

School of Health and Social Care

BA (Hons) Social Work

**Practice**

**Learning**

**Handbook**

**for**

**Level 5 & 6**

**2023 - 2024**

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***Please note*: Details and documents included are accurate at the time of printing/circulating and may be subject to change.**

**University Staff**

The University Staff who may be most useful for you to contact about issues concerning placement are:

Placement Coordinators: Marina Bailey 073 4200 0172

Jonathan Stringer 07785530610

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Placement Administrator: Laura Mussett [socialworkplacements@essex.ac.uk](mailto:socialworkplacements@essex.ac.uk)

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**1.1 Purpose of Handbook**

Welcome to the BA (Hons) in Social Work programme. The School of Health and Social Care is committed to making a difference to local, national and international health, social care and voluntary services through education, research and knowledge transfer. In accordance with the placement criteria placements are an essential component of the BA (Hons) Social Work degree.

You will spend a total of at least 200 days gaining experiences from working with experts by experience and social care practitioners and learning in practice settings.

These days will comprise:

* 30 days of skills development activities with experts by experience and social care practitioners. The majority of these activities will take place on campus before your first block placement and some of them will be incorporated into activities that support taught modules and assessments, e.g., observations, presentations, group discussions and role playing.
* 70 days on your first placement in a non-statutory setting. This could be with a voluntary agency or a local authority discretionary service (i.e. not one required to meet a statutory duty). We have a large number of partner agencies who work with us to offer placement learning opportunities. However, if you have a particular interest in an agency or service that we do not currently work with please tell us about this so the placement coordination team can explore the possibility of you being placed where you have the most interest.
* 100 days on your second placement with an agency providing statutory services (i.e., services that meet social care duties and responsibilities defined in legislation). These are most often with local authorities but could also be with other agencies that deliver services commissioned by local, regional or national authorities to meet statutory obligations.

The purpose of this handbook is to supplement the information provided within the course guide, detailing further practice learning and associated policies and procedures. The handbook should coincide with additional material provided by the Placement Tutors and Practice Educators, for example student portfolios and guidance for modules.

This handbook is designed to be a reference book for students throughout the course, and for those staff responsible for supporting students through their learning and assessment in practice.

An electronic link is provided to enable access to the most recent versions of all of the University of Essex’ policies and procedures.

[University Policies | University of Essex](https://www.essex.ac.uk/governance-and-strategy/governance/policies)

If you require further information that is not contained within this handbook, please contact the Placement Coordinators. Further contact details for staff associated with practice learning can be found in section [**8.2 of this handbook.**](#_8.1_Student_Support)

A website to support practice learning is available and this handbook and all related information, policies and procedures will be available online through the university website.

**2. Professional body requirements**

The following information details the relevant professional body requirements that inform and underpin the BA (Hons) Social Work degree.

**2.1 Social Work England Professional Standards**

‘Social Worker’ is a legally protected professional title regulated by Social Work England (SWE). SWE was established in 2019 according to new legislation introduced in the Children and Social Work Act 2017. The regulator’s function is to promote and maintain proper professional standards for social workers in England as described in the Social Workers Regulations 2018. SWE does this by maintaining standards of professional practice that apply to registered social workers, i.e., those who have qualified and standards of education and training that apply to organisations that train new social workers. SWE recognises that both our under and postgraduate programmes of study meet the requirements set out in their education and training standards.

**2.2 Quality of Assurance of Placement Learning (QAPL)**

As stipulated through the QAA (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education) benchmark statements and aligned with the Social Work Reform Board’s reforms and requirements for the regulation and professional endorsement of social work programmes.

**2.3 Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF)**

Practice is assessed using the PCF**.** The PCF is an overarching professional standards framework with nine domains: professionalism; values and ethics; diversity; rights, justice and economic well-being; critical reflection; analysis; knowledge; intervention and skills; contexts and organisations and professional leadership.

Students must meet all practice requirements as specified within the module guide and portfolio to be successful in achieving the professional standards for placement learning that is applicable to their stage of the programme.

**2.4 Service user/carer involvement**

Service user/carer involvement is integral to all aspects of the programme and qualifying award. Consequently, the University of Essex has established a panel of past and present service users/carers, to advise and inform the development of and subsequent delivery of the academic and practice learning modules. There will be a day of every term, dedicated to community development and activities relevant to the modules for all students and service users/carers involved with the programme.

**2.5 Glossary**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| OSS | On-site Supervisor |
| PE | Practice Educator |
| HEI | Higher Education Institute |
| PCF | Professional Capabilities Framework |
| PT | Placement Tutor |
| DBS | Disclosure and Barring Service |
| LA | Learning Agreement |
| SWE | Social Work England |
| PS | Professional Standards |
| APC | Agency Placement Coordinator |
| PC | Placement Coordinator (HEI) |
| BASW | British Association for Social Workers |

# 3. Prior to Placement

When students accept a place on the BA (Hons) social work programme they have agreed to conform to the University of Essex’ Code of Student Conduct. <https://www1.essex.ac.uk/students/experience/code-conduct.aspx>

A structured framework of meetings is pivotal to the assessment of practice, and to enhancing learning. These are described in the following flowcharts.

**3.1** **Practice Placement Level 5 (First Placement 70 days) Flowchart**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Events/Actions** | **Proposed timeline** |
| 1 | Pre-Placement Meeting with student and OSS at the agency. This may include the PE if inhouse or a separate meeting may be arranged if they are offsite. | Prior to beginning the placement |
| 2 | Completion of Pre-Placement Check List by the student and sent to PT |
| 3 | Begin Placement and maximum 9-day induction period | |
| 4 | Meet with PE and OSS to draft Learning Agreement (LA) – this may include formal and informal meetings. | Within 6 days of starting placement |
| 5 | Final draft of LA to be sent to PT, PE and OSS 2 days prior to LA meeting. | Within 10 days of beginning of placement |
| 6 | LA Meeting – Student, PT, PE and OSS must all attend. The LA will be finalised during this meeting if possible. At the meeting all parties to agree Midway date. | Within 12 days of beginning placement |
| 7 | If the LA is not completed at the LA meeting then a finalised copy must be sent to the PT. If there is no finalised LA in place and there is no formally agreed extension of the deadline for this then the placement may be suspended. | By day 15 of placement |
| 8 | First Direct Observation of Student’s Practice | No later than 5 days prior to Midway |
| 9 | First Critical Reflection by student |
| 10 | Student to meet with PE and OSS to draft Midway – this may include formal and informal meetings. | Within 27 days of beginning placement |
| 11 | Midway meeting - Student, PT, PE and OSS must all attend. Midway documents to be sent to all parties by the student 2 days prior to Midway meeting. At the meeting all parties agree Final Meeting date. | Within 39 days of beginning placement |
| 12 | Completed Midway document to PT – if this is not done and there is no formally agreed extension of the deadline for this then the placement may be suspended. PT add their comments and signature to Midway report. | By day 42 of placement |
| 13 | Second Direct Observation of Student’s Practice | By day 50 of placement |
| 14 | Second Critical Reflection by student |
| 15 | Third Direct Observation of Student’s Practice | By day 63 of placement |
| 16 | Third Critical Reflection by student |
| 17 | Final Placement meeting – Attended by the student, PE and OSS. PT only attends if there have been concerns or complexities related to the placement. Draft Workbook to be discussed as well as overall holistic assessment of the student’s practice. | Within 65 days of placement |
| 18 | Completed workbook to be handed in to PE | By 4pm 3 days after the final placement day |
| 19 | PE to review, write final report and return the workbook to the student for handing in to the University. | Within 2 weeks of end of placement |
| 20 | Student to submit completed Workbook with their reflective comments on the PE final report to PT for final comments and signature before e-submission on Faser. | Within 3 weeks of end of placement |

**3.2 Practice Placement Level 6 (Second Placement 100 day) Flowchart**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Events/Actions** | **Proposed timeline** |
| 1 | Pre-Placement Meeting with PE, student and if there is one allocated, OSS, at agency | Prior to beginning placement |
| 2 | Completion of Pre-Placement Check List |
| 3 | Begin Placement and maximum 16-day induction period | |
| 4 | Meet with PE (and OSS) to draft Learning Agreement (LA) – this may include formal and informal meetings. | Within 6 days of starting placement |
| 5 | Final draft of LA to be sent to PT, PE and OSS by the student 2 days prior to LA meeting. | Within 10 days of beginning of placement |
| 6 | LA Meeting – Student, PT, PE and OSS must all attend. The LA will be finalised during this meeting if possible. At the meeting, all parties agree Midway date. | Within 12 days of beginning placement |
| 7 | If the LA is not completed at LA meeting then a finalised copy must be sent to the PT. If there is no finalised LA in place and there is no formally agreed extension of the deadline for this then the placement may be suspended. | By day 15 of placement |
| 8 | First Two Direct Observation of Student’s Practice | No later than 5 days prior to Midway |
| 9 | First Two Critical Reflections by student |
| 10 | Student to meet with PE (and OSS) to draft Midway – this may include formal and informal meetings. | Within 42 days of beginning placement |
| 11 | Midway meeting - Student, PT, PE and OSS must all attend. Midway documents to be sent to all parties by the student 2 days prior to Midway meeting. At the meeting, all parties agree Final Meeting date. | Within 55 days of beginning placement |
| 12 | Completed Midway document to PT – if this is not done and there is no formally agreed extension of the deadline for this then the placement may be suspended. The PT to add their comments and sign Midway report. | By day 60 of placement |
| 13 | Third Direct Observation of Student’s Practice | By day 70 of placement |
| 14 | Third Critical Reflection by student |
| 15 | Fourth Direct Observation of Student’s Practice | By day 85 of placement |
| 16 | Fourth Critical Reflection by student |
| 17 | Final Placement meeting – Attended by the student, PE and OSS. PT only attends if there have been concerns or complexities related to the placement. Draft Workbook to be discussed as well as overall holistic assessment of the student’s practice. | Within 95 days of placement |
| 18 | Completed Workbook to be handed in to the PE | By 4pm 3 days after the final placement day |
| 19 | PE to review, write final report and return the workbook to the student for handing in to the University. | Within 2 weeks of end of placement |
| 20 | Student to submit completed Workbook with their reflective comments on the PE final report to PT for final comments and signature before e-submission on Faser. | Within 3 weeks of end of placement |

**3.3 Disclosure and Barring Service**

All students are required to have an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service Check (DBS) and to register with the Update Service. At the point of application, all students are required to declare any unspent convictions. Students applying for courses for which a satisfactory DBS check is a mandatory entry requirement must declare all convictions, cautions and reprimands, whether spent or unspent. When students enrol upon the course they will be asked to complete a (DBS) form. The forms will be returned to the universities DBS administrator who will progress the DBS checking process. Students should be aware that this process could take an average of 4 – 6 weeks. Further information can be found here.

<https://www1.essex.ac.uk/dbs/applications.aspx>

A student will not be able to start their placement without this check being completed. If a student is aware of any unspent criminal convictions / cautions registered against them, they must make their Placement Tutor or Coordinator aware at the earliest opportunity.

Students are required to share their DBS Certificate with the placement agency providers at interview. Some placement agencies may complete their own DBS checks. The university is not able to share the contents of a DBS check without the student’s consent. The university is required to have written consent, ordinarily through signing the ‘Student Support Confidentiality Agreement,’ before sharing any student information; however, it is an expectation that a student’s acceptance onto the programme includes agreement from the student to share relevant information, where appropriate to placement providers and Local Authority Designated Officers (LADO), where issues of safety or legality apply.

Students will be required to complete an online declaration at the start of every academic year before they can re-enroll. Should they become subject to criminal proceedings / convictions / or cautions at any point during the course they must inform their Placement Tutor or Coordinator immediately.

The student should keep the original copy of their DBS record for the duration of the course.

**3.4 Pre-Placement Checklist**

Students will be provided with a pre-placement checklist to be completed with their placement tutor prior to the beginning of placement.

The check list provides detailed information about all issues and areas that must be explored prior to placement, including

* DBS Disclosure
* Conduct
* Pre-Placement Interview
* Prior Relationships or conflict of interest
* Car Documents
* Attendance
* Health / Disability / Learning Difficulties
* Travel
* Other Commitments / Personal issues
* Placement Handbook and Workbook
* Inoculations (Hospital placements only)

An example of the pre-placement checklist can be found in the student workbook or online.

**3.5 Mandatory Training**

All Social Work students undertake a range of mandatory training annually. Allocation of placements are subject to the successful completion of the mandatory training. This mandatory training consists of online and practical sessions on the following topics:

* Fire Safety
* Risk Assessment
* Protection and Safeguarding of Children
* Conflict Resolution
* Information and Records Governance
* Disability Awareness
* Equality and Diversity
* Health & Safety Awareness
* Protection & Safeguarding of Vulnerable People (including PREVENT)

**3.6 Students with Disabilities / Learning Difficulties**

The University of Essex is committed to supporting Students with disabilities and / or Specific Learning Difficulties and to conforming to the Disability Discrimination Acts (DDA) 1995, 2005.

Applicants who meet the academic criteria for selection and who indicate on their application form that they have a disability will be contacted by a Disability Adviser with information about the support available.

Students with a disability or those with any other learning difficulties, including dyslexia and mental health issues, any medical conditions or placement related needs are encouraged to notify the Placement Coordinator at the earliest opportunity to enable appropriate arrangements to be made.

Further Information can be found on the University website. <https://www.essex.ac.uk/student/access-and-disability>

With the student’s consent any specific requirements will need to be shared with the placement provider to ensure their needs are met appropriately or reasonable adjustments can be made.

Specific requirements of students must be negotiated at the initial interview, learning agreement and reviewed at the midway meeting and monitored regularly during the placement.

# 4. Suitability for Practice

**4.1 Professional conduct**

Students are therefore required to meet the standards that are set out by Social Work England which include *Professional Standards*. It is highly recommended that students familiarise themselves with these standards as they will be used to draw conclusions about professional conduct and behavior. The standards can be found in the publication ‘Professional Standards Guidance’ which is available from Social Work England.

**4.2 Fitness to Practise**

Students are required to demonstrate that they are suitable to practice in social work to be eligible to register as a Social Worker with Social work England.

Each higher education institution (HEI) will have its own fitness to practise procedure, which may be applicable to students enrolled on courses that lead to qualification in several different professions. These should take into consideration the Office of the Independent Adjudicator’s (OIA) ‘good practice framework – fitness to practise procedures’ and Social Work England’s fitness to practise process.

The OIA’s good practice framework gives guidance for providers in designing fitness to practise procedures and in handling individual cases. They are unable to give HEIs specific advice on individual fitness to practise cases, but can provide guidance on principles, such as how to approach decision making.

Where a fitness to practise concern relates to a student, they do not normally need to be informed. However, they would expect to be informed of any fitness to practise conditions at the point a student completes a course.

HEIs must not permit a social work student to graduate where fitness to practise concerns are under consideration, or where concerns have been raised but they have not yet been considered. HEIs must have considered all fitness to practise concerns and reached a determination on them before the social work student can be permitted to graduate.

Where a fitness to practise concern involves a registered social worker (working in an academic, practice or other setting), this should be referred to them.

Concerns about fitness to practise will be managed in accordance with the University of Essex’ School of Health and Human Science Fitness to Practise Policy.

[**https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/departments/hsc/procedures-fitness-to-practise-(9).pdf?la=en**](https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/departments/hsc/procedures-fitness-to-practise-(9).pdf?la=en)

**4.3 Occupational Health**

Students may need access to the University’s screening service for Occupational Health when they enroll.

The objective of health screening is to be supportive and if necessary, provide guidance around how to manage specific health issues / disabilities within the workplace. Having a disability or health condition will not inevitably mean a student is not fit to practise.

Students who will be on placement at a hospital will be subject to Occupational Health screening and inoculations.

Further information including contact details can be found by following the link to the university’s Health and Safety and Occupational Health Standards, Policy and Procedures

<https://www.essex.ac.uk/staff/health-and-safety-support/policies>

**4.4 Confidentiality**

There are strict codes to follow in relation to confidentiality and these can be found in the guidance of the SWE, and the [University statement and policy of confidentiality.](https://www1.essex.ac.uk/hhs/documents/current/maintaining-confidentiality-in-your-work.pdf)

* + You must not discuss service users and carers outside the workplace
  + Service users and carers names and details must be anonymised in all assessments
  + For your protection, you should be cautious about personal information shared about yourself with service users, for example you should not disclose personal phone numbers or your home address. You are advised to refer to your Practice Educator or supervisor for further guidance
  + To enable judgments to be made about your progress, information relating to your academic and practice assessments may be shared with practice supervisors and Practice Educators responsible for assessing your capacity and fitness to practise.

The university is required to have written consent, ordinarily through signing the ‘Student Support Confidentiality Agreement,’ before sharing any information or taking any action on behalf of a student. The written consent will be held in Student Support files. If a student chooses not to give consent for information to be shared, this decision will be respected, except where issues of safety or legality apply (see Section 5 confidentiality policy). However, the student should understand this might limit their progression on the course and the kinds of support that are available to them.

**4.5 Social Media**

It is becoming more frequent that people are using social networking sites as a method of communicating and maintaining contact with others.

This can be extremely problematic in maintaining and protecting the privacy and confidentiality of yourself and others.

If students engage with social networking they are required to adhere to the principles of the codes of conduct performance and ethics, specifically:

* + You must act in the best interests of service users
  + You must respect the confidentiality of service users, colleagues/staff, carers and others we work with
  + You must keep high standards of personal conduct
  + You must behave with honesty and integrity and make sure that your behaviour does not damage the public’s confidence in you or your profession.

# 5. Coordination of Placements

The placement coordinators organise placements for students. Contact details for staff associated with practice learning can be found in section [**8.2 of this handbook.**](#_8.1_Student_Support)

**5.1 Student Placement Profiles**

Before placements can be allocated, students are required to complete a Student Placement Profile (SPP). Upon completion this document will be used by the Placement Coordinator and relevant social care agencies to identify an appropriate placement. It is important that all sections are completed accurately and with sufficient information as partner agencies may refer to a student’s SPP to assess their experience and suitability for the placement. The SPP will also be forwarded to Practice Educators and On-Site Supervisors.

**5.2 Allocation of Placements**

Students are allocated placements to facilitate their placement learning and to meet the professional body requirements as described in section 2.

Students will need to demonstrate their ‘readiness for practice’ and ability to meet the PCF to become eligible for placement allocation.

Students are not permitted to contact an agency directly to organise their own placements and the University will not accept requests from students for specific placement allocation**.** If a student is aware of an organisation that might provide placements for students, they should inform their Placement Coordinator.

During the allocation process it is important that students remain in regular contact with the University, especially checking email correspondence. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that the University is informed of any changes to contact details. Failure to maintain regular contact could delay or even result in a loss of placement.

The Placement Coordinator will aim to give students 4 weeks’ notice upon placement allocation. A meeting prior to the placement commencing will be convened with the agency. Students must ensure they have appropriate knowledge about the agency and be prepared to discuss their own individual learning needs, previous experience and what they might contribute to and learn from the placement.

Students must have a valid reason to refuse a placement and there is no guarantee that another placement will be found for the same academic year if a placement is refused.

**5.3 Travel Arrangements**

Students are responsible for making their own travel arrangements to and from placements. Having a full driving license might be considered essential criteria for working in social work; those students who do not drive may want to consider taking lessons.

**5.4 Car insurance**

Students are not insured by the University to use their own cars. Where students intend to use their own vehicles for work/placement purposes, business insurance will be required. Some insurance companies will not apply additional charges for this cover. When on placement, students must not use their own vehicles to transport service users without confirmation of relevant insurance cover. Students will be expected to provide evidence of their insurance cover.

**5.5 Finance for travel**

Some agencies will provide finance to cover mileage accrued through work purposes. The rates payable will depend upon the agency or local authority. Further advice including how to claim can be obtained from the placement. An element of the social work bursary is attributed to finance travel to and from placement, further information about the bursary and including eligibility can be found at [NHS Business Services Authority.](http://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/)

**5.6 Allocating Time for Travel**

The Placement Coordinator will try to ensure that all placements are located within 1.5 hours travelling time of the students’ home or the University. However, this may not always be possible due to placement availability.

Where students are required to travel for extended time periods it may be possible to make alterations to the normal working hours. Any changes will need to be negotiated between the Placement Coordinator, On-Site Supervisor and Practice Educator.

# 6. Procedures during Placement

The following information provides details about the procedures to follow whilst on placement.

**6.1 Health and Safety**

Whilst on placement, the University of Essex and placement provider have a duty of care towards the student. To satisfy their duty of care the University will:

* Make sure that the student is prepared for placement and aware of the usual health and safety features of the placement.
* Be responsible for giving students an opportunity to give feedback about any health and safety issues.
* Escalate any issues that are raised.

Statutory duties of care and liabilities are the responsibility of the placement provider whilst the student is on placement; the University expects that the student will be given the same rights as all employees in relation to health, safety and welfare. Therefore the placement provider must:

* Provide evidence to the University of up to date liability insurance
* There is a section within the learning agreement that must be completed to confirm that health and safety procedures have been discussed with the student, usually during the induction period.
* Undertake risk assessments where relevant to the safety of the student whilst in placement, an example being if the student is pregnant.

The students have a responsibility to conform to health and safety procedures, whilst they are in placement they must:

* Ensure they are familiar with health and safety procedures applicable to the placement provider.
* Take care of their own personal safety.
* Report any concerns that have the potential to place themselves, service users or colleagues at risk.

Further information can be found in the University Health, Safety and Well Being policy

<https://www.essex.ac.uk/staff/health-and-safety-support/policies>

**6.2 Learning Agreement**

A learning agreement should be drafted before the placement begins, usually during the induction period. The Practice Educator and On-Site Supervisor (where appropriate) along with the student are responsible for formulating this agreement. The content of the agreement should detail practical arrangements, special requirements (including learning needs or disabilities) and roles and responsibilities. The agreement will plan how the learning opportunities within the placement can meet the learning requirements. The learning agreement will be discussed and finalised at a learning agreement meeting with any amendments being recorded and all relevant parties signing to acknowledge their responsibilities and commitment.

The learning agreement must be finalised within 12 practice placement days and shared with all relevant parties, including their allocated Placement Tutor within 15 days. Failure to do so without securing an extension may lead to the suspension of the placement.

The learning agreement meeting should consider:

* The student’s previous experiences, areas of strengths and weaknesses, learning requirements
* The role of service users, carers or groups in providing feedback to the student
* Anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice
* The imbalance of power within the relationships between the students, Practice Educator, On-Site Supervisor
* The individual needs of students including approaches to learning
* Specific needs of the student whilst in placement
* The use of theory and evidenced based practices within the placement
* Methods of practice education.

The learning agreement informs and underpins the midway review of progress. A copy of the learning agreement must be included in the student’s final workbook.

**6.3 Midway Review**

The date of the midway review should be agreed at the learning agreement meeting.

A midway review provides an interim assessment of the student’s progress in placement, a formal meeting taking place at a midway point during the placement. In attendance are the student, Practice Educator, on-site supervisor and Placement Tutor, with all parties being required to provide a progress report

* Students are required to have completed the specified number of observations and critical reflection of practice by the midway review meeting.
* If the student has been unable to achieve the requirements, this should not interfere with the meeting going ahead. The meeting then provides a forum for discussion about what has prevented the student from meeting the requirements. If necessary, an action plan should be implemented
* If concerns about progression procedures have been started at the time of the midway review, it could be dealt with separately.
* The midway report is completed by the student and Practice Educator and forwarded in advance of the meeting to the Placement Tutor. The report must include evidence as stipulated in the workbook
* All parties in attendance at the midway review meeting must sign the relevant sections of the report
* Students must include a copy of the midway review report in their final workbook.

**6.4 Submitting reports**

Every effort must be made to submit all reports and assessments in a timely manner. Failure to do so could have a serious impact upon progress and completion of the course. Work that is submitted after the deadline will be given a mark of zero.

In line with the University’s academic regulations, in exceptional circumstances students can apply for an extension to the date for submission. Extenuating circumstances are divided into two types: (1) those which affect a student’s ability to submit coursework by the deadline (late submission), and (2) those affecting a student’s performance in coursework or exams, or circumstances affecting a student’s ability to submit their coursework at all and/or circumstances which cause a student to absent themselves from an exam. Further information including the process that must be followed can be found in the University’s policy and guidance on the late submission of coursework.

<https://www1.essex.ac.uk/students/exams-and-coursework/late-submission.aspx>

**6.5. Concerns about Placement**

Concerns can be raised by students, Practice Educators (PE), Onsite Supervisors (OSS) or the Placement Tutor (PT). Students need to be fully informed about the concerns, thus if this is being raised by the PE, OSS or PT this needs to be discussed with the student in supervision or a 1-2-1 meeting. The PT needs to inform the Placement Coordinators (HEI) and Programme Lead of any concerns being raised for a student on placement.

Any concerns related to placement should be reviewed and monitored through the Concerns about Placement Progression process. It is intended as a supportive process for concerns and/or support needs to be outlined clearly. Whether the concerns relate to the student, the placement provider or PE this process should allow for the opportunity to demonstrate change and reduce the potential for placement failure. It is best to identify and initiate the Concerns for Progression process as soon as concerns emerge. Some of the situations in which a Concerns for Progression process may be initiated are:

* Concerns identified related to the student’s conduct, behaviour and/or development which indicates that they may not meet the requirements to pass the placement.
* Health concerns are identified which are impacting the student’s ability to engage with or fully participate in the placement.
* The student experiences a significant life event which impacts their ability to engage with the placement.
* The placement organisation not providing sufficient or appropriate learning opportunities as identified in the learning agreement, including inadequate supervision and not in line with the expected roles and responsibilities (7.7).
* The PE not guiding and supporting the student through the placement experience, including inadequate supervision and not in line with the expected roles and responsibilities (7.5 / 7.6).

The indicators in the Concerns about Placement Progression Form (Appendix 2) should be completed by the person raising the concerns as soon as concerns are identified. These need to be linked to the relevant PCF’s and SWE standards. The concerns will then be discussed in a three-way / four-way meeting attended by the student, PE, OSS (if allocated) and PT. In the meeting an action plan with clear objectives should be agreed with an initial review period of 2 weeks. The objectives should be realistic and achievable in line with the PCF’s in order to give the best possible opportunity to show progression. Subsequent reviews can take place weekly or as per an agreed timeline by all parties. Should there be no or limited progress, consideration should be given to the PT seeking further advice from the Placement Coordinators, Programme Lead and /or Head of Division.

If the concern relates to the student, at the **second review** there needs to be shared consideration as to whether the student is on track to pass. If there is a recommendation of a placement fail or student conduct or behaviour which is considered to place service users in direct harm a decision can be made to terminate or suspend the placement immediately. (Appendix 1)

Any concern related to professional conduct will be addressed through the Professional Suitability Group (PSG) and Fitness to Practice (4.2 / Appendix 3).

**6.6 Requesting a change of placement**

Any concerns about a placement must be discussed with the Placement Tutor, Placement Coordinator and/or Practice Educator. They are usually resolved within a 3-way meeting and through devising an action plan.

If the concerns cannot be resolved then requests to change placements can only be made in exceptional circumstances and through a formal appeals process. Legitimate reasons to appeal include:

* + For specific health reasons.
  + The placement does not meet the professional requirements detailed in section 2.
  + Conflict of interest, for example previous / current involvement as a service user of the agency.

If no resolution can be agreed then the process to follow is detailed in the [Concerns and Professional Misconduct Process.](#_11.2_Concerns_and)

Students must be aware that requesting a change of placement could prevent the student from completing the practice learning module in a timely manner and will likely require the module to be repeated.

**6.7 Delayed and Disrupted Placements**

Generally, placements will begin on time however should the start of a placement become delayed (for a period of two weeks or more) this will impede upon the date for the completion of the placement. Subsequently, the date for handing in the workbook will need to be rearranged. The only circumstances in which a placement might be delayed will be in the extremely unlikely event that the university/placement coordinator cannot identify an appropriate placement.

**6.8 Attendance**

The module timetable allows students sufficient days in which they can complete the practice placement and includes supplementary days for independent study. Students are required to complete the specified amount of practice learning days and so time out for any reason must be accounted for before the placement can be finished.

The placement week equates to the average working week of 37.5 hours. Students are required to spend the normal hours of a working day in the placement, 7 to 7.5 hours. Where students are required to travel for extended time periods it may be possible to make alterations to the normal working hours. Any changes will need to be negotiated between the Placement tutor and Coordinator, On-Site Supervisor and Practice Educator.

There may be times when a student is required to work outside of the usual working day. These hours must be recorded in the record of attendance (which can be found in the student workbook) and can be taken as time off in lieu (toil), in agreement with the organisation, on-site supervisor, practice supervisor and/or on-site PE.

Students are required to keep a record of attendance, which must be verified weekly by the Practice Educator or OSS. The record of attendance must be submitted at the end of the placement with the portfolio.

Students are encouraged to take 30 minutes reflection time during each day. The time must be negotiated and agreed with the Practice Educator and/or on-site supervisor. This time must be protected and used for the purpose of reflection only.

**6.9 Short term Absence from the placement**

Short term and temporary absence from placement, usually for reasons of ill health or exceptional circumstances. The absence should be:

* reported via email to the Placement tutor and the Practice Educator on the first and last day of absence, and for every three days of absence.
* Email [hhsplace@essex.ac.uk](mailto:hhsplace@essex.ac.uk) to register their absence with the admin team
* The organisational procedures for reporting illness should also be followed.

These procedures must be explained at the start of the placement as part of the induction process.

Students are required to maintain a record of attendance, which will be shared and discussed during supervision and included in the student workbook for submission.

**6.10 Long Term Absence from the Placement**

Students must inform their Placement Tutor and/or Placement Coordinator if they are aware of any issues that might interfere with their ability to complete their placement, prior to starting the placement. Students may be advised to postpone their placement until the following year, depending upon the circumstances and length of leave.

Once the placement has started, leave of absence from the placement will only be agreed in exceptional circumstances and must be approved by the head of the social work department. Evidence to support the request for leave will be required, for example medical certification.

If a request for leave is approved, a report will be compiled detailing the student’s progress to enable continuity upon return. Dependent upon the length of absence from a placement, the timescales of the placement may be extended to incorporate placement days missed. Alternatively it might not be possible to return to the same placement. In those circumstances students will be required to repeat the placement. All reports from previous placements are shared with future placements.

* 1. **Suspended Placements**

There are a number of reasons why placements might be suspended usually falling into one of two categories;

* + Concerns about the suitability of the placement and/or the provision of supervision
  + Concerns about the suitability of the student as a Social Work practitioner due to a serious breach of code/s of professional practice / placement policies and procedures.

Suspension of a placement will be conducted in strict accordance with the procedures for [Concerns and Professional Misconduct Process.](#_11.2_Concerns_and)

Placement providers can only suspend a placement if a service user is deemed to be at immediate risk and it is not possible to contact the university. A student can be suspended until an urgent meeting can be convened.

Students must not terminate or suspend their own placement.  If a student suspends or terminates their own placement without prior consultation and authority, this may constitute a placement fail and/or be considered professional misconduct that could lead to a Professional Suitability Group (PSG) referral, with a repeat of a failed placement only possible in the next academic year.

# 7. Roles and Responsibilities

This section details the roles and responsibilities of all people involved in the coordination, maintenance and the success of practice placements.

**7.1. Students**

Whilst in placement, students are responsible for:

* + Learning in placement and including relevant lectures that underpin the theory to their practice whilst in placement
  + Ensuring that they are fully aware of all requirements, expectations and professional standards and policies relevant to their placement, the University and their professional and personal conduct.
  + Attendance and punctuality, including when conducting agency business.
  + Preparing in advance for supervision, share responsibility for ensuring your learning needs are being met and capabilities evidenced.
  + Informing relevant people if not coping or meeting deadlines within the workplace or module.
  + Attending all formal meetings including mid-way, tutorials and three / four-way meetings.
  + Informing On-Site Supervisor, Practice Educator and Placement tutor and/or Coordinator of any absences, planned or unplanned.
  + Informing their Practice Educator and On-Site Supervisor if there are any circumstances that may impact negatively upon their progress in placement at an early stage and throughout their placement.
  + Completing specified number of days pertinent to stage in programme.
  + Ensuring all reports, both for the University and practice placement and assignments are completed and submitted in a timely manner.
  + Developing personal and professional skills as a reflective practitioner, through academic learning, personal and group tutorials and considering the feedback from others, finding creative approaches to working.

**7.2 University**

Students are entitled to:

* Consultation to prepare for the placement and including information about the assessment process and expectations of learning outcomes
* Regular supervision from both the Practice Educator and On-Site Supervisor and to be allocated a named Placement Tutor. Supervision will be an informative meeting where students can expect to explore their progress, receive feedback and plan to meet required learning outcomes. Supervision should also be a forum to discuss any issues of concerns on behalf of the OSS or student
* Access to workshops to facilitate learning requirements
* Be treated fairly and equally and in accordance with equal rights opportunity and legislation (Equality Act 2010) and to be assessed in accordance with the University regulations.

**7.3 Placement Tutor**

All students will be assigned a Placement Tutor whose primary responsibilities are to:

* First point of contact for the student
* Monitor students’ progress and keep relevant parties informed of any concerns / issues arising
* Attend or coordinate action plan meetings and facilitate resolution, working alongside all parties
* Routinely attend all review meetings.
* Provide academic guidance to students
* Liaise with the Placement Coordinator to ensure the quality of the placement learning.
* Maintain an overview and up to date records of all areas of the students’ progress.
* Facilitate the development of anti-discriminatory, anti-racist and anti-oppressive practice, exploring all issues of diversity.
* Facilitate group tutorials / supervision to enhance the learning experience.

**7.4 Placement Coordinator**

The Placement Coordinator is responsible for the procurement and quality of placements and that the standards as stipulated by the professional, regulatory and statutory bodies can be met. Therefore the primary responsibilities of the Placement Coordinator are to:

* Allocate placements
* Ensure the agency is aware of and meeting their responsibilities to promote learning within the placement
* Liaise with module leaders to synchronise and enrich the student experience.
* Provide training for On-Site Supervisors
* Organise, coordinate and support off site practice education
* Provide an annual evaluation and audit report to the course management committee that endorses the quality assurance of placements and learning, to detail and respond to any concerns arising.

**7.5 Practice Educator (on site)**

The role of the Practice Educator is underpinned by the Practice Educator Professional Standards.

<https://www.basw.co.uk/social-work-training/practice-educator-professional-standards-peps>

Which sets out the requirements and responsibilities of Practice Educators when teaching, assessing and supervising social work students. They include:

* Ensuring that the students can meet the relevant professional standards for which they are being assessed by liaison with the placement, service users and carers to identify appropriate work.
* Monitoring, supporting and promoting the students learning experience.
* Assessing the students practice in accordance with university requirements.
* Providing regular formal and informal supervision, at least 90 minutes in duration every five-placement days.
* Creating and facilitating formal and informal teaching, learning and feedback sessions in liaison with the On-Site Supervisor, University and other relevant professionals.
* Implementing an induction plan for the student and advice staff about their roles in supporting and assessing the student’s practice.
* Contributing to the midway and final meetings; be responsible for the relevant reports in accordance with the assessment framework for the course.
* Recording all meetings, including supervision being aware that these may need to be shared in the event of formal investigations / enquiries being made.
* Undertaking a minimum of two direct observations of the student’s practice
* Notifying all relevant parties and the student if any concerns arise.
* Contributing to the quality assurance process and evaluate the practice learning agency and potential.
* Facilitating the development of anti-discriminatory, anti-racist and anti-oppressive practice, exploring all issues of diversity.
* Encouraging students to become reflective practitioners and protect time specified for reflection on a daily basis.

**7.6 Practice Educator (Off-Site)**

The responsibilities of the Off-Site Practice Educator are the same as if they are situated on site, however in addition they must liaise closely with the On-Site Supervisor.

The On-Site Supervisor will be providing supervision in the workplace and so the offsite Practice Educator will provide supervision on a 10 workday basis and for a timed duration of a minimum 90 minutes.

**7.7 On-Site Supervisor**

If the Practice Educator is on-site (based within the practice placement) then it is not necessary for the student to have an On-Site Supervisor, however where Practice Educators are off-site the student will have an On-Site Supervisor.

The On-Site Supervisor is based and works within the same agency as where the student is placed, they are responsible for;

* Managing daily tasks and activities
* Provide supervision every 10 placement days, to compliment with supervision provided by the Practice Educator for a minimum of 90 minutes
* Daily guidance and support
* Allocation of work and as specified within the learning agreement.
* Verification of the work of the student
* Liaising closely with and provide feedback to the Practice Educator
* Participating in review meetings
* Recording all meetings, being aware that these may need to be shared in the event of formal investigations / enquiries being made.
* On site supervisors are not required to provide formal reports, except for within the workbook, a short report detailing over all progress, however they are required to provide feedback that will inform assessments / judgments about the capacity and development of the student.
* In accordance with the university procedures contribute to the quality assurance process and evaluate the practice learning agency and potential.
* Facilitating the development of anti-discriminatory, anti-racist and anti-oppressive practice, exploring all issues of diversity.
* Encouraging students to become reflective practitioners and protect time specified for reflection on a daily basis.

**7.8 Agency Placement Coordinator**

Students will be placed within the voluntary sector or a Local Authority; the ideal is for students to undertake a placement in both sectors over the two placements learning periods. Within the practice agency there will be a nominated person who coordinates social work placements, their key responsibilities are to:

* Arrange learning opportunities within the placement that will meet the course requirements
* Identify and prepare a Practice Educator and On-Site Supervisor
* Liaise with the university to communicate any issues or problems and to attend relevant meetings
* Assure the quality of placements and ability to meet the requirements of the course.

**7.9 Agency Team Role**

The success of a placement learning opportunity is the responsibility of the whole agency / team, specifically they are responsible for:

* The student’s induction including all relevant agency policies, health and safety, confidentiality, maintaining records, dress code, lone working, duty systems and IT systems.
* Identifying who will be accountable for the students work.
* Supporting, guiding, mentoring and reviewing capabilities and competence.
* Identifying any concerns with the student and relevant parties including the Practice Educator / On-Site supervisor.

**7.10 Placement Administrator**

* Assists the placement coordinator
* Available for students and placement providers to contact
* Manages placements on the PEMS system
* Manages access to the PEMS system
* Makes placement payments

# 8. Difficulties in the Placement

If students experience difficulties or problems whilst on placement they are usually resolved informally however where this is not possible, please refer to the table below for a guide about who to contact.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Issue/problem** | **Who to contact** |
| Placement allocation  Type of placement offered  Quality of placement | Placement Coordinator (HEI) |
| DBS queries | Placement Coordinator (HEI) |
| General queries about the requirements of the practice learning module | Placement Tutor |
| Supervision and support: Arrangements for supervision and frequency and amount of supervision that can be expected and any concerns about this process | Placement Tutor |
| Practice Supervisor and Practice Educators absent from placement e.g. due to sickness | Agency Placement Coordinator or Placement Coordinator (HEI) |
| Concerns that the placement is not going well, for example, you are not achieving to the standard expected, lack of opportunity to achieve, feeling unsupported or not getting feedback | In the first instance discuss this with the Practice Educator/On-site Supervisor, and if not resolved contact the Placement Tutor/Placement Coordinator |
| Notifying sickness or absence from placement | Follow the placement polices for notifying non-attendance to the placement and notify the Placement Tutor.  If sickness/absence is more than 2 weeks notify the module Placement Tutor/Placement Coordinator. |
| General enquiries about attendance requirements and hours of work | Placement Tutor |
| Changes to the Practice Learning Agreement | 3-way meeting |
| Changes to your health or character status that impedes your fitness to practise | Division Lead/Programme Lead |
| Witness severe bad practice that compromises the safety of service users | Refer to advice given in the escalating concerns policy |
| Concerns about your health and safety | Agency Placement Coordinator or Placement Tutor |
| If your problem is unresolved after exhausting all normal channels of resolution | Division Lead/Programme Lead |

**8.1 Student Support on Placement**

If a student in experiencing difficulties or requires support for any other reason, they should speak to their;

* Practice Educator
* On-Site Supervisor
* Placement Tutor
* Placement Coordinator

The key roles and responsibilities of these people are detailed in section seven.

**8.2 Contact details for relevant staff Members**

Placement Coordinators: Marina Bailey 073 4200 0172

Jonathan Stringer 07785530610

[socialworkplacements@essex.ac.uk](mailto:socialworkplacements@essex.ac.uk)

Placement Administrator: Laura Mussett [socialworkplacements@essex.ac.uk](mailto:socialworkplacements@essex.ac.uk)

Programme Administrator: Sarah Wiblin 01702 328229

[swiblin@essex.ac.uk](mailto:swiblin@essex.ac.uk)

Programme Lead: Aaron Wyllie 01702 328511

[a.wyllie@essex.ac.uk](mailto:a.wyllie@essex.ac.uk)

Division Lead: Gert Scheepers 01702 328287

[gschee@essex.ac.uk](mailto:gschee@essex.ac.uk)

**9. Complaints**

The University aims to resolve any concerns or complaints quickly and efficiently and if appropriate informally.

In the first instance if a student has an issue or complaint about the placement agency this should be raised with their Practice Educator and/or the On-Site Supervisor at the earliest and most appropriate opportunity. Supervision may present the ideal situation to explore issues or concerns.

If a student does not feel comfortable to discuss a concern or complaint with their PE or OSS, they should speak to their Placement Tutor / Placement Coordinator.

If concerns cannot be resolved informally then the [Concerns and Professional Misconduct Process](#_11.2_Concerns_and) should be followed.

We aim to resolve any issues of complaint as speedily as possible. If you wish to make a formal complaint about any aspect of practice education it should be addressed to:

(Dean of Health and Social Care)

University of Essex

Wivenhoe Park

Colchester

CO4 3SQ

**T:** 01206 874487

**9.1 Whistle Blowing**

All social care agencies have a duty to conduct their affairs in a responsible and transparent manner and in accordance with the SWE Professional standards.

If a student witnesses ‘severe bad practice,’ that is damaging to service users and / or carers then the [Professional Misconduct Process](#_11.2_Concerns_and) should be followed.

The Public Disclosure Act 1999 gives legal protection to students / workers against being dismissed or suffering any other detriment as a consequence of raising, with appropriate senior and line managers any concerns which they believe indicate malpractice within the organization.

# 10. Quality Assurance of Placements

Practice learning modules must meet the SWE Standards for Education and Training, and SWE Practice Placements Guidance.

The University of Essex quality assures all practice learning opportunities in accordance with the Quality Assurance in Practice Learning (QAPL).

**10.1 Evaluation**

Students, Onsite Supervisors and Practice Educators are required to complete an online (PEMS) evaluation questionnaire (QAPL) at the end of each placement. This information is used to monitor and maintain and improve the quality of placements. Information provided will be anonymised and used to complete a report for the social work management committee (Scrutiny Panel), and Social Work England. The information produced will be used to benefit all of those parties involved in the practice learning module and to enhance the student experience and to continually develop the quality of placements.

Placement monitoring is a standing agenda point for the termly Scrutiny Panel meetings.

The Agency Placement coordinator will be able to view student evaluations on PEMS.

Guidance on the process for completion of the QAPL will be provided to Students, Onsite Supervisors and Practice Educators by the Placement Administrator.

**10.2 Practice Assessment Panel**

The Practice Assessment Panel (PAP) has a key role in developing and contributing the quality of practice learning. This is achieved through providing feedback about the practice learning opportunities and assessment process. The membership of the PAP consists of representation from both academic and agency staff. The PAP meets as and when required if there are unresolved disputes at standardisation or if a student contests a Practice Educators decision or if an independent view of assessment practices is required. The PAP will make recommendations to the assessment board but does not have the authority to confirm grades or change the progression of students.

Assessment boards are responsible for the ratification of student results and ensuring that university regulations and procedures have been applied properly in verifying the students’ qualifications and in confirming their right to continue with their studies. All grades are provisional until the assessment board ratifies them.

If the assessment board’s decision does not support the decision made by the PAP, then feedback form the assessment board will be provided.

# 11. Appendices

Appendix 1. Concerns about Placement Progression Flowchart

Appendix 2. Concerns about Placement Progression Forms

Appendix 3. University Fitness to Practise Procedure

Appendix 4. SWE Professional Standards

Appendix 5. Procedure for Raising Concerns about Practices and Behaviour in Practice Partner Organisations

Appendix 2

**BA Social Work: Concerns about Placement Progression Form**

This form is an official record of concerns raised in relation to a student, placement provider, onsite supervisor or practice educator. It is completed by the placement tutor, practice educator and the student concerned.

The use of the form signifies concerns and/or issues on placement that may lead to the student underperforming or failing to perform at a satisfactory level. If improvement is not demonstrated within an agreed timescale, it is likely to result in the student failing the placement. Similarly, the form can be used to highlight and address concerns relating to the learning opportunities available, the onsite supervisor or practice educator.

The form outlines the areas of concern and is used to create an action plan to assist the student, placement provider, onsite supervisor and practice educator in improving performance to the required level. A copy of this form is given to the student, the practice educator and the placement tutor. The original must be given by the placement tutor to the Administrator - Social Work and Social Justice division for confidential storage in the student’s placement file. The practice educator and placement tutor copies must be treated as confidential documents and must be destroyed when the student completes the placement.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Student** |  | | **Date** |  |
| **Year of Study** |  | | **Level/Type of Placement** |  |
| **Practice Educator** |  | | **Placement Tutor** |  |
| **Placement** |  | | **Onsite Supervisor** |  |
| **Indicators of poor performance**:  (these must be aligned with the relevant placement assessment criteria i.e. SWE Professional Standard/ PCF Domain) | | | | |
| Indicator1 |  | | | |
| Indicator 2 |  | | | |
| Indicator 3 |  | | | |
| Indicator 4 |  | | | |
| Indicator 5 |  | | | |
| **Objectives to be achieved by first review:**  (these should include what action will be taken and how success will be demonstrated) | | | | |
| Objective 1 |  | | | |
| Objective 2 |  | | | |
| Objective 3 |  | | | |
| Objective 4 |  | | | |
| Objective 5 |  | | | |
| **Date of Review:** (Usually 2 weeks or within an agreed timeframe after this form is completed and then reviewed within agreed timeframe until student is performing at the required level or has failed the placement). | | | | |
| **Signature of Student** | |  | | |
| **Signature of Practice Educator** | |  | | |
| **Signature of Onsite Supervisor** | |  | | |
| **Signature of Placement Tutor** | |  | | |

**BA Social Work: Concern about Placement Progression Form (Review)**

This form is completed by the placement tutor and the practice educator in discussion with the student. The use of the form acts as an official record of the review of the performance of a student who is underperforming or failing to reach a satisfactory standard or concerns raised about the placement provider, onsite supervisor or practice educator.

The student, the practice educator and the placement tutor must be provided with copies of this form. The original must be given by the placement tutor to the Administrator – Social Work and Social Justice division for confidential storage in the student’s placement file. Practice educator and placement tutor copies must be treated as confidential documents and must be destroyed when the student completes the placement.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Student** |  | | **Date** |  |
| **Year of Study** |  | | **Level/Type of Placement** |  |
| **Practice Educator** |  | | **Placement Tutor** |  |
| **Placement** |  | | **Onsite Supervisor** |  |
| Current student performance in relation to the indicators of poor performance identified on the original concerns about placement progression form dated: | | | | |
| Progress on Objective1 |  | | | |
| Progress on Objective 2 |  | | | |
| Progress on Objective 3 |  | | | |
| Progress on Objective 4 |  | | | |
| Progress on Objective 5 |  | | | |
| **Summary of student’s current level of performance**: | | | | |
| **Recommended further action** | | | | |
| **Is the student now making satisfactory progress? YES NO**  (If yes the student can be signed off from the danger of failure process below) | | | | |
| **If NO what objective are to be met by the next review?**  Set review date and sign off below | | | | |
| Objective 1 |  | | | |
| Objective 2 |  | | | |
| Objective 3 |  | | | |
| Objective 4 |  | | | |
| Objective 5 |  | | | |
| Reviews should usually be undertaken weekly until student is performing at the required level or has failed the placement. **Date of Review:** | | | | |
| **Signature of Student** | |  | | |
| **Signature of Practice Educator** | |  | | |
| **Signature of Onsite Supervisor** | |  | | |
| **Signature of Placement Tutor** | |  | | |

Appendix 3

**11.3 University of Essex**

**Fitness to Practise Procedure**

**Introduction**

1. All University students are required to comply with the regulations of the University regarding conduct. Students enrolled on courses where a practical professional placement is required (including health, social work and education) have additional responsibilities placed upon them regarding not only their conduct but also their professional suitability, as outlined in relevant regulatory and/or professional body codes of practise. Failure to meet these responsibilities can lead to the *Fitness to Practise Procedure* being invoked. Students will be notified on registration if their course of study is subject to the terms of this procedure.
2. The *Fitness to Practise Procedure* applies to all relevant courses leading to awards of the University of Essex, although the office holders identified in Sections A and B below may be adapted where the course is offered through a partner institution of the University.
3. The *Fitness to Practise Procedure* is not intended to replace the University’s membership and Disclosure and Barring Service, disciplinary or academic offences procedures, though the outcome of a case raised under these procedures for a particular student might also raise issues of fitness to practise. Where a conviction, caution or reprimand comes to light as part of the DBS checking process, the matter is considered in accordance with the Student Membership and Disclosure and Barring Service Checks Policy and Procedure. Where a student allegedly commits an act that is actionable under the University’s disciplinary or academic offences regulations then these procedures must be completed prior to instigating action under the *Fitness to Practise Procedure.*
4. In the event of concerns that a student may not be suitable for engagement in the relevant profession, the University’s *Fitness to Practise Procedure* shall be invoked. A student may at any time be suspended or precluded from further study by the University if a concern is raised under the *Fitness to Practise Procedure*.
5. Schools/Departments that are running courses where students are subject to the *Fitness to Practise Procedure* will establish a School/Departmental Professional Suitability Group as outlined in appendix 1 of this procedure.
6. Concerns about a student’s fitness to practise may be raised from any source, including any member of staff, student, placement partner, member of the public, the Occupational Health Service or other agencies such as the Police or Social Services. Concerns about fitness to practise may involve a range of actions or omissions relating to professional conduct or professional suitability but may include any of the following:
7. actions that are harmful to service users, other members of the public or service providers
8. actions that are likely to constitute an unacceptable risk to the student or others
9. failure to disclose information about previous matters relating to their professional suitability prior to registration on the course, including health, previous convictions and cautions
10. contravention of the relevant professional code of conduct
11. concerns about health[[1]](#footnote-1) or wellbeing, including a failure to seek appropriate medical treatment or other support; unreasonable failure to follow medical advice or care plans and treatment resistant conditions which might impair fitness to practise
12. actions that are prejudicial to the development or standing of professional practise.

7 This Procedure includes normal timescales. Every effort will be made to expedite the overall process and meet the normal timescales. However sometimes circumstances arise which mean that exceptionally the normal timescales will not be met. In these cases the student will be contacted and informed of the adjusted timescale.

**A Procedure for dealing with concerns about a student’s fitness to practise**

A1 Concerns about the fitness to practise of a student shall be made in writing to the Professional Suitability Group of the Department/School offering the professional course.

A2 It must be borne in mind that an allegation raising concerns about fitness to practise is a serious and potentially defamatory one. Consequently it is essential that the proceedings should be conducted on a basis of strict confidentiality.

A3 On receipt of a written allegation, the Professional Suitability Group, in consultation with the relevant Course Director or equivalent, shall:

1. take such immediate action as is deemed appropriate in the circumstances to safeguard all relevant parties, but without prejudice to the outcome of the enquiry
2. normally within five working days of receipt of the allegation shall confirm in writing the nature of allegation made, the action taken under A3 (a) above and the procedures for dealing with the allegation
3. normally within ten working days of the receipt of the allegation either:
4. decide no further action is required, or
5. appoint an Investigating Officer from the list approved by the Academic Registrar for this role.

A4 The Investigating Officer shall impartially assemble the evidence relevant to the case in a timely manner. Appropriate methods for gathering evidence will normally include

* Interviewing the student concerned, who may be accompanied by a student or other member of the University, the relevant partner institution or the Students’ Union if he or she wishes. The interview can be conducted by telephone if appropriate.

and may include:

* Interviews with relevant University staff, students, professional or practice partner colleagues
* Obtaining a written professional opinion on the effect of the student’s behaviour or state of health/wellbeing on their fitness to practise
* Obtaining other relevant documents and other information
* Obtaining information about the student’s progress on the course.

A5 The Investigating Officer shall prepare a written report for the Professional Suitability Group, normally within fifteen working days of the case being referred to him/her. The report shall not pass judgement nor recommend a particular course of action.

A6 If the Professional Suitability Group deems that no *prima facie* case has been made they shall inform the student in writing.

A7 If the Professional Suitability Group deems that a *prima facie* case has been made against the student, they shall refer the case as expeditiously as possible to a Fitness to practise Committee which shall be appointed, normally within five working days, by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education). The Committee shall normally comprise the following, but will also conform to the requirements of the relevant professional and/or regulatory body:

1. an Executive Dean, his/her Deputy or the Dean of Health who has had no previous involvement with the case as Chair
2. two members of academic staff from the relevant subject discipline within the School who have had no previous involvement in the case
3. one practicing member of the relevant profession who is from outside the University and who has not been associated with teaching the student.

A8 The Secretary of the Fitness to practise Committee shall be the Academic Registrar or his/her representative.

A9 The Professional Suitability Group shall submit to the Secretary of the Fitness to practise Committee all relevant evidence, including the report of the Investigating Officer, and a case summary. The Secretary shall convene a meeting of the Committee as soon as possible and send copies of the evidence to the members of the Committee and at the same time to the student concerned a minimum of ten working days before the meeting.

A10 The student should submit to the Secretary of the Fitness to practise Committee any papers for the consideration of the Committee at least five working days before the meeting.

A11 All representations to the Fitness to practise Committee should be submitted in writing. Exceptionally the Committee may ask for witnesses to attend in person.

A12 The student will normally be required to attend the meeting of the Fitness to practise Committee in person. In the event of their non-attendance, without very good reason, the Committee meeting will continue in their absence.

A13 If the student wishes, they may bring to the Committee meeting a student or employee of the University, the relevant partner institution or the Students’ Union to help him/her in presenting his/her case to the Committee.

A14 The Head of Department/School or another member of the Departmental/School Professional Suitability Group will attend the meeting of the Fitness to practise Committee to set out evidence relating to the concern. The Head/member of Professional Suitability Group should not propose or comment on any outcome or penalty which might be imposed.

A15 The Head/Professional Suitability Group member is not a member of the Committee and can only attend when the student is present (not before and after). Head/Professional Suitability Group member is not permitted to ask questions of the student during the meeting except through the Chair

A16 The Fitness to practise Committee will operate on the principle of ‘the balance of probability’ rather than that of ‘beyond reasonable doubt’.

A17 The conduct of the Fitness to practise Committee is at the discretion of the Chair but shall normally proceed as follows:

1. The members of the Committee have a preliminary discussion without the student, the student’s representative or the Head/Professional Suitability Group member being present.
2. The student, the student’s representative and the Head/Professional Suitability Group member enter the room and the Chair introduces all those present.
3. The Chair checks that the student has received details of the concern and any supporting documentation.
4. The Chair explains the order of proceedings to the student.
5. The evidence relating to the concern about fitness to practise is then presented by the relevant Head or member of the Professional Suitability Group, and members of the Committee, the student and the student’s representative are invited to put questions to them. `
6. The Chair then invites the student to put forward a case orally if he or she wishes to do so including any mitigation, and members of the committee (but not the Head) are invited to put questions to the student.
7. The Chair invites the student’s representative to put forward any additional statement.
8. Exceptionally the Committee has the power to call witnesses who shall only attend to present their evidence and to answer questions that the Committee or other party may put to them through the Chair. Once their evidence has been heard and there are no more questions, witnesses shall be required to withdraw
9. The Chair invites the student to make any final response.
10. The student, the student’s representative and the Head/Professional Suitability Group member are then asked to leave the room. The Committee then deliberates and comes to a decision. If the Committee is unable to reach a decision then the Committee may be adjourned.
11. If the Committee finds on the balance of probability that the case is proven, they determine any further action or sanction, clarifying the reasons for the choice of penalty.
12. The student is then recalled to the room and is told the decision, the reason for the decision and details of any further action or sanction if appropriate. The Head /Professional Suitability Group member may be present during this final stage.

A18 Only members of the Committee and the Secretary shall be present while a Committee is reaching a decision on the outcome, or on any penalty or other action

A19 The Committee shall have the power to seek such other evidence as it deems necessary. The Committee may be adjourned to allow for such evidence to be gathered

A20 If the Committee decides that the fitness to practise concern is unproved, it will dismiss the case

A21 If the Committee decides the fitness to practise concern is proven then it shall have the power to do any one or combination of the following:

1. Permit the student to continue on the course with no further action required
2. Permit the student to continue on the course with adjustments
3. Issue a formal warning
4. Discontinue the placement and institute arrangements for locating an alternative placement if this is permitted under the Rules of Assessment
5. Require the student to intermit from the course for a defined period of time with return subject to conditions
6. Require the student to withdraw from the course because they are unfit to practise
7. Impose such other penalty as it considers appropriate, provided that no such penalty requires or implies a concession or exemption under the Rules of Assessment

A22 The Secretary shall confirm to the student and the Head of Department/School concerned in writing within five working days the decision, the reason for the decision and details of any sanction or further action. The student shall be informed of the right to appeal against the decision in accordance with Section B (below).

A23 If the fitness to practise case against the student is found proven, the Head of Department/School and the Academic Registrar shall decide whether a report should be made to the relevant professional or regulatory body and/or the student’s employer, if applicable. The student will be informed in writing whether such a report will be made.

**B Procedure for Appeals against Decisions of the Fitness to practise Committee.**

B1 Written notice of appeal by the student must be lodged with the Academic Registrar within five working days of the student being informed of the decision by the Fitness to practise Committee.

B2 In the event of an appeal, the Academic Registrar and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) shall decide whether the grounds for the appeal are covered by the provisions of paragraph B5 below and warrant further consideration by a Fitness to practise Appeals Committee. If they agree that there are no grounds for further consideration of the appeal, the Academic Registrar shall inform the student in writing giving the reasons for that decision.

B3 If the Academic Registrar and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) decide that the appeal does warrant further consideration, the Academic Registrar shall refer the case to a Fitness to practise Appeals Committee which shall be appointed by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) and which shall normally comprise:

1. a Chairman who shall be from a different Faculty from that relevant to the course
2. one member of staff from the relevant subject and professional discipline within the Faculty concerned who shall not be the Head of Department/School or the Investigating Officer or a member of the Professional Practise and Conduct Committee
3. one senior practicing member of the relevant profession who is from outside the University and who has not been associated with the teaching of the appellant.

B4 The Secretary of the Committee shall be the Academic Registrar or his/her representative.

B5 The grounds for the appeal shall be one or more of the following:

1. that new evidence had become available that could materially affect the Fitness to practise Committee's decision
2. that there was evidence of procedural irregularity or prejudice or bias in the conduct of the hearing by the Fitness to practise Committee.

B6 The Committee shall have before it all documents relating to the original hearing, together with a written statement submitted by the student setting out the grounds for the appeal. The Committee shall not proceed by way of a re-hearing but shall have power to require the presentation of such further evidence as it deems necessary.

B7 The Committee shall have the same powers as the Fitness to practise Committee and may confirm the decision of the Fitness to practise Committee or substitute such other decision as it considers appropriate.

B8 When the Committee has reached its decision, the Secretary shall inform the student and the Head of Department/School concerned in writing.

B9 If any action had been taken under paragraphs A23 above to inform the relevant professional or statutory bodies and/or the student’s employer, the Head of Department and the Academic Registrar shall decide whether any further report should be made to the professional or statutory bodies and/or the student’s employer concerned in the light of the decision of the Committee.

B10 The decision of the Fitness to practise Appeals Committee shall be final.

B11 The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) provides an independent course for the review of student complaints or appeals. When the University’s internal procedures for dealing with complaints and appeals have been exhausted, the University will issue a Completion of Procedures letter. Students wishing to avail themselves of the opportunity of an independent review by the OIA must submit their application to the OIA within three months of the issue of the Completion of Procedures letter. Full details of the course are available on request and will be enclosed with the Completion of Procedures.

**Guidelines on the Operation of a Departmental Professional Suitability Group**

* These guidelines are only relevant for Departments/Schools that are running courses where a professional or regulatory body has concerns for a student’s fitness to practise. These students will be subject to the *Fitness to Practise Procedure*.
* Any concerns raised under the *Fitness to Practise Procedure*, will initially be made to a Departmental/School Professional Suitability Group so all relevant Departments/Schools will need to establish such a group.
* There are a number of different policies and procedures where the outcome for a particular student might raise issues of fitness to practise. These procedures operate separately from each other but there is a need for them to be considered as a whole in assessing a student’s suitability for practise.
* Information on Academic Offences cases, Disciplinary cases and Progress cases will be reported to the Professional Suitability Group within the Department/School.
* The Professional Suitability Group will receive and consider reports from all the relevant sources and then make appropriate referrals
* Professional Suitability Groups will vary in operation dependent on the needs of the Department/School and the relevant professional/regulatory bodies.
* In Departments/Schools which run courses for which it is a requirement, the Professional Suitability Group will consider all students who need to be ‘signed off’ as being of good character as part of their programme of study and will make the appropriate report to the Board of Examiners.
* Departments/Schools must ensure that students are informed of the operation of the departmental Professional Suitability Group and other processes relating to fitness to practise. This information should appear in student handbooks.

**Constitution of a Professional Suitability Group**

* The constitution of the Professional Suitability Group will vary in operation dependent on the needs of the department and may need to take account of the requirements of relevant professional/regulatory bodies. The membership of the group may vary dependent upon the reason it has been convened.
* The minimum requirements for membership of the group are:
* The Head of School/Department will chair the group
* There shall be at least two other members
* A majority of the members of group should be members of staff working on courses where the students are subject to the *Fitness to Practise Procedure*
* Other individuals may be co-opted into the group as appropriate. This may include, for example, the Programme Lead for a particular student under consideration or a member of staff with a particular clinical of professional background relevant to the case under consideration

**Remit of the Professional Suitability Group**

The Professional Suitability Group will:

* only consider students who are on programmes which are subject to *Fitness to Practise Procedure*
* have a remit to consider any report submitted to it as part of the *Fitness to Practise Procedure*
* will, where relevant, consider any student on courses where students are required to be signed off as being of good character as part of their course, and either confirm to the Exam Board that there are no issues to raise, or deal with any issue arising under the *Fitness to Practise Procedure*
* be a central point, established at Departmental/School level, to which the outcomes of a number of different processes can report. These are: Disciplinary procedures, Academic Offences Procedures, outcome of Progress Committee, Exam Board. It might also consider reports from Occupational Health, Student Support, or reports made directly from a placement.
* have referral powers as outlined under the *Fitness to Practise Procedure*

**Operation of group**

* The Professional Suitability Group will meet on an ad hoc basis and may meet ‘virtually’ to consider any referral made as outlined in the *Fitness to Practise Procedure,* keeping to the appropriate timescale where required.
* For programmes where it is a requirement, the Professional Suitability Group will also need to meet before relevant exam boards, to review all students on the programmes to verify professional suitability and make referrals if necessary
* A record should be kept of all cases considered by the Professional Suitability Group, noting decisions made.

Appendix 4

11.4 **Social Work England Professional Standards**

Social work courses aim to ensure that students develop the skills and knowledge necessary to meet the professional standards by the time they complete the course. Although we do not regulate students, we do expect them to understand and work towards our professional standards in preparation for when they apply for registration.

Students should make sure that during their course, including while they are on placement, they do not do anything that contravenes the professional standards or the policies and procedures of their course or placement provider.

The qualifying education and training standards are the standards against which we will assess and approve social work education and training courses.

**Education Training Standards**

[Education and training standards - Social Work England](https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/standards/education-and-training-standards/)

**Practice Placements Guidance**

[Practice placements guidance - Social Work England](https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/standards/practice-placements-guidance/)

**Social Work England Professional Standards**

<https://www.socialworkengland.org.uk/standards/professional-standards/>

Appendix 5

**School of Health and Social Care**

**University of Essex**

**Procedure for raising Concerns About Practices and Behaviours in Practice Partner Organisations**

AIM……………………………………………………………………………………. 1

POLICY STATEMENT……………………………………………………………… 1

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PROCEDURE FOR REPORTING DISCRIMINATORY BEHAVIOUR…………. 4

**AIM**

This document sets out how the School of Health and Social Care at the University of Essex supports students and staff who experience racism and discrimination whilst undertaking practice placements as part of their programme of study. All practice placements are undertaken within organisations with whom the University have an established partnership agreement. In line with the university’s commitments as set out in its Equality and Diversity Policy 2019-25, **we expect that partner organisations and their employees share similar values to the university, and have policies and procedures in place to address, challenge and tackle racism and discrimination.**

**POLICY STATEMENT**

This policy document has been constructed in alignment with the university’s policy statement on equality, diversity and inclusion:

* The University of Essex celebrates diversity, challenges inequality and is committed to nurturing an inclusive and diverse community that is open to all who have the potential to benefit from membership of it, and which ensures equality of opportunity for all its members.
* We expect all members of our communities, employees, workers, contractors, partners, students and visitors to be treated, and to treat others, with dignity and respect. We do not tolerate discrimination against any individual or groups of people because of their age, gender identity, marriage and civil partnership status, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, because they have a disability, or because they are pregnant, breastfeeding or have recently given birth.
* To support our value-commitment to inclusivity, we extend protection from discrimination beyond our legal obligations to cover other forms of difference such as socio-economic background, political beliefs and affiliations, family circumstances, appearance, personal interests.

**Introduction**

1. This Disclosure Procedure (referred to as “The Procedure”) applies to all partner organisations who provide practice-based learning within their services to students registered on programmes involving practice placements in health, social care and education. The Procedure supplements the [University’s Whistleblowing Policy](https://www.essex.ac.uk/governance-and-strategy/governance/policies), which applies to practices within the university.
2. The Procedure relates to any incident which contravenes the Equality Act (2010); other legislation relating to bullying, harassment and hate crime; professional codes of practice; partnership agreements or other significant breaches in policy, irrespective of whether the incident is directly related to the educational process.
3. The Procedure applies to all relevant programmes leading to awards made by the University of Essex. It is designed to ensure that members of the university (students and staff) can undertake their learning and working in a safe and welcoming environment without fear of prejudice, exclusion or hate.
4. The Procedure provides a context for raising concerns about discrimination, malpractice, unlawful behaviour or other serious wrongdoing in the workplace without fear of reprisal. The Procedure is intended to cover concerns which are in the public interest and may involve any of the following:
   1. Discrimination based on age, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability or any other protected characteristic by anyone present in the organisation;
   2. Committing a criminal offence;
   3. Harassment and/or bullying
   4. Failure to observe a legal obligation or to comply with an instrument of governance;
   5. Endangering health or safety or the environment;
   6. Administrative malpractice (financial or non-financial);
   7. Abuse of service users;
   8. Other improper conduct or unethical behaviour;
   9. Suppression or concealment of any information relating to any of the above.
5. The above is not intended to be a comprehensive list and there may be other examples not included above that members of the university can raise. These will be considered seriously.
6. The University recognises that members of the university community (students and staff) have a duty to report discriminatory, dangerous, abusive, or exploitative behaviours and practices. The Procedure also recognises the relative powerlessness and vulnerability of students who may be undergoing a process of assessment by practice-based staff during their placement. The University takes seriously its responsibilities towards students and regards it as important that students are able to voice their concerns and that their interests are safeguarded as far as possible.
7. No detrimental action of any kind will be taken against a member(s) of the university community (student or staff) raising a concern of the nature described above, provided that it is done without malice and in good faith. A malicious complaint, however, could result in disciplinary action.

**Initial Advice and Guidance**

If you observe, or are involved in, a practice-based incident that raises serious concerns, you are advised to take the following steps.

**Firstly, seek support**. Speak to someone you trust and feel comfortable with, this could be a personal tutor or colleague, a bullying or harassment adviser, a ‘Speak Up Guardian’, or a student representative. You can also access [wellbeing support services](https://www.essex.ac.uk/student/professional-services/student-wellbeing-and-inclusivity-team), where you will be able to speak to someone confidentially.

**Secondly, challenge behaviour** (only if possible). If students and staff feel they are able to challenge the behaviour, a calm and non-confrontational approach often works best. This gives the other person a chance to apologise, reflect and learn.

**Thirdly, keep a record**. Consider writing or recording voice notes on your phone to remind yourself of the incident(s), while ensuring these are protected and secure. Keep things simple and stick to the facts. Take note of date; time; place; who was there; what happened; how you felt.

**Fourth, report behaviour and complain**. Students and staff should familiarise themselves with the formal procedures for reporting and dealing with harassment or similar behaviour as outlined below.

**Procedure for Reporting Discriminatory behaviour**

**1** A member(s) of the university (student or staff) wishing to report an incident should report their concerns to **a trusted person** in the university. For students this will usually be the personal tutor, divisional placement lead, or programme lead – but could be another staff member that the student trusts. For staff this will usually be the line manager, academic adviser or mentor.

**2** The **trusted person** will advise the student or staff member on the preparation of a Statement setting out the issue or incident. The trusted person will familiarise the student or staff member with the contents of this Procedure. It is **not** the role of the **trusted person** to draft the Statement or to counsel for or against its submission, but to offer support.

**3** The **trusted person**, in collaboration with the student or staff member reporting the concern, may determine one of the following actions:

**Informal action**

* Raise the concern with the relevant team manager or education lead and, where appropriate, the staff involved to challenge the behaviour.

**Formal action**

* Qr code

  Description automatically generatedThe person reporting the behaviour, in collaboration with **the trusted person**, should complete an incident report form by clicking on the QR code or link below:

<https://essex.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3rwuocmmJT0eKz4>

* The Director of Practice Partnerships will support **the trusted person** to pursue an investigation through the provider organisation’s complaints procedure.
* The Director of Practice Partnerships will support **the trusted person** to forward the Statement to a named person at the organisation (usually the person who oversees practice placements in that organisation) requesting that the matter be investigated urgently.
* The Director of Practice Partnerships will support **the trusted person** to explain the expectation of a formal investigation, requesting an indicative timeframe and the requirement to provide a response to **the trusted person** and Director of Practice Partnerships that includes outcomes and actions taken or planned.
* The Director of Practice Partnerships will support **the trusted person** to follow-up with the named person at the placement organisation to monitor the progress of the investigation.

**Options for students who are mid-placement**

* Remain in current placement area with the same educator
* Remain in the same placement area with a different educator
* Transfer to another placement area, where this is possible within the existing placement circuit

Support for HSC staff can be provided by the HSC Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Lead and identified Committee members.

**4** The Director of Practice Partnerships and HSC Placements Team will retain oversight of the cases that are reported. Anonymised details of the cases may, as required, be shared with the others. Non-anonymised details will only be shared with the consent of the person raising the concern.

**5** All practice partner organisations must identify an appropriate **contact person** for the purposes set out above, who is competent to implement an appropriate internal investigation. Normally this will be via the organisation’s own established raising concerns procedure, complaints procedure or whistleblowing process. Where no such process currently exists, the placement organisation will be required to put in place an appropriate process. This will set out the circumstances in which such a procedure might be invoked and confirm the rights of anonymity and freedom from discrimination for the member of the university submitting a Statement. The practice partner organisation would normally be expected to complete their investigation within **28 days of receiving the report**. If the investigation is not completed within this timeframe, an update on progress and an estimated date of completion should be provided by the placement provider to the Director of Practice Partnerships and **the trusted person**.

**6** On conclusion of the investigation by the organisation concerned, a report setting out the findings, outcomes and actions taken will be submitted by the organisation to **the trusted person** and the Director of Practice Partnerships, who will forward the findings to the Dean of School as well as the student or staff member who raised the concern. All parties involved must undertake to keep information relating to the specific outcome of the investigation confidential. Outcomes of investigations will be retained by all parties. The university will retain information for review of quality assurance processes and reserves the right to share strictly anonymised outcomes for the purposes of shared organisational learning, where both organisations and the member making the referral have provided consent for this information to be used in this way.

**7** If the University is satisfied that the practice partner organisation is fulfilling its responsibilities under the relevant laws, partnership agreements, professional codes of practice, or other policies, then no further action will be taken. Where this is not the case, the University will take further action to fulfil its own responsibilities towards its members (for example, by reviewing the suitability of that organisation to offer placements) and the wider public (for example by referring its concerns to the relevant professional body).

**8** If the student or staff member of the university who raised the concern is not satisfied with the process or outcome of the investigation at any point, they may make a formal complaint under the University’s *Complaints Procedures*.

1. By Health we are not referring to pre-existing medical conditions or disabilities that the student has already disclosed and where reasonable adjustments have been made to enable the student to access their study. Cases will be considered where disability prevents the student meeting the core competences after adjustments have been considered or made or where this has implications for the safety of the student, patients, service users or colleagues [↑](#footnote-ref-1)