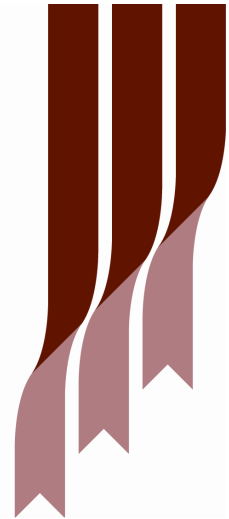


SCOTTISH INSTITUTE  
FOR EXCELLENCE IN  
SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION



# **LEARNING FOR EFFECTIVE AND ETHICAL PRACTICE**

*Agency-based Practice Learning Opportunities*

LEEP Project 1.3 Demonstration Model

Evaluation Report (Abbreviated Version)

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## **Background**

The Scottish Institute for Excellence in Social Work Education (the Institute) is promoting the Learning for Effective and Ethical Practice (LEEP) Project, the overall purpose of which is to improve radically the quality, quantity, range, relevance, inter-professionalism and management of agency-based practice learning opportunities for the new social work degree. In order to achieve such an aim, the LEEP Project has the following objectives:

1. To enhance the integration of learning for practice within the university and in the workplace.
2. To develop innovative opportunities for inter-professional learning within new service settings to serve as models of good practice.
3. To work in partnership with social work agencies to identify possible solutions to problems associated with or arising from the supply of agency-based practice learning opportunities

Three Higher Education Institutions are involved in the development of the LEEP Project: the University of Edinburgh has a leading role in enhancing the integration of learning for practice (objective 1), the University of Dundee is focusing on developing opportunities for inter-professional learning (objective 2), and the Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, is working in partnership with social work agencies to achieve objective 3.

Prior to the implementation of the Project's Demonstration Model, the key themes highlighted by the Practice Audit and Literature Review were used to design two pilot projects, which were run in Local Authority Social Work settings between February and May 2004 (Bruce, 2004). One pilot project was based in Aberdeen City Council's Criminal Justice Service, and another pilot project in Children's Services, Aberdeenshire Council. A total of 12 students –in two groups of six- took part in the pilot projects.

Findings from the evaluation of the two pilot projects were presented in the report 'Project 1.3 Pilot Evaluation'. Such findings have informed the next stage of the Project, which encompasses the design, implementation and evaluation of the LEEP

Project 1.3 Demonstration Model. The Demonstration Model, developed in partnership with Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils Social Work Departments between August and December 2004, has explored an integrated approach to agency-based practice learning based on the following principles:

- Creation of opportunities for interchangeable roles between university and agency.
- Development of the role of practice learning facilitator as a manager, negotiator and co-ordinator of packages of learning opportunities. The practice learning facilitator also has major responsibilities in the teaching and assessment of students.
- Develop service specific and cross sector packages of learning opportunities.
- Development of a team approach to student learning and assessment by engaging a range of staff (links) who coach and supervise discreet aspects of a student's direct practice.
- Implementation of a group and individual pattern of student supervision. The pattern used in the Demonstration Model includes:
  - Weekly 1/1.5-hour case-based supervision with link supervisor(s) ;
  - Fortnightly 3-hour group supervision with practice learning facilitator:
  - 3 weekly 2-hour individual supervision with practice learning facilitator.
  - In addition three joint meetings are arranged over the duration of the agency-based practice learning experience for student, links and practice learning facilitator to come together, one of which is also followed by a mid-point review meeting involving the student's personal tutor.
- Involvement of service users and carers in the assessment process.

## **Aim of the study**

To evaluate the LEEP Project 1.3 Demonstration Model.

## **Sample**

All students and professionals who took part in the implementation of the LEEP Project 1.3 Demonstration Model (n = 51) were initially considered as potential participants in the present study. However, it has not been possible to approach for evaluation purposes four staff members who were involved in the project as link supervisors – two of them due to illness and two having left their job. Therefore, the sample size of the study is 47 participants (n = 47) who are distributed according to the following roles:

- Eight personal tutors;
- 11 students;
- Two practice learning facilitators;
- Two senior managers;
- 24 team managers, team seniors and link supervisors.

## **Methods**

**a) Research design.** A post-test only design, has been used for the evaluation of the LEEP Project 1.3 Demonstration Model.

**b) Evaluation tools:**

- Personal tutors were given the choice to provide their feedback through an on-line questionnaire or an individual semi-structured interview using the same questionnaire.
- A focus group session with the support of a questionnaire was conducted with each of the student groups. An on-line questionnaire was used by one student who was not able to attend the group session due to illness.

- An individual semi-structured interview with the support of a questionnaire was conducted with each of the practice learning facilitators.
- On-line questionnaires were distributed among senior managers, team managers, team seniors and link supervisors.

c) **Evaluation method.** The present study has used a mixed-method approach to evaluation: both closed- and open-ended questions have been formulated in order to collect quantitative and qualitative data, respectively. This approach is adequate to quantify participants' feedback regarding a range of areas as well as to know participants' understanding and insights about the programme and what can be done to improve it.

### **Response rate**

32 out of the 47 participants in the study returned the questionnaire or held an interview or group session in order to provide their feedback, which yields an overall response rate of 68%. Although there are different opinions about this issue, a response rate over 60% can be considered acceptable for survey research (Babbie, 1990; Schutt, 1999). Response rate in this study has been largely affected by relatively low participation among link supervisors: only 45% of link supervisors completed and returned the questionnaire, which might be accounted for by the length and complexity of the questionnaire coupled with time constraints at work.

### **Findings**

The evaluation of the LEEP Project 1.3 Demonstration Model has focused on the following areas:

1. Interchangeability of university and agency staff.
2. Placement preparation.
3. The role of practice learning facilitator.
4. Service and cross-sector learning opportunities.
5. Team approach.

6. The role of link supervisor.
7. Individual and group supervision.
8. The role of senior managers, team managers and team seniors.
9. Access to Information Technology.
10. Service user and carer involvement.
11. Impact of the integrated assessment process.
12. Student contribution.
13. The future: prepared for practice.
14. Other comments and suggestions.

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### **1. Interchangeability of university and agency staff.**

The survey tool included two open-ended questions and one closed-ended questions in relation to this area. The aim of the first open-ended question was to gain a better understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of interchanging university and agency staff in the agency-based practice learning process – e.g., involving academic tutors in providing knowledge to social work agencies and agency staff in making a teaching contribution to higher education institutions. Specifically, the question was: *“In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of interchanging academic and agency staff roles in the agency-based practice learning approach?”*

The only closed-ended question contained in this section specifically asked: *“To what extent has the placement been useful in allowing the student to integrate theory and practice?”*.

The second open-ended question of the present section gave the participants the opportunity to provide *further comments or suggestions about interchangeability of academic and agency staff roles for future agency-based practice learning.*

**Findings:** Helping the student link theory and practice is the most frequently mentioned (n = 14) advantage of interchanging academic and agency staff roles.

Some participants (n = 8) also highlighted the importance of input from academic tutors in order to help students not to lose sight of academic demands. Increased opportunities for higher education institutions and social work agencies to work in partnership (n = 8) is another of the most frequently mentioned advantages of this approach.

Boundaries issues (n = 7), lack of contact of academic tutors with practice (n = 6) and time pressures are the most frequently cited disadvantages of interchanging academic and agency staff roles.

A total of 13 respondents (56.5%) answered that the placement has been useful “to a great extent” in allowing the student to integrate theory and practice, and six respondents (26.1%) answered “to a moderate extent”. No participant reported that the placement has been little useful or not useful at all. Four respondents answered that they did not know the answer or that the question was not applicable to their role.

More involvement in agency work of academic tutors who have experience as practitioners is the most frequent suggestion produced by participants in relation to this section.

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## **2. Placement preparation.**

This section deals with the evaluation of preparation arrangements for the Demonstration Model. For this purpose, participants were asked about four different aspects of the preparation process carried out before or at the beginning of the placement: (i) placement preparation provided by the Robert Gordon University; (ii) information about the agency provided by the practice learning facilitator to the student or his/her personal tutor; (iii) placement preparation provided to the agency team by the practice learning facilitator; and (iv) agency induction provided to the student. In addition, personal tutors were asked to give their opinion on the information about the LEEP Project 1.3 Demonstration Model provided to them before the placement. Specifically, the following six closed-ended questions were formulated:



*“How useful was the placement preparation in the Robert Gordon University in familiarising the student with the structure and content of the placement?”*

*“How useful was the information about the agency provided by the practice learning facilitator to the student/personal tutor prior to the beginning of the placement?”*

*“How would you evaluate the placement preparation provided to the agency team by the practice learning facilitator?”*

*“How would you evaluate the quality of the agency induction received by the student (structure, content, delivery...)?”*

*“How useful was the agency induction received by the student?”*

*“How useful was the information about the LEEP Project 1.3 Demonstration Model provided to personal tutors?”*

Several open-ended questions were also included in this section. Three of them aim to provide further insights about the agency induction provided to the students at the beginning of the placement, and were formulated in the following terms:

*“What elements of the agency induction were more useful and which ones were less useful?”*

*“What could usefully be added to the agency induction?  
And taken out?”*

The last open-ended question of this section refers to further comments and suggestions about placement preparation in future agency-based practice learning. Specifically, the question was formulated as follows:

*“Do you have any more comments or suggestions in this area for future agency-based practice learning?”*

**Findings:** Seven respondents (23.3%) rated the placement preparation in RGU as “very useful” in familiarising the student with the structure and content of the placement, the same number rated it as “useful” and nine (30%) as moderately useful.

No respondent considered this part of placement preparation “little useful” or “not useful at all”. Among students, there is a significant difference between those students who responded “moderately useful” (72.7%) and those who rated this placement preparation in RGU as “very useful” (27.3%)

A large majority of respondents (90.4%) rated the information about the agency provided by the practice learning facilitator to the student or his/her personal tutor either as “very useful” (47.6%), “useful” (9.5%) or “moderately useful” (33.3), with no respondent giving a negative answer (“little useful” or “not useful at all”). This question was not applicable to senior managers, team managers, team seniors and link supervisors. Conversely, agency staff members were specifically asked about the placement preparation provided to the agency team by the practice learning facilitator. No negative response is reported, with five respondents (55.6%) rating the preparation they received as “good” and three respondents (33.3%) as “excellent”.

Feedback about quality of the agency induction provided to the students is overall positive, with only one respondent (4.3%) rating it as “poor” and a large number of respondents (47.8%) reporting that agency induction was “good”.

Regarding usefulness of agency induction, the highest score (“very useful”) achieves the best results (50%) with the rest of responses spread across other categories. Two negative responses (“Little useful”, 10%) were given to this question.

All personal tutors consider either “very useful” (42.9%) or “useful” (57.1%) the information about the LEEP Project 1.3 Demonstration Model provided to them by the co-ordinators of the project.

Among the useful elements of the agency induction, gradual incorporation of the student to the duties of the agency by “shadowing”/observing other workers (n = 7) and availability of staff members (n = 6) were the most frequent responses given by participants. Providing the student with too much information (n = 7) and keeping students out of teams during the induction process (n = 6) appear to be the elements most frequently cited as less useful.

The most frequent suggestions provided by participants in relation to agency induction include:

- adopting a front loaded approach with general themes and then integrate other more specific topics throughout (n = 6);
- spending some time in the placement before receiving some of the information ( n = 6);
- out of hours practice procedures being added into induction (n = 6);
- one day of Care First instead of two (n = 6);
- adapting placement preparation in RGU according to student needs (n = 5).

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### **3. The role of practice learning facilitator.**

This section deals with several aspects related to the role of the practice learning facilitator in the LEEP Project 1.3 Demonstration Model. Several closed- and open-ended questions were combined in order to obtain quantifiable data as well as further comments and suggestions about this feature of the project and how to improve it. Specifically, the following questions were formulated:

*“What were the main functions of the practice learning facilitator in the placement?”*

*“Was the number of contacts of the practice learning facilitator with the students adequate? Do you have any more comments about this point?”*

*“How effective was the practice learning facilitator in facilitating packages of learning opportunities to the students?”*

*“What factors enabled and which ones prevented the facilitation of packages?”*

*“How effective was the practice learning facilitator in addressing professional development issues and individual needs of the students during the placement?”*

*“What factors enabled and which ones prevented the practice learning facilitator from addressing professional development issues and individual needs of the students during the placement?”*

*“What are the advantages and disadvantages of having the practice learning facilitator role in agency-based practice learning?”*

*“Do you have any more comments or suggestions in this area for future agency-based practice learning?”*

**Findings:** A significant number of respondents mentioned providing the student with learning opportunities (n = 19), being responsible for monitoring student progress (n = 18) and being responsible for integrating theory and practice (n = 11) as the main functions of the practice learning facilitator in the placement.

15 respondents (75%) reported that the number of contacts between practice learning facilitator and student over the placement was adequate, while five respondents (25%) answered that the number of contacts was adequate to a moderate extent. No negative response (“no”) was reported in relation to this question, though some concerns (n = 6) were expressed about having the practice learning facilitator working on-site.

The next question explores participants’ opinions about how effective the practice learning facilitator was in accomplishing one of the key functions of the role, namely, facilitating packages of learning opportunities to the student. 26 respondents (86.7%) rated practice learning facilitator’s performance in this area as “very effective” and three respondents (10%) as “moderately effective”, with no negative responses (“little effective” or “not effective at all”) reported. Among the factors that enabled the facilitation of packages, practice learning facilitator working very closely to link supervisors (n = 9) is the most frequent response produced by participants. On the other hand, inconsistencies across students are reported (n = 7) with some students getting more packages than others.

Feedback with respect to how effective the practice learning facilitator was in addressing professional development issues and individual needs of students during the placement is, overall, positive, with a majority of respondents (53.3%) reporting that the practice learning facilitator was “very effective” in performing this function. However, outcomes in this area appear to be significantly lower than those regarding effectiveness in facilitating packages of learning opportunities.

Overall, the role of practice learning facilitator in the LEEP Project 1.3 Demonstration Model receives positive feedback, especially in relation to providing students with

learning opportunities. The practice learning facilitator not being under the pressure of case-based work with services users is also seen as one of the advantages of the approach. However, it is suggested that particular attention should be paid to establishing clear boundaries between practice learning facilitator and the members of the staff involved in the agency-based practice learning process.

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#### **4. Service specific and cross-sector learning opportunities.**

The aim of this section is to explore whether the students had access to sufficient learning opportunities in the agency they were based as well as in other agencies within the same sector. For these purposes, a combination of closed- and open-ended questions was used. Specifically, the following questions were formulated:

*“Did the practice learning facilitator provide the students with sufficient learning opportunities during the placement?”*

*“Do you have any more comments about this point?”*

*“Did the student have access to a range of different services/agencies within a sector during the placement?”*

*“How did this impact on the student’s learning and development?”*

*“To what extent were the different services/agencies interconnected or linked to each other?”*

*“Was the level of work in partnership between services/agencies adequate?”*

*“Do you have any suggestion in this area for future agency-based practice learning?”*

**Findings:** A very large majority of respondents (90%) agree that the practice learning facilitator provided the student with sufficient learning opportunities during the placement, and two respondents (6.7%) consider that such function was accomplished just to a moderate extent. No negative response (“very little” or “no”) was reported.

Also a majority of respondents (63.3%) report that the student had access to a range of cross-sector learning opportunities “to a great extent”. However, nine (30%) respondents answered that this function or feature of the project was achieved “to a moderate extent”. There was one negative response (“very little” access to a range of cross-sector learning opportunities). Widening student perspective of services/agencies (n = 5) is one of the most frequent responses in relation to how access to a range of cross-sector learning opportunities impacted on student learning and development.

A large majority of respondents (73.3%) consider that the different agencies to which the student had access during the placement were “to a great extent” interconnected or linked to each other. Six respondents (20%) answered that the agencies were linked only “to a moderate extent” and one respondent reported that agencies were “very little” interconnected between them. Although a majority of respondents (56.7%) consider that levels of work in partnership between cross-sector agencies were adequate, responses suggest that there might be room for improvement in this area – taking into account how these agencies are interconnected to each other within a sector levels of work in partnership between them appear to be not extremely high. The most frequent suggestion in this area produced by participants (n = 8) stresses the need to achieve a balance between service-specific and cross-sector learning opportunities in order to benefit from the benefits of both approaches.

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## **5. Team approach.**

Participants were asked about the development of a team approach to achieve student progress and development during the placement. Closed- and open-ended questions were combined in order to gain an adequate understanding of respondents’ views in this area. Specifically, the following questions were formulated:

*“To what extent did team members share responsibility for the student’s learning, development and assessment during the placement? What factors enabled and which ones prevented this?”*

*“Do you have any comments or suggestions in this area for future agency-based practice learning?”*

**Findings:** A majority of respondents (62.5%) report that team members shared “to a great extent” responsibility for the student’s learning, development and assessment during the placement. Nine respondents (28.1%) think that this function was achieved only “to a moderate extent” and two respondents (6.3%) gave negative feedback in this area (“very little”).

Established networks, information sharing and a strong team commitment to work together are cited as some of the factors that enabled team members to share responsibility for student learning, development and assessment process. On the other hand, dispersed teams in rural areas is the most frequently mentioned obstacle to a team approach in agency-based practice learning.

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## **6. The role of link supervisor.**

Engaging a range of staff (links) who coach and supervise discreet aspects of the student’s direct practice is another main feature of the LEEP Project 1.3 Demonstration Model. Several closed- and open-ended questions were combined in order to obtain quantifiable data as well as further comments and suggestions about the role of link supervisors involved in the project. Specifically, the following questions were formulated:

*“How many link supervisors were actively involved in the student's learning and assessment process?”*

*“What functions did the link supervisors have in the placement?”*

*“What factors enabled and which ones prevented shared supervision and assessment?”*

*“What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a number of link supervisors involved in the student’s learning experience?”*

*“Do you have any suggestion in this area for future agency-based practice learning?”*

**Findings:** Six students (54.5%) had more than one link supervisor during their placement but a significant proportion of students (45.5%) report having just one link supervisor. Being responsible for all aspects of case-based work (n = 22), providing the student with day-to-day information and support (n = 21) and providing formal supervision/assessment through feedback (n = 18) were the most frequently mentioned functions performed by link supervisors.

Establishing clear lines of responsibilities (n = 5) for practice learning facilitator and link supervisors was the most frequent enabling factor for supervision and assessment being shared by link supervisors whereas staff shortages (n = 3) was the most frequently mentioned obstacle. Access to different styles of work (n = 14) is the most cited advantage of having a number of link supervisors involved in agency-based practice learning and risk of the learning process being too fragmented (n = 10) is the most frequently reported disadvantage of the approach.

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## **7. Individual and group supervision.**

Another of the innovations introduced by the LEEP Project is the combination of a group and individual pattern of student supervision. Several closed- and open-ended questions were used in order to obtain quantifiable data evaluating this integrated approach to supervision as well as further comments and suggestions aimed to enhance it where necessary. Specifically, the following questions were formulated:

*“Was the frequency of individual supervision with link supervisors adequate for the student’s needs?”*

*“Was the frequency of individual supervision with the practice learning facilitator adequate for the student’s needs?”*

*“How useful was the individual supervision the student had with link supervisors?”*

*“How useful was the individual supervision the student had with the practice learning facilitator?”*

*“Was the frequency of group supervision adequate for the student’s needs?”*

*“How useful was the group supervision the student received?”*



*“To what extent was the balance between group and individual supervision adequate?”*

*“What was useful about the combination of group and individual supervision model?”*

*“What was less useful about the combination of group and individual supervision model?”*

*“Do you have any more comments or suggestions in this area?”*

**Findings:** A majority of respondents (54.8%) rated the frequency of individual supervision with link supervisor as “to a great extent” adequate for the student’s needs. Nine participants (29%) rated it as adequate “to a moderate extent” and two participants (6.5%) provided negative feedback (“to a little extent” adequate). Frequency of individual supervision with the practice learning facilitator achieved lower scores, with only 41.9% of respondents rating it as “to a great extent adequate” and 45.2% of respondents considering adequate “to a moderate extent”.

Regarding usefulness of individual supervision, a very large majority of respondents (88.2%) rated individual supervision with link supervisors as “very useful” whereas only 41.2% of respondents gave the highest score to individual supervision with the practice learning facilitator. Nonetheless, nine respondents (52.9%) consider that individual supervision with the practice learning facilitator was “useful” and only one respondent provided negative feedback (“not useful”).

Nine respondents (29%) rated the frequency of group supervision as “to a great extent” adequate for the student’s needs, 17 respondents (54.8%) rated it as “to a moderate extent” adequate and one respondent (3.2%) rated as “to a little extent” adequate. Regarding usefulness, group supervision achieved slightly better results, with 44.4% of respondents considering it “very useful”, 50% “useful” and just one response (5.6%) reporting negative feedback.

14 respondents (45.2%) report that the balance between individual and group supervision was adequate, seven respondents (22.6%) rated it as “to a moderate extent” adequate and five respondents (16.1%) consider that such balance was inadequate. There was a high number of respondents (16.1%) providing a “not applicable/do not know” response.

Participants were also asked about useful elements of the integrated approach to supervision: enhanced support, guidance and advice from both link supervisor and practice learning facilitator, the ability to share learning experiences and peer support are the most frequent responses produced by participants. On the other hand, time pressures is the factor most frequently mentioned as less useful with respect to this approach to supervision. It is also indicated that more individual supervision with the practice learning facilitator would have been helpful. Finally, the suggestion most often given by participants (n = 11) refers to the importance of achieving a balance between individual and group supervision. Nine respondents reported that in those weeks (3 in total) in which there was supervision with link supervisors, group supervision, and one-to-one supervision with the practice learning facilitator, the student felt over- supervised.

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#### **8. The role of senior managers, team managers and team seniors.**

This section looks at the role of other professionals involved in the LEEP Project 1.3 Demonstration Model, like senior managers, team managers and team seniors. Several open-ended questions were raised in order to obtain information about the participation of such professionals in the project as well as suggestions for future practice. Specifically, the following questions were formulated:

*“What functions did the senior managers perform in the placement?”*

*“What functions did the team seniors/managers perform in the placement?”*

*“What was useful about the involvement of senior managers and team seniors/managers in the placement?”*

*“What was less useful about the involvement of senior managers and team seniors/managers in the placement?”*

*“Do you have any more comments or suggestions in this area?”*

**Findings:** In relation to this area respondents have highlighted the importance of such roles in supporting staff members involved in practice learning as link supervisors. Nonetheless, more evidence in this area is needed before any generalisable conclusion can be drawn.

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## **9. Access to Information Technology.**

Two open-ended questions were formulated to participants with respect to student access to information technology during the placement. Specifically, the following questions were formulated:

*“How did access to IT facilitate the student’s learning process?”*

*“Do you have any suggestion in this area for future agency-based practice learning?”*

**Findings:** Among several examples of how access or lack of access to Information Technology facilities impacted on student learning process, the most often reported response (n = 12) refers to how access to E-mail facilitated transfer of material. Six respondents consider that initial IT training as part of the agency induction was helpful. Lack of instant access to IT facilities (because students had to share a computer) and lack of access to the Internet are mentioned as issues to be improved for future agency-based practice learning.

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## **10. Service-user and carer involvement.**

Involvement of service users and carers in the student assessment process is another of the main features of the LEEP Project 1.3 Demonstration Model. Several closed- and open-ended questions were combined in order to obtain quantifiable data as well as further comments and suggestions about this feature of the project and how to improve it where necessary. Specifically, the following questions were formulated:

*“To what extent did service users participate in the student’s learning process and assessment?”*

*“Do you find these levels adequate?”*

*“What are the advantages of service-user involvement in the student’s learning process and assessment?”*

*“What are disadvantages of service-user involvement in the student’s learning process and assessment?”*

*“To what extent did carers participate in the students’ learning process and assessment? Do you find these levels adequate?”*

*“What are the advantages of carer involvement in the student’s learning process and assessment?”*

*“What are the disadvantages of carer involvement in the student’s learning process and assessment?”*

*“Do you have any more comments or suggestions in this area?”*

**Findings:** In relation to service user involvement in the student learning and assessment process, 10 respondents (33.3%) report that service users were “to a great extent” involved, nine respondents (30%) consider that service users were involved just “to a moderate extent” and five respondents (16.7%) report little service user involvement. Nonetheless, a majority of respondents (63.3%) think that levels of service user involvement were adequate.

The most often mentioned advantages of service user involvement in the student learning and assessment process are: importance of getting a holistic assessment and alternative perspectives (n = 11), and empowering services users by giving them the opportunity to feedback (n = 11). On the other hand, the possibility that some service users may have their own agenda, different to the student’s one (n = 11), is mentioned as one of the main disadvantages of this approach.

Regarding carer involvement, only one respondent (3.3%) reported that carers participated “to a great extent” in the student learning and assessment process. Four respondents (13.3%) report that carers were involved “to a moderate extent” and three respondents (10%) report little carer involvement. A large majority of respondents (73.3%) provide a “not applicable/do not know” response, which suggests low levels of development in this area.

The most often mentioned advantages of carer involvement in the student learning and assessment process are: importance of getting alternative perspectives and learning from carer’s experience (n = 13), and empowering carers by giving them the opportunity to feedback (n = 8). On the other hand, ethical issues such as power balance, vulnerability of carers and conflict of interest (n = 12), are the most often

mentioned disadvantages of carer involvement. Finally, it is suggested that, for student development purposes, feedback from service users and carers are collected at mid-placement and later in the placement, and not only at the end.

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### **11. Impact of the integrated assessment process.**

In order to know the impact of the integrated assessment approach developed in the LEEP Project 1.3 Demonstration Model on the students' process of learning and professional development, participants were asked the following open-ended question:

*“What impact has the integrated assessment process used in this project had on the student’s learning and professional development process?”*

**Findings:** 6 respondents mentioned that the integrated assessment process used in the project is positive in order to have different sources of information and evidence. Also among the most frequent responses it was highlighted that this experience will make students more accountable in their work with service users (n = 5) and that this is a very good step into qualified status (n = 5). On the other hand, five respondents reported that, as a result of the integrated assessment process, students felt over-supervised and watched.

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### **12. Student contribution.**

Participants in the evaluation of the LEEP Project 1.3 Demonstration Model were also asked about the contribution that the students made to the agencies in which they did their placement. Specifically, the following questions were formulated:

*“How would you evaluate the contribution of the student to the service provided by the agency?”*

*“How would you evaluate the contribution of the student to the agency’s learning culture (knowledge, reflective practice, values....)?”*

*“Do you have any more comments or suggestions in this area?”*

**Findings:** Feedback in this area is positive. 14 respondents (45.2%) rate the student contribution to the service provided by the agency as “excellent”, and 16 respondents (51.6%) rate it as good, with no negative response (“minor” or “poor”). Regarding student contribution to the agency’s learning culture (knowledge, values, etc.), 16.1% of respondents rate it as “excellent”, 51.6% as “good” and 25.8% as “satisfactory”, with no negative response being reported.

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### **13. The future: prepared for practice.**

In this section, the participants were asked about their views in relation to the levels of readiness of the students involved in the project to work as social workers after their placement. Specifically, the following questions were formulated:

*“How well prepared do you think the students are to enter the profession of social work after their placement?”*

*“How well prepared do you think the student are to enter social work in the area of practice linked to their placement?”*

*“Do you have any more comments or suggestions in this area?”*

**Findings:** 22.6% of respondents think that the student is “very well” prepared to enter the profession of social work after the placement, 61.3% consider them “sufficiently” prepared and 6.5% “not sufficiently” prepared. Scores are higher in relation to the specific area of practice linked to the student’s placement. Thus, 14 respondents (45.2%) mention that the student is “very well” prepared to enter social work in the area of practice linked to the placement, the same proportion of respondents consider the student “sufficiently” prepared and one respondent (3.2%) thinks that the student is “not sufficiently” prepared.

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#### **14. Other comments and suggestions.**

Finally, participants in the evaluation of the LEEP Project 1.3 Demonstration Model were given the opportunity to provide further comments or suggestions in relation to the project – in particular, about any topic or issue not covered in the questionnaire.

**Findings:** Student forum prior to group supervision is mentioned as helpful and supportive. However, two themes stand out among the comments and suggestions most often raised by respondents in this section: financial issues and difficulties caused by rural placements. Firstly, a range of financial issues are commonly mentioned by respondents, namely, reimbursement of travel expenses, car parking costs, mileage, and the need for students getting paid for their placement work. Regarding rural placements, travelling long distances appears to cause difficulties to some students in terms of financial cost, time out of the placement and additional tiredness. It is suggested that RGU should provide guidelines on what it will pay for. Benefits of a collaborative approach –within the agency team as well as between the agency and Higher Education Institutions- are also highlighted.

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#### **Limitations of the study**

As noted above, a post-test only design, at the end of the programme, has been used for the evaluation of the LEEP Project 1.3 Demonstration Model. This research design is useful in order to collect formative feedback. However, since a post-test only design does not involve conducting a baseline measurement, it is not suitable to measure changes in knowledge, opinions or attitudes (Carpenter, 2005). Also, because the study does not include comparison groups, the outcomes shown in the present report cannot be compared with outcomes in different interventions. Finally, low response rate (45%) among link supervisors might be considered another serious limitation of the study. However, it is not clear whether socio-demographic variables among non-respondents are significantly different to those of respondents, so that conclusions in relation to this group might not be necessarily biased. In any case, caution should be taken when analysing the data reported by this group of participants.

## Conclusions

1. A majority of respondents report that the project has been useful in allowing the student to integrate theory and practice and mention this outcome as one of the main advantages of interchanging academic and agency staff roles. It is suggested that more involvement in agency work of academic tutors who have experience as practitioners could enhance the model.
2. Placement preparation in RGU is generally regarded as useful in familiarising students with the structure and content of the placement. However, a considerable proportion of students consider it only moderately useful, which suggests that some improvements could be done in this area. High levels of satisfaction are reported in relation to other areas of placement preparation, with gradual incorporation of the student to the duties of the agency and availability of staff members being mentioned among the most useful elements of agency induction. On the other hand, providing students with too much information is commonly reported as one of the less useful aspects of agency induction.
3. Overall, the role of practice learning facilitator in the LEEP Project 1.3 Demonstration Model receives positive feedback, especially in relation to providing students with packages of service-specific as well as cross-sector learning opportunities. This function, along with the practice learning facilitator not being under the pressure of case-based work with services users, is seen as one of the main advantages of the role. Nevertheless, it is suggested that particular attention needs to be paid to establishing clear boundaries between the roles of practice learning facilitator and members of the staff involved in the agency-based practice learning process such as link supervisors.
4. Most respondents indicate that the practice learning facilitator provided students with learning opportunities across a range of agencies within the social work sector linked to the placement. Access to different agencies,



interconnected or linked to each other, helped students gain a wider perspective of services available when working with a specific service user group. The most frequent suggestion in this area refers to the need to achieve a balance between service-specific and cross-sector learning opportunities in order to benefit from the advantages of both approaches.

5. Regarding a team approach to agency-based practice learning, team members generally shared responsibility for the student's learning, development and assessment during the placement. However, in some cases a team approach to practice learning was accomplished only to a moderate extent. Established networks, information sharing and a strong team commitment to work together are cited as factors that enabled team members to share responsibility in this area, whereas dispersed teams in rural areas are mentioned as the main obstacle to a team approach to practice learning.
6. Although one of the principles of the model is to engage a number of staff members –link supervisors- in the student's learning and assessment process, almost half of the students report having just one link supervisor during their placement. Link supervisors were responsible for all aspects of case-based work, providing the student with day-to-day information and support as well as formal supervision/assessment through feedback. Establishing clear lines of responsibilities between practice learning facilitator and link supervisors was the most frequently mentioned enabling factor and staff shortages the main obstacle to supervision and assessment being shared by link supervisors. Access to different styles of work is an important advantage of having a number of link supervisors involved in agency-based practice learning whereas risk of the learning process being too fragmented is the most frequently reported disadvantage of the approach. It is suggested that a balance in the number of links should be achieved.
7. Individual supervision -with link supervisor and practice learning facilitator- and group supervision are generally viewed as useful by a majority of respondents. Also frequency of individual supervision with link supervisor is commonly rated as adequate. Enhanced support, guidance and advice from

both link supervisor and practice learning facilitator, the ability to share learning experiences and peer support are cited as the most useful elements of the integrated approach to supervision. On the other hand, time pressures is the factor most frequently mentioned as less useful. It is suggested that a better balance should be achieved in this area, with more individual supervision with the practice learning facilitator and less group supervision. Respondents also mention that in those weeks (3 in total) in which there was supervision with link supervisors, group supervision, and one-to-one supervision with the practice learning facilitator, the student felt over-supervised.

8. In relation to other agency members such as senior managers, team managers and team seniors, respondents have highlighted the importance of such roles in supporting staff members involved in practice learning as link supervisors. Nonetheless, more evidence in this area is needed before any generalisable conclusion can be drawn.
9. Access to Information Technology facilitated the student learning process. However, some students did not have instant access to a computer or access to Internet, issues which –as reported by participants- need to be addressed in future agency-based practice learning.
10. Service user involvement in the student learning and assessment process was, generally speaking, moderate. Nevertheless, a majority of respondents report that such level of service user involvement is adequate. Getting a holistic assessment and alternative perspectives as well as empowering services users by giving them the opportunity to feedback are mentioned as the main advantages of service user involvement in the student learning and assessment process. The possibility that some service users may have their own agenda, different to the student's one is cited as one of the main disadvantages of this approach. Regarding carer involvement, a large majority of respondents provide a “not applicable/do not know” response, which might indicate that further investigation is needed in this area. Finally, it is suggested that, for

student development purposes, feedback from service users and carers are collected at mid-placement and later in the placement, not just at the end.

11. Participants report that the integrated assessment process used in the project is positive in order to have different sources of information and evidence as well as make students more accountable in their work with service users. On the downside, some participants report that students felt over-supervised and watched.
12. Student contribution to the service provided by the agency and to the agency's learning culture (knowledge, values, etc.) receive very positive feedback and a very large majority of participants think that the students are, at least, sufficiently prepared to enter the profession of social work after the placement.
13. When participants were given the opportunity to provide further comments or suggestions, financial issues and difficulties caused by travelling long distances in rural placements were the themes most often raised.
14. In conclusion, while a majority of participants in the study report positive results, a number of suggestions are also provided as to how to enhance future agency-based practice learning.

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