support staff who contributed to the research project indicated that they fully appreciated the dilemmas students faced regarding disclosure:

"People are always less willing to disclose to placement providers or at least always ask the question: 'do you think it will affect my chances on placement' and that is an attitude to disability in general I think; particularly students with mental health difficulties, but also dyslexia. I have had students who say 'they think I am stupid'."

(Disability support staff)

Whilst disclosure to the placement might mean that the student loses control of personal information, staff recognised that without disclosure, the relevant support cannot be put in place:

"That is what we try to encourage students to do; to disclose so that we can put the support in place before the placement starts and then try to break down the myths and work out the adjustments." (Disability support staff)

Staff were clear that the decision to disclose or not must always remain with the student and where possible students themselves should take responsibility for this:

"I think the individual should be responsible for informing the placement. And it's entirely up to them whether they wish to disclose their disability." (Disability support staff)

However, some acknowledged that, in exceptional circumstances, the department may be compelled to disclose the student's disability to the placement:

"It is the duty of care to the clients. If there are issues where the health and safety of the client might in anyway be compromised; for example, students with epilepsy. The department would have a duty to inform the placement. Decisions like this must be dealt with case by case; it is not about making blanket decisions of people with a category of medical condition." (Disability support staff)

This can leave disability support staff in a difficult position. Therefore, it is important that academic and disability staff are clear about those 'exceptional circumstances' in which disclosure without the student's consent may occur. This is discussed in more detail later in this section.

Disability staff who were involved in the research recognised that all students experience pressure on placement but that this can be greater for some disabled students:

"There are the difficulties that can cause them real problems on the placement, whether that's report writing, recording information accurately, organisational skills ... and that's on top of all the normal things that happen on the placement anyhow - the extra pressure that a person feels." (Disability support staff)

It is important that the student is involved in all negotiations and discussion around disclosure of their disability to the placement. Re-examining the student's needs prior to attending placement provides an ideal opportunity for such a discussion to take place and also ensures that the reasonable adjustments put in place are appropriate for that student in that placement. Involving students in these discussions will also help develop their skills and confidence in dealing with disclosure to prospective employers.

Sometimes direct intervention is necessary and disability support staff may need to attend a pre-placement planning meeting in their role as advocate for the student. Much of their work will take place at the pre-placement stage; however some students may develop a disability during the placement, or issues become evident on placement. Disability support staff can provide the student with an 'independent ear' whilst they are on placement. Keeping lines of communication open to students whilst they are on placement is important so that they know they have someone to contact should any issues arise. This is essential if further adjustments need to be re-negotiated.

We recommend that disability support staff:

- ▶ Discuss with and advise the student on the potential benefits of disclosure to the placement agency as well as the implications of not disclosing.
- ▶ Ensure that the student is involved in discussions and/or disclosure of their disability to the placement agency. This may involve attending the pre-placement planning meeting if needed by the student.
- ▶ Identify which member of academic staff will undertake responsibility for disclosure if the student wishes to disclose but does not feel confident to do so. This also involves agreement as to what information about a student's disability can be disclosed and to whom.

WORKING WITH ACADEMIC AND PLACEMENT STAFF

As well as supporting students, disability support staff play an important role in advising academic staff involved in organising and co-ordinating the delivery of placements. Whilst disability support staff are the experts on disability related issues, the placement co-ordinator/academic staff will fully understand the placement environment and the student's learning and assessment needs whilst they are there. The PEdDS study found that students' needs were not generally reviewed prior to attending the placement area

and most staff indicated that they would only look at a student's needs if the student requested. It is important that disability support staff provide academic staff with all the necessary advice and support to ensure that recommendations regarding placements made in the Access Report are implemented as 'reasonable adjustments'. The disability support staff role is essentially that of expert advisor to academic staff so that they feel adequately prepared and confident to negotiate support with the placement agency.

"We met with her at a very early stage and we did a lot of liaising with the department prior to her starting because obviously there was a lot of support that needed to be in place and for staff to be aware that there could be communication problems and how best we could overcome those problems."

(Disability support staff)

Early planning is particularly essential if additional equipment or aids/adaptations are needed as a decision will have to be made as to how this is funded. Funding for undergraduate disabled social work students will be accessed from the DSA via local authorities. The General Social Care Council will fund adjustments for most postgraduate students. However, staff need to be aware that this can take time:

"The practical business of getting funding for additional equipment from services is pretty slow and GSCC and the Post Graduate Research Councils tend to be slower in processing DSA claims." (Disability support staff)

Therefore, it is important that the university department confirms the student's placement dates at the earliest opportunity to facilitate pre-placement planning and if necessary secure funding and/or equipment. Another option that can be considered is that of institutional support or funding. Some higher education institutions have a contingency fund to support disabled students and other options such as equipment loan services. From the interviews undertaken with placement staff it was evident that many social work agencies lacked the equipment and resources to adequately support disabled students. Therefore, it is essential that the student has the necessary assistive technology to take with them to the placement.

Some of the adjustments may involve physical adaptations and resources, but the majority are about increasing awareness and sensitivity to student needs and the nature of adjustments. Disability support staff need to use their expertise to ensure that academic staff understand how best to achieve this. In some cases, the placement organiser or co-ordinator will need to be aware of the reasonable adjustments a student might need prior to the placement being chosen (e.g. at the application stage), for example, in the case of a student with mobility impairment who requires an accessible environment.

Prior to the placement commencing, the key people involved in the placement will need to come to some agreement as to the nature of the reasonable adjustments for a prospective student:

"They could for a start enforce, well not enforce, but encourage Disability Service and departments to meet and the placement to meet and discuss how the student can be best supported and to draw up some kind of agreement to ensure students are supported if they request it." (Disability support staff)

As most placements differ in both environment and learning opportunities, the adjustments appropriate for a disabled student may vary for different placements. All students will have a placement agreement and the nature of a student's reasonable adjustments can be documented here. These agreements might cover the following issues:

- ▶ the nature of the disability
- ▶ what adjustments will be made
- ▶ how adjustments will be funded
- ▶ what action will be taken if adjustments are not provided
- ▶ who is to be informed of the student's disability at the placement
- ▶ systems for maintaining communication between the practice assessor/teacher, the student, the programme staff in the university and disability support services.

Details of adjustments or support required by a student need to be recorded in the placement agreement as well as in the system for monitoring and reviewing the student support. As specialist advisors on disability issues, it will often be up to disability support staff to provide advice to academic staff as to what constitutes a reasonable adjustment.

The PEEdS study found that the student's relationship with the practice assessor/teacher is often fundamental to the success of a practice learning experience. Therefore it is essential that the practice assessor/teacher is adequately prepared as they will often be the 'front-line' person delivering the support. Staff noted that:

"We can't be sure students are getting the support when we aren't there. Somebody should be going along and talking to the placement tutors and I'm not aware that that happens." (Disability support staff)

All practice assessors/teachers undergo training and regular updating and disability support staff can contribute to such programmes to help develop skills and knowledge in placement agencies. In some instances, they will need to become directly involved and bring together the key stakeholders to ensure that both the student and the placement are adequately prepared to deliver the necessary reasonable adjustments. Disability support staff will then need to directly liaise with the placement agency and staff prior to the placement agreement being signed.

However, the main responsibility of disability support staff will be to ensure that they provide sufficient advice and guidance to academic staff in order that they can organise the necessary adjustments. If academic staff are not adequately prepared then they are unable to take responsibility for supporting and advising placement staff. Preparation is the key to effective support and also to ensuring that a suitable mechanism for monitoring and review is available to both staff and students. It is important that the student, academic

and placement staff understand where to go if they need further information and/or advice.

We recommend that disability support staff:

- ▶ Work with the academic department to establish mechanisms to ensure that student needs are considered prior to a placement being selected.
- ▶ Support and advise academic staff in identifying and delivering appropriate reasonable adjustments in the placement agency.
- ▶ Provide advice on additional funding for supportive technology and/or other aids and adaptations for the placement - whether supplied through the GSCC or other sources.
- ▶ Contribute to training programmes aimed at practice assessors/teachers.

UNIVERSITY WIDE POLICY AND PROCEDURES

All HEIs will be aware of the Quality Assurance Agency's Code of Practice on Placement Learning (2001) and the Code of Practice on Students with Disabilities (1999). In addition, some universities have developed their own Placement Learning codes or guidance but they may not make specific reference to disabled students:

"To my knowledge there is no policy that exists as such. But I think, because more students are coming in with more complex support requirements I think and those students are already coming onto courses with work placements, it's something that's being looked at, at the moment, but no policy as yet." (Disability support staff)

Where an institution has its own code or policy disability support staff need to make sure that this takes into account the needs of disabled students.

Also, an institution's confidentiality policy should be clear in relation to the handling of sensitive information and disclosure of disability. A policy must be clear as to whether disclosure at application or any other stage also constitutes disclosure to the placement agency. This should also specify whether confidential information can be communicated to an external agency without the student's consent. If so, it needs to document the circumstances in which this might occur and the implications of doing so. It is important that academic and disability support staff are clear about these 'exceptional circumstances' in which disclosure without the student's consent may occur.

The confidentiality policy must also be communicated to students. This is particularly important as some students involved in the study assumed that disclosure to the HEI meant that the placement had been made aware of their needs, whilst others were very clear that this was not the case. Students also need to know the implications of choosing not to disclose as this may well have significant consequences both for the student and potentially the client group/placement agency in which they are placed. The policy should be clear regarding what information about a student's disability is being shared and with whom.

The research identified the need for clear lines of communication between all the key stakeholders and for information about a student's disability, the adjustments made, and systems for monitoring and communication to be recorded.

This can be promoted by developing a institution-wide procedure which outlines the HEI's approach to managing disclosure and developing and delivering reasonable adjustments on placement so that all staff (academic, disability or otherwise) are clear as to how this will be administered within the institution. The University of Hull has developed its own 4-stage approach and this is provided in Appendix 2.

We recommend that disability support staff :

- ▶ Make explicit and clarify their own institution's confidentiality policy and its stance on disclosure of disability and whether that includes (or not) disclosure to the placement agency.
- ▶ Provide advice to institutional committees responsible for developing guidance documents on placement learning.
- ▶ Develop a procedure which outlines the HEIs approach to managing disclosure to external agencies and to developing and delivering reasonable adjustments on placement including how information is recorded, monitored and reviewed.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

The majority of disability support staff contributing to the PEdDS study acknowledged that they had shortfalls in knowledge regarding the expectations of professional students on placement, the competencies students are required to meet and what activity took place on placement:

"So yes, we do need more training and especially on subjects specific to learning more about what someone is actually going to be doing on placement."

(Disability support staff)

It is important that disability support staff understand and are sensitive to the issues of professional education, in particular the requirements of professional bodies in relation to disclosure of a disability and the key issues of suitability and public interest and safety which may in some cases necessitate the academic department disclosing the disability to the placement (see resource section).

"It's the same in all professional areas to be quite frank - can this person meet the professional standards?" (Disability support staff)

There was evidence that some staff were aware of 'fitness' to practice issues in social work;

"Fitness to practice can be difficult with say, dyslexia and medicine or law - they might not be keen on having a note-taker, or not allowing you to write notes more slowly or use a dictaphone. But I think one of our students working in a hospital was allowed to use a dictaphone instead of taking notes." (Disability support staff)

Competency requirements are relevant to any profession and the application of such standards does not amount to discrimination if the requirement can be objectively justified. Academic staff can therefore play a key role in providing disability support staff with information and advice on professional education, learning needs on placement and 'suitability' and 'safety' issues. Whilst academic staff may not be fully aware of the recent

changes in disability legislation, or the adjustments that might enable a particular student to fulfil the standards, they are aware of the competency requirement in their particular profession.

We recommend that staff development and support for disability support staff are made available on the following:

- ▶ The learning approaches and assessment methods that take place in social work placements.
- ▶ The requirements of professional regulatory bodies, such as the GSCC, including National Occupational Standards and issues relating to suitability to practice.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES FOR DISABILITY SUPPORT STAFF

- The **PEdDS Project website** contains various links to external sites and downloadable documents that are relevant to this guide.
 - Available at <http://www.hull.ac.uk/pedds>
 - Also see the full project report : Wray, J., Fell, B., Stanley, N., Manthorpe, J. and Coyne, E. (2005) '**PEdDS : Disabled students and placements**', Hull : The University of Hull. (ISBN : 1-904176-11-9) -
 - Available at <http://www.hull.ac.uk/pedds>
-
- Campbell, J. and Cowe, T. (1998) '**Working with DipSW Students with Dyslexia : a guide for Practice Teachers**', Strathclyde : University of Strathclyde.
 - Available at http://www.hull.ac.uk/pedds/documents/Dyslexia_Guide_000.doc
 - Department of Health (2002) '**Requirements for Social Work Training**', London : DoH.
 - Available at <http://www.dh.gov.uk>
 - **General Social Care Council (GSCC) website** - the social care workforce regulator and the first port of call for information relating to standards of competence and fitness.
 - Available at <http://www.gsccl.org.uk>.
 - '**Health Care Professionals with a disability**' website. A site dedicated to promoting, supporting and providing information about disabled people as healthcare professionals in the UK.
 - Available at <http://www.shcf.ac.uk/~mdldjw/HCP-disability/>
 - Kearney, P. (2004) '**A framework for supporting and assessing practice learning**', London : SCIE.
 - Available at <http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/positionpapers/pp02.pdf>
 - Sapey, B., Turner, R. and Orton, S. (2004) '**Access to Practice: Overcoming the barriers to practice learning for disabled social work students**', Brighton: SWAP.
 - Available at www.swap.ac.uk/widen/Accessstopractice.asp
 - **The Practice Learning Taskforce (PLT)** - a government agency set up to increase the amount of placement learning opportunities for the new social work award.
 - Available at <http://www.practicelearning.org>
 - TOPSS : Training Organisation for The Personal Social Services (2003) '**National Occupational Standards for Social Work**', Leeds : TOPSS.
 - Available at <http://www.topssengland.net/files/cd/England/Main.htm>

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- West of Scotland Consortium (2003) '**Disabled Students on Placement : Information for Placement Providers, Colleges and Universities**', [online].

‣ Available at

http://www.hull.ac.uk/pedds/documents/Disability_Handbook_2002_000.doc

Appendix I:

ILLUSTRATIVE STUDIES

These illustrative studies were collected by the PEdDS Project. They are based on real situations but have been anonymised.

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE ONE

Context:

Hannah was a first year social work student with mental health difficulties. She had experienced agoraphobia and acute anxiety for a number of years which she had managed well in the three years before her arrival at university. When she became particularly worried or stressed she experienced anxiety attacks and her blood pressure would rise. Whilst attending university, a range of support measures were put in place, and with the exception of one occasion when she had needed to leave a lecture, she had successfully completed her first semester. She was about to undergo her first placement with a statutory agency providing services for children and families. Like all social work students, she was particularly worried about how she would manage this new and demanding experience.

A number of different issues were identified with Hannah by the university disability adviser. She felt that she became very tense in new and/or unusual situations and that this might result in anxiety attacks. She was aware that she would have to meet with service users (people she didn't know) and go to new environments. She did not want to be seen as 'not able to cope' and wanted to perform well in practice. She was especially concerned that she might experience an attack when she was with a family. She could recognise when an anxiety attack was coming on and usually found that going for a walk and taking '10 minutes out' was sufficient for her to manage her anxiety. Stress often exacerbated her condition and she needed to take regular breaks throughout the day to prevent this building up.

Adjustments negotiated:

The following adjustments were agreed with Hannah to enable her to meet her practice learning outcomes. They were then agreed with the university department and the

practice agency to ensure that they did not compromise any academic and/or professional standards:

- ▶ A pre-placement visit to enable Hannah to familiarise herself with the physical environment and be introduced to key members of staff including her practice assessor/teacher. A member of disability support staff also came on this visit to provide additional support to Hannah in negotiating her adjustments.
- ▶ The practice assessor/teacher and agency staff were asked to take into consideration Hannah's need to be adequately prepared and supported when undertaking a first visit to a family or when confronting other new experiences. A system was to be set up for Hannah to have accompanied first visits with a gradual reduction in support over time to allow her to complete visits independently as the placement progressed. The level of support and its reduction were discussed and agreed between the practice assessor/teacher and Hannah throughout the placement.
- ▶ Hannah was given the opportunity to take regular breaks throughout the day in agreement with her practice assessor/teacher and in accordance with the schedule of activities/workload asked of her (e.g. coffee break, lunch break).
- ▶ The adjustments were reviewed at the end of the third week of the placement by the practice assessor/teacher and Hannah.
- ▶ Hannah took responsibility for communicating any additional needs or concerns to the practice assessor/teacher.
- ▶ Both Hannah and the Practice Assessor/Teacher agreed that it might be necessary at times for these support arrangements to be adjusted slightly to meet the requirements of the placement learning experience (for example, a break might not be possible as scheduled).

All the agreed adjustments were formalised in a letter to Hannah, the practice assessor/teacher and the department placement co-ordinator by the member of staff from the Disability Support Service.

Outcome:

Hannah successfully completed all learning outcomes for the placement and met the required national occupational standards. The level of support she needed for working with families was gradually reduced over a two month period when both Hannah and the practice assessor/teacher were confident that this was no longer necessary. Hannah continued to experience anxiety at times throughout the placement but worked closely with her practice assessor/teacher to develop strategies to manage this.

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE TWO

Context:

Jane was a second year social work student with a number of serious medical conditions which meant that she had complex health needs. These conditions resulted in mobility and posture difficulties, back pain and chronic fatigue. She had managed her health conditions for many years and was confident in her ability to successfully complete her placement provided some adjustments were made. Her health status fluctuated at times

and was exacerbated by stress. She was undertaking her second placement with a social services team, co-ordinating services for adults.

Several different issues regarding Jane's learning support needs in practice were identified. Jane disclosed her health conditions to the practice agency prior to the placement commencing and identified a number of possible adjustments she felt would be of benefit to her. She was anxious that if she became unwell and needed to go into hospital she might either have to re-take her placement or even fail it. She had experienced a recent fall that had resulted in a broken collar bone. She needed to maintain an appropriate posture to minimize the pain and was concerned about suitable seating at her workstation.

Adjustments negotiated:

Adjustments were discussed and agreed with Jane at an initial interview with the disability support service. These adjustments were discussed with the academic department and then the practice agency by the disability support service to ensure that they did not compromise any academic and/or professional standards:

- ▶ Jane visited her practice assessor/teacher before the placement so she could ensure the accessibility of the office as well as examine the seating at her workstation.
- ▶ An extra half day off a week in conjunction with a half day study leave each week provided Jane with a break in her working week to prevent fatigue. This extended the placement by approximately 2-3 weeks. This was feasible as Jane had no further teaching to attend after the placement.
- ▶ A later start and earlier finish in her working day when appropriate were agreed with the practice assessor/teacher
- ▶ It was agreed that Jane could take time off as necessary for hospital appointments. Jane acknowledged the importance of planning her visits to service users around such appointments.
- ▶ Suitable seating was provided by the agency (i.e. an operator's chair with arms) to prevent exacerbation of Jane's back and shoulder difficulties and pain.
- ▶ Jane agreed to be responsible for communicating any additional needs or concerns to the practice assessor/teacher.
- ▶ The adjustments were reviewed at the end of the third week of the placement by the practice assessor/teacher and Jane. The university department's disability tutor also agreed to contact both Jane and the practice assessor/teacher at this time to see if any further adjustments were needed.

All the agreed adjustments were formalised in a letter to the practice assessor/teacher and the department placement co-ordinator by Jane in conjunction with a member of staff from the disability support service.

Outcome:

Jane successfully completed all learning outcomes for the placement and met the required national occupational standards. The weekly break in her working week enabled her to manage her health condition and, whilst she did become very tired at times during the placement, she did not need to take time off because of ill-health. Jane did need to take

some time off for scheduled hospital appointments. She realised the importance of planning her visits around such appointments and with the support of her practice assessor/teacher scheduled her workload accordingly.

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE THREE

Context:

Alan was a first year student with a specific learning difficulty. He had been diagnosed in his second semester at university and had experienced difficulties coming to terms with the diagnosis as he felt that he had managed well in previous studies. He was also disappointed that this had not been picked up sooner. He had just started attending disability services for regular one-to-one support from a specialist adviser and had recently received a range of adaptive technology (including a laptop, specialist software and dictaphone) funded through the Disabled Student's Allowance. He was about to start his first placement with a voluntary agency working with young homeless people.

A number of issues were identified for Alan's support on placement. He was anxious about the paperwork he would be required to complete as he had difficulties with note-taking as well as organising written material. He was reluctant at first to disclose his specific learning difficulty to the agency because he felt that staff there might not understand his learning needs. Alan met with a member of disability support services and they discussed at length the advantages and disadvantages of disclosure to the placement. Alan disclosed his specific learning difficulty on his placement application form and discussed the impact of this on his learning style at the pre-placement interview.

Adjustments negotiated:

The following adjustments were discussed with Alan first, then a member of disability services staff discussed these with the university department and the placement:

- ▶ It was agreed that Alan could use his laptop and specialist software at the placement agency. However, confidential material could not be removed from the office on his laptop and any information that was removed would need to be anonymised. As an additional precaution, Alan 'password protected' every document he worked on.
- ▶ It was agreed that Alan could use his dictaphone whilst with the agency to supplement any written notes after working with service users. It was understood that service users' names should not be used. He was given the time after interviews to write up all his notes immediately so that digital voice files could then be deleted.
- ▶ The practice assessor/teacher agreed that she would proof read any letters/documents that Alan had to send out.
- ▶ Alan took responsibility for communicating any additional needs or concerns to his practice assessor/teacher.
- ▶ The adjustments were reviewed at the end of the third week of the placement by the practice assessor/teacher and Alan. Both were asked to contact the disability tutor in social work or disability support staff in the university if there were any further support issues.

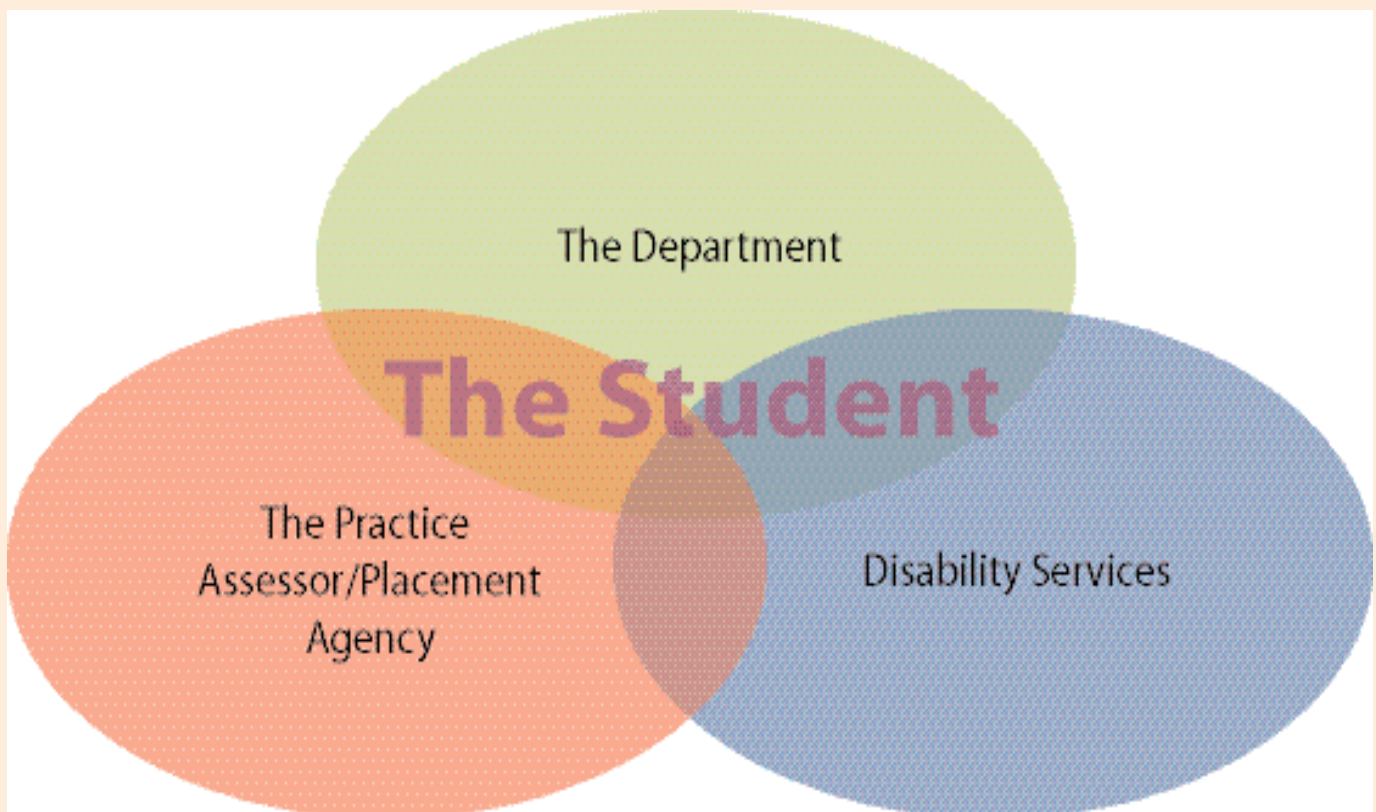
All the agreed adjustments were formalised in a letter to Alan, the practice assessor/teacher and the department placement co-ordinator by the member of staff from the disability support service. The letter also stated that it might be necessary for these support arrangements to be adjusted slightly to meet the requirements of the placement learning experience.

Outcome:

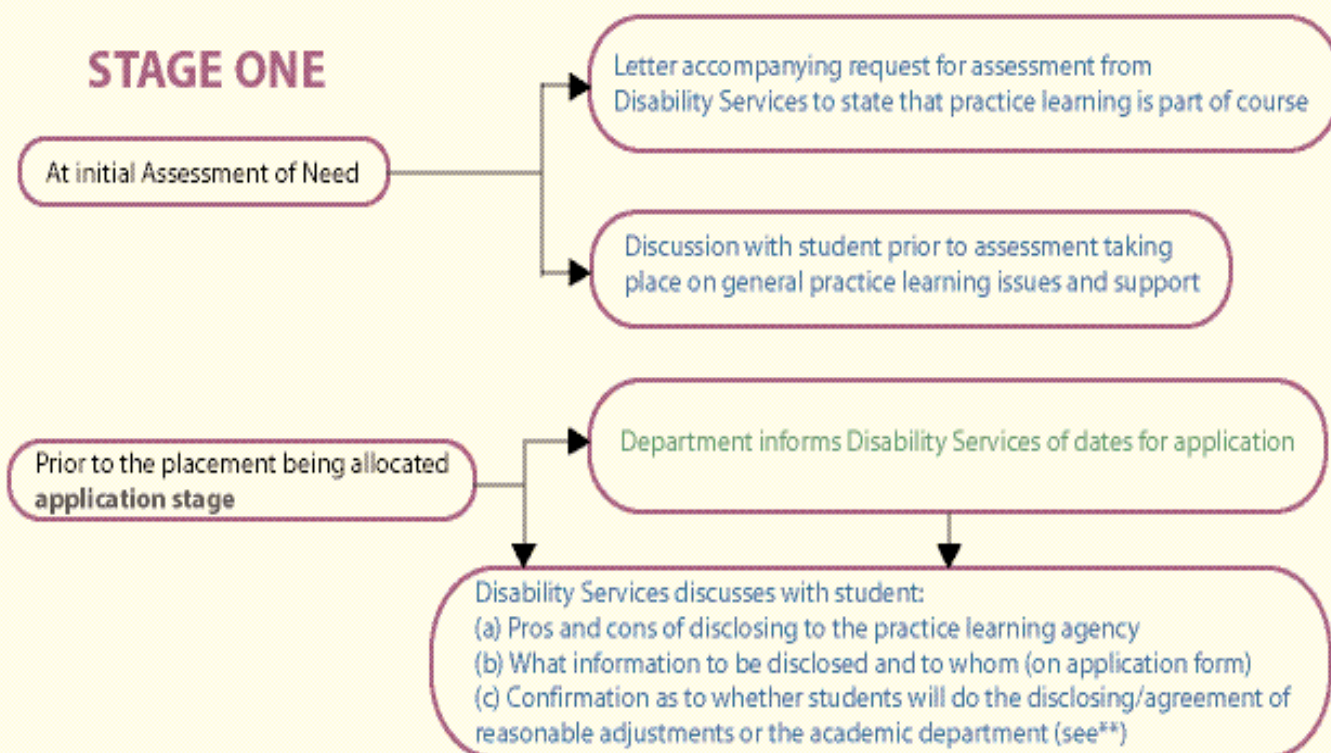
Alan successfully completed his placement. He made use of additional support available to him from the university disability services whilst on placement. This included proof-reading of his assessed work by the specialist advisor and attending group sessions on developing strategies for organising written and verbal material.

Appendix 2:

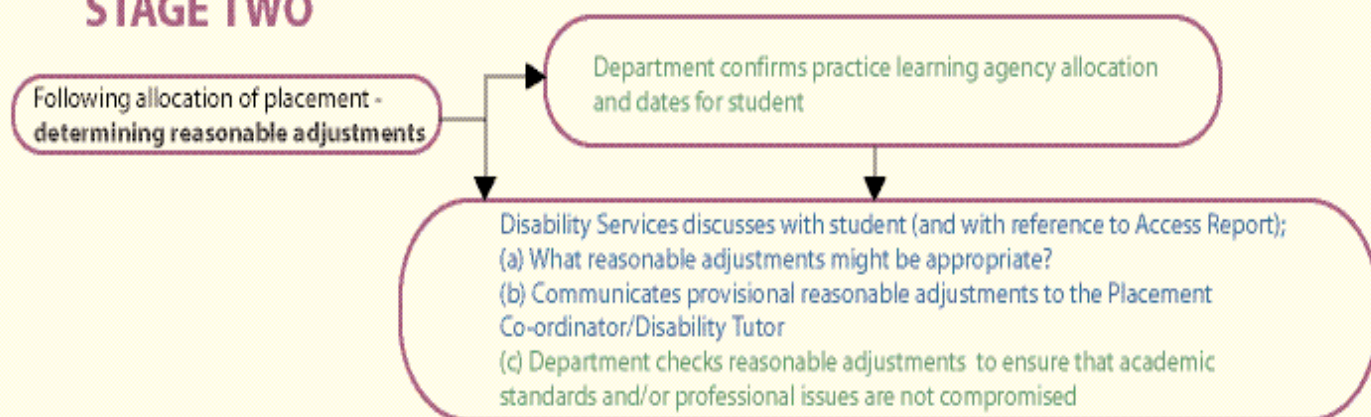
KEY STAGES AND INSTITUTIONAL PROCEDURE FOR THE SUPPORT OF DISABLED
SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS ON PLACEMENT
(THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL)



STAGE ONE



STAGE TWO



STAGE THREE

Prior to the placement learning agreement being signed - **negotiating reasonable adjustments with placement provider**

Department/Students (**see earlier):

- (a) Communicates provisional reasonable adjustments to Practice Assessor (PA)
- (b) Negotiates reasonable adjustments for duration of placement
- (c) Any resource implications identified (if necessary referred back to Disability Services and Disability Services confirms funding and/or resources)
- (d) Discuss with PA any health and safety issues
- (e) PA identifies any additional training and/or support needed and informs line manager/team of outcomes

Department confirm reasonable adjustments and these are written into the practice learning agreement which includes:

- (a) all key contact details for Disability Services, Placement Co-ordinator and Dept Disability Tutor
- (b) training/support for PA given by Department
- (c) relevant page copied to Disability Services for information

STAGE FOUR

Monitoring and reviewing support to student and practice assessor/teacher and/or placement area

PA/placement agency implements reasonable adjustments as agreed

Department reviews reasonable adjustments 3-4 weeks into placement with student and PA

PA reviews reasonable adjustments with placement team and line manager

PA informs department if more support is needed or difficulties arise

Department discusses support/difficulties with PA and resolves – issued referred back to Disability Services for further advice if needed

Disability Services contacts student if advocacy/support needed

Appendix 3

MEMBERS OF THE EDITORIAL GROUP FOR THE BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

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