

Case study

Reference number

Subject details (fields in red to be completed by DfE staff)

Teaching Partnership name	Kent, Medway and the South East Social Work Teaching Partnership (KMTP)
Lead Organisation	Medway Council
Sector	Social Work
Subject	Practice Support and Development
Potential related work area	Placement and Curriculum Workforce and Labour Market Planning

Case study details

Main title

Driving up the quality of placements and Practice Educator CPD.

Introduction (max 100 words)

Kent County Council (KCC) and Medway Council (MC) provide an average of 105 practice placements per year for social work students for the HEIs in the partnership. In Medway their Student Faculty has been in place for over 5 years and placements are identified and allocated through the Student Faculty of the Social Care Academy. KCC are moving towards this model and has developed a new allocation process this year.

Feedback from the HEI Practice Panels is generally positive and they mostly feel supported by the practice educators and the teams, however this can be affected by organisational transformation and staff shortages. Over 95% of Practice Educators are within the LAs and with only a very small number of independent PEs this is well below the DfE target of 20%. MC does not use any independent PEs and KCC only uses a small number but even these are either provided by the HEI partners or are contracted by KCC.

The Teaching Partnership has enabled the LAs to review their offer of student placements and put in place a CPD programme for Practice Educators.

Fact box

In Medway Council:

There is a total of 59 Practice Educators.
Over 60% are qualified to PEPS Stage 2 level.

Placements numbers

2018/19

- 21 practice placements were provided in the 2018/19 academic year and in addition there were 4 Step Up to Social Work students and 5 x 70 day first placements provided by the Student Social Workers in School Settings (SSWISS) and 17 Readiness for Practice shadowing placements of 2 – 5 days.
- The SSWISS placements were developed by the Social Work Student Unit Supervisor who was also the Practice Educator for these placements.
- 14 social workers were supported to undertake PEPS training.

2019/20

- A total of 19 placements are being provided in the current academic year – 18 x 100-day final placements and 1 x 70-day first placement. In addition, there are 6 Step Up to Social Work students who will be undertaking first and second placements during 2020 and 17 Readiness for Practice shadowing placements of 2 – 5 days. There will also be 6 Social Work Apprentices.
- 18 social workers are being supported to undertake PEPS training – 10 on PEPS Stage 1 and 8 on PEPS Stage 2.

In Kent County Council:

There are over 200 Practice Educators.

Almost 75% are qualified to PEPS Stage 2 level.

Placement numbers

2018/19

- 72 practice placements were provided in the 2018/19 academic year and in addition there were 11 x Step Up to Social Work students, 4 Think Ahead participants and 2 x 70 day placements in the Mental Health Kent Enablement & Recovery Service, plus 21 in-house OU students and 58 Readiness for Practice shadowing placements of 2 – 5 days.
- 47 social workers were supported to undertake PEPS Stage 1 and 22 to undertake Stage 2 training.

2019/20

- A total of 79 placements are being provided in the current academic year – 75 X 100-day final placements and 4 x 70 day first placements. In addition, there are 14 Step Up to Social Work students who will be undertaking first and second placements in 2020 and 18 in-house OU students – 8 on first placements and 10 on final placements. There will also be 25 Social Work Apprentices.
- 33 social workers are being supported to undertake PEPS Stage 1 and 28 to undertake Stage 2.

Quotes

Practice Educators Comments on Practice Educator Forums:

'Gain an insight into PE's experiences, challenges and ideas/strategies that work well.'

'Catch up on any new PE development to refresh own knowledge and practice.'

'Greater knowledge of PE's and ability to contact other PE's for advice and guidance if needed. Good to hear all are sharing the same experiences.'

'I definitely want to be a PE and support a student on placement again.'

'Really liked the opportunity to discuss positives and issues in groups. Got some good ideas to use in practice.'

'Recognition of the importance of the role.'

'Role of PE in enhancing students learning and supporting with linking theory to practice.'

'The forum has provided me with a wide range of information about what to expect.'

Body of case study text

Objectives

- To produce accurate data on the numbers and location of active Practice Educators in the LAs.
- To recruit and train an appropriate number of Practice Educators annually to support placement provision.
- To quality assure Practice Educators.
- To develop and deliver a CPD programme for Practice Educators to meet their identified learning needs to ensure that their knowledge and skills remain current and relevant and to support trainee Practice Educators.
- To undertake an audit with a group of Practice Educators to establish the actual time commitment the Practice Educator role requires to support and teach the student on placement to provide an excellent learning experience.

Impact

KCC and MC now have accurate databases of all their Practice Educators. They undertake a range of practice learning activities and whilst the majority are supporting social work students on placement, the other activities include PEPS assessor for trainee Practice Educators, ASYE assessor for Newly Qualified Social Workers and Practice Educator for AMHP and BIA students.

The databases enable the LAs to see where their Practice Educators are located and potentially how many placements they can provide. If Practice Educators are Team Managers or Practice Managers, they usually undertake the ASYE Assessor role for an NQSW rather than Practice Educator for a social work student. The databases will also inform the target numbers for annual recruitment and training of Practice Educators.

Practice Educator CPD

'We expect that all new practice educators are trained and that this is followed up with regular refresher training and support.' (Practice Placement Guidance, Social Work England July 2019)

Both LAs undertook an extensive survey with the Practice Educators to identify their CPD needs and how they would want these to be met. Their preference was for quarterly themed forums delivered jointly across both LAs. The forums will provide opportunities for joint learning for new and existing Practice Educators. Being part of a larger Practice Educator network will enable them to have access to a broader range of experience and expertise and have opportunities to share experience and common issues and concerns. The forums will also enable Practice Educators to gain a better understanding of their role as a Practice Educator. Attendance at the forums will include both experienced Practice Educators and trainees and they will be co-facilitated by the LA employers and HEI partners

The first joint forum took place in November last year and was well attended. The PEPS programme lead from one of the partner HEIs delivered a session on reflective supervision followed by focus groups looking at PE resources, student caseload and a draft placement evaluation form. The next forum is scheduled for February 2020. The February forum will include sessions on the specific issues faced by students in placement from a BAME

background, supporting struggling and failing students and unconscious bias delivered by academics from both partner HEIs.

Practice Placement Evaluation Tool

The Teaching Partnership is committed to delivering high quality practice placements by ensuring that they are supported by highly skilled and well supported Practice Educators. The Quality Assurance of Practice Learning (QAPL) process is already well established through the HEIs, and to enhance QAPL the Teaching Partnership has developed a Practice Placement Evaluation Tool to provide a more robust and triangulated process to monitor and maintain Practice Educator capability. The tool is designed to capture feedback that is specifically relevant to the placement provision rather than overarching themes. The tool was piloted in KCC and will be used by both the social work student and the Practice Educator to evaluate the placement experience.

Following feedback from the Practice Educator Forum, the tool has been modified and 2 versions will now be used one for the student and the other for the Practice Educator. The Teaching Partnership is looking into IT options to enable the tool to be completed electronically in an online format to make collation of the responses easier.

MC has used the tool to evaluate the 70-day placement and will be using it with all the final year students currently completing placements.

Practice Educator Time Audit

'It is important that HEIs have a shared understanding with employers of the role and responsibilities of practice educators and the time that they need in their working day or week to effectively carry out the role and promote the value of this role with employers.' (Practice Placement Guidance, Social Work England July 2019)

The estimated time that a Practice Educator spends in supporting a social work student on placement does not reflect the actual time they spend as this can be difficult to quantify but it is an issue often raised by Practice Educators. A group of 11 Practice Educators across all service areas in KCC agreed to take part in an audit undertaken by the Teaching Partnership to establish the time commitment more accurately. The Practice Educators kept a record of all the time spent undertaking practice educator activity throughout a 100-day final placement, including the time they spent outside of working hours. The outcome of the audit identified that they spent approximately 7 hours or 1 day per week on practice educator activity.

The outcome of the audit was used to inform the section of the Practice Educator Guidance on 'Organisational Support for Practice Educators'.

Total hours for 11 Practice Educators

Total hours (daytime)	1922
Total hours (OOH)	236
Total average (daytime)	7
Total average (OOH)	0.7
Highest day time in 1 week	28
Highest OOH in 1 week	19

Practice Educator Guidance

The Teaching Partnership has written Practice Educator Guidance to be adopted by the employer partners. The guidance was informed by the PEPS refresh document and the Social Work England Practice Placement Guidance and addresses the following areas:

- Eligibility
- Recruitment and selection
- Training
- Maintaining currency
- Organisational support
- CPD

The guidance has been submitted to the Teaching Partnership Strategic Board for sign off and has been agreed by Medway's Children and Adult's Directorate Team. KCC has yet to agree this policy through their management teams or the strategic board of their SC Academy.

Practice Educator Recruitment and Selection

The employer partners have begun to implement a selection process for the Practice Educator programme for the 2020 intake. The process is based on the PEPS refresh guidance and will include a written application with line manager support and a panel interview that will include the HEI programme provider.

Guidance for the Onsite Supervisor and Off-Site Practice

The Teaching Partnership has produced guidance for on-site supervisors and off-site practice educators. The guidance sets out the duties and responsibilities for both roles.

Recommendations Post March 2020

- To continue to undertake the survey with Practice Educators annually, to identify any other activities and support required in response to the findings to develop and maintain Practice Educators in the role.
- Continue to recruit and train Practice Educators annually, though the application process to support sustainability and to identify placement availability.
- Plan for the sustainability of the Practice Educator quarterly forums for Practice Educator CPD.
- Continue to monitor the time commitment needed for the Practice Educator role.