

SCOTTISH INSTITUTE
FOR EXCELLENCE IN
SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION



**LEARNING FOR EFFECTIVE AND ETHICAL PRACTICE
(LEEP)**

COMPREHENSIVE KNOWLEDGE REVIEW

April 2005

**The University of Edinburgh
University of Dundee
The Robert Gordon University
With
Glasgow Caledonian University,
University of Paisley
and Open University**

ref. 1.1.6, 1.2.6, 1.3.6

CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction	3
2.0	Methodology	4
3.0	Structure of Comprehensive Knowledge Review	4
4.0	The LEEP Projects	4
	4.1 Integration of Learning for Practice	4
	4.1.1 Introduction and Project Outline	4
	4.1.2 Key Messages	5
	4.1.3 Findings	5
	4.1.4 Practice Examples	8
	4.1.5 Conclusions	9
	4.2 Opportunities for Interprofessional Learning	10
	4.2.1 Introduction and Project Outline	10
	4.2.2 Key messages	10
	4.2.3 Findings	11
	4.2.4 Practice Examples	12
	4.2.5 Conclusions	14
	4.3 Agency Based Practice Learning	15
	4.3.1 Introduction and Project Outline	15
	4.3.2 Key Messages	16
	4.3.3 Findings	17
	4.3.4 Practice Examples	20
	4.3.5 Conclusions	23
5.0	LEEP Projects' Recommendations	24
6.0	References	25

LEARNING FOR ETHICAL AND EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

1.0 Introduction

Between November 2003 and July 2005, the Scottish Institute for Excellence in Social Work Education (the Institute) commissioned The Universities of Edinburgh, Dundee and The Robert Gordon University to undertake a study of Learning for Effective and Ethical Practice (LEEP), the main purpose of which was as follows:

‘To improve radically the quality, quantity, range, relevance, inter-professionalism and management of practice learning opportunities for the new social work honours degree.’

Each project examined a related, but different, topic:

1. The integration of learning for practice was undertaken by the University of Edinburgh, in partnership with Glasgow Caledonian University.
2. Inter-professional learning opportunities were examined by the University of Dundee, in partnership with Paisley University and the Open University.
3. Agency based practice learning was the focus of the Robert Gordon University project.

The projects coincided with a period of major upheaval and change in social work education and practice in Scotland. This had both positive and more problematic consequences. On the positive side, this was a time of great openness and willingness on the part of individuals, agencies and HEIs to look at things afresh; to take risks and try new approaches. The Institute projects took place alongside other innovative developments, including work which was supported financially by the Scottish Executive’s ‘transitional’ money. In this way, we were able to build on, and contribute to the larger picture, sharing our ideas with others as the projects unfolded, and working alongside the new structures and bodies that were emerging. On the more problematic side, planning for the new Honours degrees was well under-way before the projects began, and our own work, inevitably, took time to get off the ground. As a result, it sometimes felt as if we might have ‘missed the boat’ - how could we make recommendations which might lead to improvements in practice learning when key decisions had already been taken? It also became increasingly apparent that some changes required a long lead in time and the life of the projects, (straddling only one full academic session) would not be sufficient to bring some of the planned changes to fruition.

In reviewing the work of the projects overall, it is our assessment that the positives we have identified far out-weighed any negatives. We have felt able to make a real contribution in spite of problems with timing, and it is our hope that the key messages of our projects will be taken forward into the new Learning Centres and in the work of the Scottish Practice Learning Project in the future months and years.

2.0 Methodology

Each of the three projects employed the same general methods:

- A *practice audit* of service managers, practice teachers and social work academics was conducted across Scotland and published as one audit report.
- A *review of literature* was carried out by each project, drawing on extensive literature sources (journals, books and websites).
- *Demonstration projects* to try out new approaches to practice learning were run and analysed by each project.
- A *training programme* to disseminate findings was managed by all the LEEP and Assessment projects working together. This programme took LEEP findings to six sites across Scotland and was coordinated and centrally funded by all the projects.
- The evaluation of all the projects is ongoing. This is being led by the University of Edinburgh on behalf of all the projects

3.0 Structure of this Comprehensive Knowledge Review

This review follows the structure provided in the LEEP programme, so that Integration of Learning for Practice will be presented first, followed by Inter-professional Learning and finally Agency-Based Learning. Each section will cover the same themes, beginning with an Introduction and Key Messages, before going on to present Findings and Practice Examples. The recommendations which are included at the end are shared across all three projects.

Further information on all the projects is available from the Scottish Institute for Excellence in Social Work Education (the Institute) website: www.sieswe.org.

4.0 The LEEP Projects

4.1 Integration of Learning for Practice (LEEP 1.1)

4.1.1 Introduction and Project Outline

This project was led by The University of Edinburgh, in collaboration with Glasgow Caledonian University, and the various practice agencies in the statutory and voluntary sector that worked with us in both the South-East and West of Scotland. In total, 10 lecturers, 16 practice teachers, 8 link supervisors and 39 students took part in the 'demonstration' part of this project. It was this partnership which made it possible to achieve what we have done over the life-time of the project.

The work of the project was monitored and supported by a Project Advisory Group which met at The University of Edinburgh on a bi-monthly basis for the duration of the project. It was chaired by an external social work educator, and included agency managers, practice teachers, students, service users, university teaching staff, the Practice Learning Coordinator, and the LEEP 1.1 Project Manager.

This review will report on the outcomes of three pieces of work which, although conducted separately, each contributed to the project as a whole. Thus findings from the Practice Audit and Literature Review informed the setting up of the demonstration

projects in Edinburgh, Midlothian and Glasgow, and it is the findings from all three activities which have led to our recommendations for the future.

4.1.2 Key messages

1. The integration of learning for practice can be enhanced when efforts are made to bridge the gap between the university and the field.
2. Practice learning should not be seen as the responsibility only of practice agencies, just as academic teaching is not just the responsibility of university staff. This means that lecturers and tutors have a role to play in relation to students' practice learning, just as practitioners have a role to play in academic teaching.
3. Similarly, lecturers and tutors have a contribution to make in the Continuing Professional Development of agency practitioners, just as agency staff have much to teach lecturers and tutors about current policy and practice.
4. There is huge untapped potential for the university and the field to work together in social work education, research, policy and practice. For this to be realised, people will have to take risks, to 'think outside the box' of their traditional professional and institutional boundaries.

4.1.3 Findings

Practice Audit (www.sieswe.org/projects/documents/LEEPPracAudit.doc)

The Practice Audit identified a clear gap between the university and the field and specifically between theory and practice in social work. The phrase that summed up much of the views of practitioners and educationalists alike was 'two separate worlds'. The Audit also demonstrated a real commitment on the part of social workers and academics to doing something about this.

Literature Review (www.sieswe.org/projects/documents/LEEP11LitRev.doc)

The Review of Literature suggested that there was little consensus about what integration of learning actually means. Gibbons and Gray offered one useful definition:

'...integrated learning means integration of theory and practice, the individual and social, art and science, field and classroom' (2002: 539).

It became apparent from the Literature Review that there are many initiatives currently in use which explicitly (or more frequently, implicitly) set out to improve students' integration of learning for practice. These include the use of skills teaching; problem-based learning; reflective diaries; integrative assignments etc. Many of these methods are also seen as helpful in facilitating transfer of learning, a concept found to have strong overlaps with integration of learning (see Cree and Macaulay 2000). The review went on to identify many instances where practitioners and practice teachers are currently participating in university-based activities, such as lecturing and tutoring, practice assessment and course planning.

What was much less in evidence, however, was any discussion of the engagement of lecturers and tutors with the field. It appeared that while practitioners have played an increasing role in social work education, social work academics, under pressure of

writing and research, have all but withdrawn from any meaningful connections with the world of practice. This does not, of course, suggest that there is no interest in the literature on the role of the tutor per se. There is some examination of the importance of tutors as supporters of students' learning, but this tends to be in relation to their university-based, academic learning (e.g. Watson and West 2003).

A very different approach to the integration of learning for practice was found to be operating in one university in the United States, the University of Washington. Their idea of 'collaborative community-based education' provided the project team with a new way of thinking about social work education and practice, and gave us the inspiration for the demonstration projects which followed. (For further information, see www.washington.edu/change/proposals/schcomp.html)

Demonstration projects

In order to try out a new approach to integration of learning for practice, demonstration projects operated at six sites (three in Edinburgh, one in Midlothian and two in Glasgow) between April and December 2004. In each case, a lecturer/tutor went out to the agency to work as 'academic adviser' for one day a week, along with students who were on placement in the agency. In most situations, students were placed in agencies (voluntary and statutory) in groups. Where this was not possible in some Glasgow settings, the students still came together as a group on a weekly basis. 39 students took part in the demonstration projects overall, accompanied by 6 academic advisers.

It should be acknowledged that, at the outset, academic staff who were used to conducting often just two visits to students over the lifetime of a placement were concerned that this new approach might be overly time-intensive. Some practice teachers were also a little anxious that their role in student learning might be compromised in some way by the presence of the academic adviser. In practice, the gains from the project convinced even the sceptics that this was a good way to proceed. Not only was less time spent by academics in travelling to and from students on placement, but by sending students out to placement in groups, we were able to make the most of everyone's time (academics, students and practice teachers alike). We therefore came to see the approach as a more fruitful use of time than traditional patterns, for all concerned.

We did not present a standard 'blue-print' to academic advisers and their placement agencies. Instead, they were expected to negotiate their activities on the basis of agency and student need, as well as their own interests. As a result, they took part in a range of activities, some of which are outlined here.

Work with students included: three-way meetings with practice teachers, group supervision/discussion, dedicated teaching sessions covering, e.g., Critical Incident Analysis, Social Work Research and Theory and Skills. Formal input into assessment of students' work and informal support also occurred.

Work with agency staff was also varied. Academic advisers were able to support practice teachers through, e.g., joint group work and through clarification of university placement and assignment requirements. In-house teaching and the provision of learning materials also took place with agency staff, both professionals and non-professionals. For their part, academic advisers were able to gain insight into current policy and practice within agencies.

An evaluation of the Demonstration Projects was conducted by a researcher from Glasgow Caledonian University. The evaluation involved all key parties (students,

practice teachers, agency staff, academic advisers) and was carried out using one-to-one and group interviews and postal surveys. The report can be found on the Institute website at www.sieswe.org/projects/documents/LEEP11DemoEvalRep.doc.

Findings from the demonstration projects

Key findings included the following:

- Academic Advisers were able to support student learning in a positive way, and group-work was a method of teaching valued by Academic Advisers, most Practice Teachers and most students.
- Informal support given by Academic Advisers to students occurred frequently and was valued by the students; Academic Advisers also felt that they were able to be more supportive to students than otherwise.
- Agency staff appreciated the opportunity to learn about new research from Academic Advisers and also to work alongside them more.
- The learning opportunities that were made available to Academic Advisers through being located in the agencies were greatly valued e.g. the chance to refresh practice knowledge.
- Practice Teachers and other agency staff felt that through being involved in the Project, a closer working relationship had been fostered between the university and the agencies.

After the demonstration projects ended

The work of the LEEP1.1 Project did not end with the completion of the demonstration projects in December 2004. The University of Edinburgh and Glasgow Caledonian University have been continuing to work to 'mainstream' some of the gains of the projects. Examples of this are as follows:

- Practice teachers who were involved in the demonstration projects have been working with lecturers/tutors to develop and contribute to a new course called 'Learning for Practice' at The University of Edinburgh. This course is intended to prepare students better for practice, and, at the same time, improve their integration of learning throughout their period of practice learning.
- Both The University of Edinburgh and Glasgow Caledonian Universities are continuing, where possible, to send students out on placement in geographic clusters with a 'dedicated' lecturer/tutor in charge of these groups. The lecturer/tutor is still responsible for placement and agency liaison, including offering academic input to agencies where this is requested.

4.1.4 Practice examples

A) Work with students

Being in an agency one-day a week made three or four-way meetings more productive as compared with the traditional tutor visits to students on placement in which tutors find themselves in a 'monitoring', rather than supporting role.

Being in an agency also gave academic staff the potential to undertake 'early intervention' work with students who were beginning to experience difficulties during their placements. Catching such problems at an early stage before they developed was of huge benefit to students.

The physical proximity of tutors/Academic Advisers meant that students found the Academic Adviser more approachable, and more involved in their learning.

B) Work with Practice teachers and agencies

One group of Practice Teachers made a direct contribution to the university's teaching materials as a direct result of their closer contact with the university through the Academic Adviser. This closer collaboration had led to discussions about co-authoring a workbook for students coming into children and family work.

Academic Advisers offered Continuing Professional Development to agencies, through supplying literature and references to current reading materials, and through running workshops on topics identified by the agencies. One staff member said: 'through having [the Academic Adviser], the whole organisation has benefited because, you know, it has been about organisational learning as well as students' learning'.

Practice Teachers who were 'less experienced' especially gained from the supportive role that Academic Advisers could provide, simply at the level of providing reassurance that the Practice Teachers were working appropriately to support the students.

C) Academic Advisers

Two concrete examples are offered of how the attachment of Academic Advisers to agencies has led to reciprocal partnership working between the two.

In the first case, the Academic Adviser and Practice Teacher have, since the commencement of the demonstration project, been involved in delivering a number of joint presentations about the project at various public forums e.g. training events of practice teachers' organisations.

In the second example, one agency in Midlothian, and another in Glasgow which had hosted Academic Advisers for the project's duration found the partnership between the Academic Adviser and the practice teaching team so successful that they negotiated an extension of the role to continue with another group of students.

4.1.5 Conclusion

The LEEP 1.1 project enabled us to open new discussions about partnership in social work education and, at the same time, re-affirm some fundamental principles about adult learning and the need to support that learning. The approach we trialled does not necessarily require a huge investment in terms of time or money, but it will require a change in the 'mind-set' of all those involved in social work education and practice. We have much to learn from each other. By taking the risk to 'think outside the box' of our traditional institutional boundaries, we have the chance to enhance the integration of learning for practice of all participants in the learning circle.

4.2. Opportunities for Interprofessional Learning (LEEP 1.2)

4.2.1 Introduction and Project Outline

This project was led by the University of Dundee with partners in University of Paisley. The University of Paisley was simultaneously collaborating with University of Stirling on a parallel project looking at integrated and shared assessment (Project 3.2) where integration of activity and findings with this project was clearly appropriate. The overall evaluation of the LEEP 1.2 demonstration project(s) is being conducted by the Open University (ongoing). At each of the two main sites of the project local partners or stakeholders from a wide range of practice and academic departments participated in helping us develop ideas around interprofessional learning, and in bringing them to fruition. During the first year of the project a management group representing the range of stakeholders met on a bi-monthly basis, either in Dundee, Paisley or mid-point in Stirling. Latterly this evolved into a smaller focused management group with stakeholder involvement taking place at a more individual level. Students were offered interprofessional learning opportunities that were curriculum based in the form of workshops, they were placed in settings which were not primarily social work, and were placed in multi-disciplinary teams. In total, 157*students from social work, nursing, midwifery, education, community education and medicine participated in the overall project (*some social work students participated in more than one activity). While the forthcoming G8 conference prohibited police cadet involvement, police, nursing, education, community education, social work and medical colleagues were collaborative partners.

Both the audit of practice (www.sieswe.org/projects/documents/LEEPPracAudit.doc) and the literature review (www.sieswe.org/projects/documents/LEEP12LitRev.doc) confirmed significant enthusiasm for, and activity around, interprofessional learning opportunities, with clearly identified benefits such as greater understanding of others' roles and responsibilities which is arguably a key component of more effective practice and service delivery. Similarly, the barriers or hindrances to interprofessional learning were clearly identified and well rehearsed in both the audit and literature review. Delays in both the pilot and demonstration project, in fact, reflect the complexity of achieving our goals in spite of our best efforts largely due to the barriers identified in the literature review. Nonetheless, the project set out to explore the *processes* underpinning a range of learning opportunities as well as the outcomes for those participating, namely the students from both social work and related disciplines.

4.2.2 Key messages

1. Interprofessional learning opportunities can and should take a variety of forms throughout professional training
2. Opportunities for interprofessional learning should be integrated , sustained, cumulative and at an appropriate academic and professional level
3. Students from a range of disciplines can learn effectively together within agreed and appropriate learning outcomes
4. Forward planning is essential in establishing opportunities within tightly controlled curricula and where curriculum demands, teaching styles and learning expectations vary significantly across disciplines

5. In spite of these constraints, students from different disciplines can identify broad areas of overlap in their learning experience and professional expectation, such as the need for reflective thinking and the centrality of a professional values base
6. While large groups of stakeholders can forge general agreements and express shared motivation, detailed planning is best achieved between individuals, most effectively those with autonomy to decision-make, such as programme or module leaders or service managers
7. Preparation is essential for both students and setting. Clarity around the task and the skills required to complete the task is also essential
8. The context of the learning experience is important as interprofessional settings offer greater opportunities to develop a wider range of skills and knowledge

4.2.3 Findings (LEEP1.2)

The Pilot projects have informed Demonstration Projects which are currently ongoing and will be reported fully in due course.

Demonstration projects were set up in two main areas of activity

- **Curriculum based workshops** (Dundee) – these were themed workshops around a) the subjects of death (social work and medical students), b) child protection (social work, education and midwifery students) and c) a “chaotic environment” featuring a frail older person (nursing and social work students)
- **Placements (practice learning opportunities) in non-primary and multi-disciplinary practice settings** (Paisley with Quarriers and with Renfrewshire Council, Dundee & Angus) - Youth Homelessness and Homeless Support Project; School Support Project; Residential School; Support projects for adults with complex needs; Housing, Health, Education, S.C.R.A., Voluntary Sector Agencies, Statutory Social Work Agencies, Psychological Services, Pastoral Services, Prison, Community Mental Health Teams, Hospital Discharge Scheme, Neighbourhood Community Project; Collaborative practice with service users and carers

Key findings from the demonstration projects (interim)

- Opportunities for interprofessional learning were warmly appreciated by all student participants - so much so that some students sacrificed holidays to attend and others missed scheduled lectures.
- Planning for such activities took longer than anticipated because of the curriculum planning process and variations in teaching patterns, placement patterns, vacations, and learning styles.
- Careful and thorough preparation is required to ensure students' needs in relation to professional competence is fully understood and shared, particularly by link workers from difference disciplines

- The complexity of establishing and developing interprofessional learning opportunities cannot be underestimated and needs to reflect principles of effective interprofessional practice, ie effective communication, professional confidence, and respect and understanding of others' professional roles
- Effective Interprofessional learning opportunities strengthen professional identity where this is already well established and help to establish this professional confidence where the student is at an earlier stage of learning

4.2.4 Practice examples (from pilot projects as interim reporting)

Dundee pilot 2 involved mixed groups of students (social work, education, nursing both learning disability and mental health, and community education) jointly working on a case study. Four groups comprising students from each of the disciplines (n=4), and two groups without education students (n=3) were placed in Children & Family Centres around Dundee City in order to address the issues raised in a fictitious case study. The case study itself was the result of collaboration between social work, education and community education academics based on real-life practice examples but manipulated in order to present professional challenges to all of the groups involved. The practice settings were real-life operational agencies where the professional staff were briefed to accommodate the student group and, where appropriate, provide guidance and support in terms of directing them to real-life resources and solutions. The exercise was designed to take place within 14 hours over a four day period at a time agreed by the participants to address the case study, and to pursue additional information or visits as required. Students participating were volunteers, therefore arguably already motivated, but they also required to undertake this task in addition to routine class work, or in lieu of class work. Education students therefore had to arrange back up for missed lecture notes and this conflict of interest was perceived by them to be a very real barrier to this type of opportunity.

Preparation for the case study was conducted by the project development worker and involved briefing in terms of setting out the codes of conduct, anticipated learning outcomes, case-study related tasks, practical arrangements etc. The briefing also asked the students, within their allocated small groups, to consider the following:

- To attempt to understand the values of different professional perspectives
- What impact might be experienced by groups having different membership?
- How to negotiate the practical aspects of meeting and working together within time and timetable constraints
- As an ice-breaker, to identify common or shared "professional" terms which produced the words, *empathy, empowerment, facilitate, reflective, child-centred, multi-disciplinary, value-based, collaborative, confidentiality, ethics, advocacy*. These terms were then discussed in the small groups with clear areas of agreement and divergence emerging in individual understanding.

The students were provided with an information pack containing the case study, guiding literature and information related to the working of their allocated family centre and contacts therein. Evaluation of the case study experience was conducted by means of questionnaire and a focus group discussion.

Findings

There was a unanimous response that the exercise was both challenging and enjoyable. Positive feedback was universal in terms of the students' gains in knowledge and understanding of others' roles. They were somewhat surprised that disagreements in approach were accommodated as part of the process of collaboration. They were able to identify clear overlap in their personal and professional values while becoming increasingly aware of where their professional approach differed from others'. This was perhaps most stark in the teaching students' accounts where the nature of class-room based activity was seen to limit opportunities for consideration of a child's wider circumstances. The students valued the support made available by the agency staff, and to be able to observe a wide range of interprofessional practice in action. Not all experiences of such support were as helpful, however, and valuable lessons were learned in terms of preparation. All of the students asked for this type of experience to become a routine part of the curriculum. It was agreed the two days working together had been memorable and, had as much or greater impact than any lecture or classroom format which addressed interprofessional practice. One student teacher thought this experience had made her think about whether children had been able to have breakfast before coming to school and had found out about schools who were providing breakfasts for pupils. A mental health nurse student observed that a lot of her service users' problems had arisen at school and that such links with education were clearly of immense value in helping her understand these problems.

University of Paisley Pilots

As stated above, the University of Paisley developed an integrated approach combining both of the projects in which they were involved, ie *Inter-professional Learning* and *Shared Approach to Performance Assessment*, their reasoning being the nature of the essential relationship between practice learning and assessment.

We evaluated the ability of students to work collaboratively whilst remaining confident in their own professional identity, the process of preparation required to prepare students for inter professional working, the ways in which other professionals can contribute to the performance and assessment of social work students and the contribution that service users can make to the assessment of students. Methods used in the evaluation were

- A questionnaire to all members of the learning team at the end of the placement – to act as a placement evaluation form with additional specific reference to inter professional practice
- Placement reports from Practice Teachers and link supervisors with distinct sections to allow data to be readily extracted.
- Service User feedback – detail dependant upon exploration as to tools and methods

Findings

The opportunities available in these placements seemed to encourage students to develop their understanding of inter-professional practice issues and the policy, legislative and organisational context within which it occurs. This did seem to help students reflect more widely upon their practice, but the development of skills necessary for effective inter-professional practice could be said to be at an early stage. This could be related to the stage these students were at in their training and professional development (D.P.1.) and to the relative lack of power and associated

authority they perceive themselves as having as student practitioners. Students are understandably grappling with their own professional identity and as such may lack confidence to understand or accommodate that of other professions. Organisational constraints and professional competitiveness should also be considered for their potential impact upon effective practice in this area.

Students clearly valued opportunities to gain a better understanding of what other professions and their agencies do and stated that they would be better practitioners as a result and able to offer a more integrated service to service users. Students appreciated working alongside colleagues from other professions, either as link supervisors or within inter-professional teams. The opportunities to shadow other workers, or be involved in joint practice, were considered invaluable. Whilst many of the benefits of inter-professional and collaborative practice are recognised by students, those related to the protection of vulnerable people was not fully appreciated and is an area which will be pursued with the DP2 students in the demonstration project.

Collaborative work with service users was seen as core and students felt more confident in this area. This confidence was borne out by evidence in placement reports, evaluation forms and feedback from the learning teams.

The students involved in the pilot project were DP1 students who had not yet benefited from substantial teaching on inter-professional practice or groupwork. They attended a workshop on inter-professional practice provided jointly by the University and Quarrriers as a support to placement, and focused upon related theory and practice within supervision. It was considered essential that students have the opportunity to better integrate theory and practice in this area, and DP2 students involved in the demonstration project would therefore receive more substantial input in inter-professional practice, groupwork and working in teams. They would also have the opportunity to undertake an assessed small group enquiry exercise into collaborative practice. Students would also be given more in-depth teaching on risk assessment and risk management which may contribute to the development of inter-professional practice skills.

4.2.5 Conclusions

In developing the opportunities described above we are mindful that immense good and creative work is already being undertaken by practice teachers and academics in their agencies across the social work sector. However, what we have tried to demonstrate is that creating interprofessional learning opportunities is both complex and time-consuming if they are to be sustainable and integrated. What we have been able to demonstrate is the preparation in terms of level and content required to enable students to enjoy and benefit from a meaningful learning experience. As in effective interprofessional practice, a networking approach is essential to identifying, creating and developing these learning opportunities. Arguably all social work practice teachers and social work academics have such opportunities available to them in contemporary practice settings.

4.3 Agency Based Practice Learning (LEEP 1.3)

4.3.1 Introduction & Project Outline

The Robert Gordon University was commissioned by the Institute to explore new approaches to the organisation and delivery of agency based practice learning that would inform developments in the new honours degree programme.

The key objective of the Project was 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.

A Project Advisory Group, established at the beginning of the Project, facilitated effective partnerships between The Robert Gordon University and a range of key stakeholders in the North East of Scotland, representing the statutory and voluntary sector service providers, Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC)/Scottish Practice Learning Project (SPLP) and service users and carers. This group played a critical role in the ongoing consultation and dissemination process during the life of the Project, enabling and enhancing the achievement of the Project's objectives.

Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Council Social Work Departments' commitment to the Project was significant, each agreeing to the secondment of a member of staff to the University to take on the new role of Practice Learning Facilitator and agreeing the involvement of staff teams in specific services, e.g. Criminal Justice in Aberdeen City and Children's Services in Aberdeenshire, to host the pilot and demonstration projects.

Having established the partnership arrangements with social work agencies the Project focused on gathering and reviewing evidence of current practice by completing a Practice Audit and Literature Review.

The key themes highlighted by the Practice Audit and Literature Review were used to shape and implement the design of two pilot projects, which ran between February – May 2004.

56 individuals participated in the pilot projects: 12 final placement students, six in each area; 7 personal tutors; 33 link workers/team seniors; 2 senior managers and 2 practice learning facilitators

The evaluation of the pilot projects was used to enhance the overall final design of the Demonstration Projects.

Two Demonstration Projects were then implemented between August – December 2004. The Project's design explored an **Integrated Approach to Agency Based Practice Learning Opportunities**, bringing together HEI and agency staff, setting the student's learning at the centre of social work/social care teams and ensuring the involvement of service users and carers in the assessment process.

70 individuals participated in the demonstration projects: 11 students (9 final placements and 2 first placements); 8 personal tutors; 46 link workers/team seniors; 2 senior managers; 1 academic tutor, linked to student groups and 2 practice learning facilitators.

The following sections of the report will outline the main findings of the Project to date, highlighting lessons learned along the way and offering 'good practice guidelines' for the future.

4.3.2 Key Messages

- Solutions to problems associated with the supply of agency based practice learning will only be achieved through new approaches being adopted by all stakeholders.
- Universities and Social Work/Social Care Agencies working in partnership enhances the experience of all practice learning stakeholders.
- Senior Manager involvement in practice learning increases the quantity of agency based learning opportunities.
- Students make a positive contribution to an organisation's learning culture.
- Sharing the responsibility for the teaching, learning and assessment of social work students leads to an increase in the quality of the students' experience and the quantity and range of practice learning opportunities made available.

4.3.3. Findings

Main findings of the Practice Audit and Literature Review

The Practice Audit (www.sieswe.org/projects/documents/LEEPPracAudit.doc) and Literature review (www.sieswe.org/projects/documents/LEEP13LitRev.doc) provided some insight to current practice in Scotland, identified common problems and offered guidance on possible solutions to the problems associated with an inadequate supply of agency based learning opportunities.

Current Practice

Both the Practice Audit and Literature Review highlighted that the most prevalent model of practice teaching in use across Scotland was that of one to one practice teacher – student contact (Dick et al 2002; SSSC 2003a), with or without one link supervisor, offering individual supervision predominately undertaken by the practice teacher. Additional areas highlighted by the Literature Review suggested that the majority of practice learning stakeholders were dissatisfied with the way placements were organised and an acknowledgement that the current consortia arrangements were not meeting the supply needs of the universities. (PriceWaterhouseCoopers 2002)

Problems Identified

Whilst the literature review suggested there was no shortage of potential qualified practice teachers or suitable placement settings (SSSC 2003b) both the Practice Audit and Literature Review highlighted problems that were regarded as key factors which contributed to the inadequate supply of agency based practice learning opportunities. These factors included:

- A lack of collaboration and communication between universities and agencies in areas such as course content and practice teacher support (Evans 1999; Henery 2001; PriceWaterhouseCoopers 2002)
- A lack of senior management involvement or apparent commitment to practice learning. (Sharp 2000; Henery 2001)
- Workload pressures and lack of workload relief for agency staff (Davies and Connolly 1994; Evans 1999; Henery 2001; PriceWaterhouseCoopers 2002)
- A number of qualified practice teachers not actively engaged in practice teaching (Henery 2001; PriceWaterhouseCoopers 2002)

The Literature Review also provided a brief insight into the negative consequences for students when opportunities were in short supply. (Burgess et al 1998; Henery 2001; PriceWaterhouseCoopers 2002) The Practice Audit also highlighted difficulties arising from differential access to IT facilities which impacted on administrative duties and access to the Internet.

Possible Solutions

The Practice Audit and Literature Review offered some guidance on how to find solutions to the problems identified; suggesting the way forward was to:

- Encourage the development of a learning organisation culture in the social service sector (Practice Learning Taskforce 2003; Social Work Services Inspectorate 2004)
- Move away from the current pattern of 1 student/1 practice teacher model in favour of a team approach where the practice teacher acts as a manager/facilitator of packages of learning opportunities offered by an agency (Durkin and Shergill 2003, Billingham et al 1998; Evans 1999)
- Regard the long arm model of practice teaching and group supervision as models of good practice. (Lawson 1998; Bamford and McVicker 1999; Dick et al 2002)
- Acknowledge the benefits of expanding the potential range of agency based learning opportunities to include the health, education and community learning sectors (Dick et al 2002; Social Work Services Inspectorate 2004), creating opportunities for cross sector working.

The Practice Audit offered additional advice including the need for improved communication between the Universities and Agencies and the greater involvement and commitment of Senior Managers in the organisation and delivery of agency based practice learning opportunities.

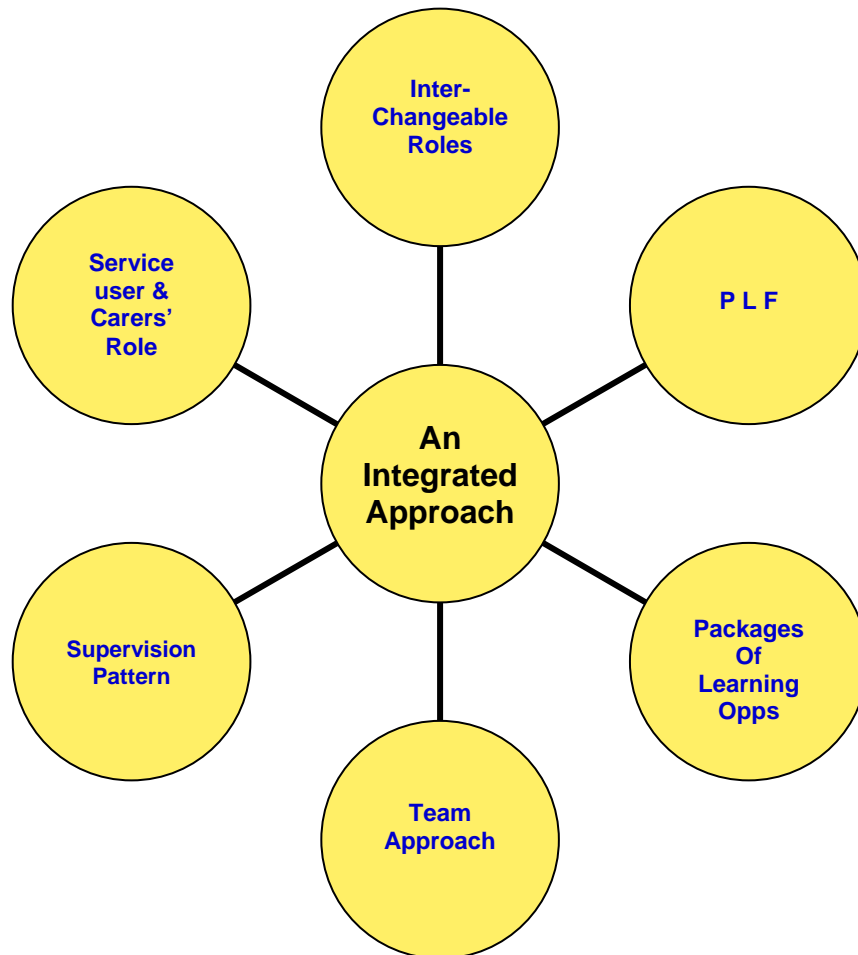
The Literature Review offered further advice, arguing for social workers to take responsibility for the development of the profession (Practice Learning Taskforce 2003; Social Work Services Inspectorate 2004), for service users and carers to have a greater role in social work education (Dick et al 2002) and for practice learning to be embedded throughout social work education (Burke 1996; Evans 1999; Shapton 2002)

Identifying a New Approach to Agency Based Practice Learning

The findings of the Practice Audit, Literature Review and Pilot Projects' Evaluation (www.sieswe.org/projects/leep13evaluation.html) provided a foundation for the design of the Project's new approach to agency based practice learning.

The *'possible solutions identified by the Project to the problems associated with or arising from the supply of agency based practice learning opportunities'* was the development of **An Integrated Approach to Agency Based Practice Learning** that involved collaboration between all practice learning stakeholders in the student's learning experience and assessment. This involved a new approach to the practice teacher, teams, tutors and service users and carers' roles in practice learning, creating a supervision model and co-ordinating packages of learning opportunities.

The design of the **Integrated Approach to Agency Based Practice Learning** has six key elements. These are:



- To create opportunities for **interchangeable roles** between HEI and agency staff with facilitators having a teaching role in the University and Academic tutors linking with student groups and staff in agencies
- To develop the **role of practice learning facilitator (PLF)** as a manager and co-ordinator of packages of learning opportunities as well as having a key role in the teaching and assessment of students.
- To develop service specific & cross sector **packages of learning opportunities.**
- To develop a **team approach** to student learning and assessment by engaging a **range of staff** who coach/supervise discrete pieces of work with students
- To implement a **group and individual pattern** of student supervision.
- To ensure **service user and carer involvement** in student assessment.

The Supervision Pattern

A brief outline of the Project's 'Supervision Pattern' is provided to highlight the difference in approach from that applied traditionally.

The shared responsibility of the student's teaching, learning and assessment between the practice learning facilitator and the team, through the use of link workers, is central to the quality of the experience for everyone involved.

After taking account of the pilot projects' evaluation the pattern of supervision provided to students in the Demonstration Project included:

Weekly case based supervision with link worker(s) (between 1 – 1.5 hrs)

The link workers' role is to offer caseload based supervision. Each link worker has specific responsibility for coaching and assessing discrete pieces of work undertaken by the student as part of the package of learning opportunities. The student will have responsibility for taking a minute of these meetings and sharing this with the practice learning facilitator.

Fortnightly group experience with practice learning facilitator & others (3 hrs)

The student group experience intends to provide a wide range of learning and assessment opportunities through teaching input, case presentations, role plays and experiential learning exercises. The focus of the sessions will be linked to the development of professional values, skills and the integration of theory with practice. The student group share responsibility for keeping a record of the meetings.

An academic tutor may share some sessions with the facilitator, but not the assessment role. These joint sessions intend to offer students additional, complimentary opportunities to reflect on their integration of theory with practice and are also open to team members. The academic tutor links with a service/sector that is in their own area of expertise and is linked to their teaching responsibilities thereby allowing a continuity of theory from the university to application in practice, but also creating opportunities for practice to influence future teaching as a result of the partnership working arrangement.

3 weekly individual supervision with practice learning facilitator (2 hrs)

The student's individual supervision with a practice learning facilitator will focus specifically on professional development areas, paying particular attention to the student's individual learning needs. The recording of these sessions will be shared by the student and facilitator and copies will be provided for link workers.

In addition three joint meetings will be arranged during the agency based practice learning experience for student, links and facilitator to come together for pre-placement negotiation, mid point review and final assessment.

4.3.4 'Good Practice' Guidelines

The lessons learned during the life of the Project provide a solid foundation for future practice by offering guidelines for good practice. In the following section key messages will be highlighted for each of the six elements that contributed to the Project's **Integrated Approach to Agency Based Practice Learning**.

Interchangeable Staff Roles

- Interchanging staff roles improves communication between agencies and universities and provides a range of professional development opportunities for staff from both sectors.
- This approach encourages and facilitates the integration of theory with practice and improves the overall quality of the student's learning.
- Identifying clear roles and responsibilities and maintaining role boundaries is an important part of the process.

Role of Practice Learning Facilitator (PLF)

- The role of PLF increases the number of agency based practice learning opportunities available to students.
- The PLF requires skills to manage, teach and assess students and negotiate and work collaboratively with others.
- Sharing assessment responsibilities generates a diverse range of evidence of a student's ability and makes the task less onerous for all.
- Individual supervision by the PLF on a 3 weekly basis is recommended.
- With senior manager support, the PLF is central to the ongoing negotiation, planning and preparation of agency based practice learning packages.

Service/sector packages of learning opportunities

- Service specific packages of learning opportunities enhance the depth of student's learning and create good opportunities for networking.
- Consecutive practice learning experiences (50/50 split) dilutes the student's learning. A student should work with a range of practice learning opportunities for the duration of the agency based practice learning experience to achieve a depth of learning.
- Cross sector packages of learning opportunities provide students with a valuable wider perspective but there is a need to avoid excessive observational opportunities.
- Striking a balance in the number of agencies involved in cross sector packages is crucial.

Team Approach

- Early negotiation and ongoing communication between the University/Senior Managers/PLF's/Teams is crucial
- Identifying a number of team members to coach/supervise discrete aspects of a student's direct practice adds depth and breadth to the student's learning experience and makes the task less onerous for practitioners.
- Case based supervision offered by link workers adds depth to the student's knowledge and understanding of practice.
- In rural settings, where teams may be dispersed, the package of learning opportunities should be located within a reasonable travelling distance, drawing on staff from a variety of teams
- A programme of staff training in student supervision/assessment would enable a wider range of staff to undertake the link worker role with confidence

Supervision Pattern

- A combination of both individual and group supervision enhances the quality and depth of students' learning and provides a wide range of opportunities for students to evidence the quality and standard of their practice.
- Creating a balance in the frequency of both group and individual supervision is important: 91% of students were satisfied with the balance provided by the demonstration model (see section on supervision pattern)
- Ongoing communication between the student/link worker/PLF is important to avoid excessive duplication of content
- The content of group supervision sessions should compliment the individual supervision and is most useful when it is student led and specifically linked to the needs of the student group
- Settings where teams were actively involved led to students making less additional demands on the PLF
- Flexible methods should be employed to take account of students with special needs.

Service User & Carer Involvement

- Service users and carers have a valuable contribution to make to students' ongoing professional development and assessment
- Students, link workers and PLF's should all actively be involved in ensuring service user and carer involvement
- A range of approaches and tools are needed to facilitate service user and carer involvement in student assessment. These tools should identify general

criteria for comment and an explanation of the purpose of the request for feedback

- Feedback should be sought regularly during the agency based practice learning experience

4.3.5 Conclusions

The Project has provided us with a valuable opportunity to create an evidence base that can inform future developments in the organisation and delivery of agency based practice learning in social work education in Scotland.

Our investigations show that with senior managers' commitment and a shared responsibility for students' practice learning and assessment we can enhance the quality of the student's experience and learning. This will also ensure an increase in the quantity of learning opportunities as well as provide continuing professional development opportunities for agency and university staff.

5.0 LEEP Projects' Recommendations

That all HEIs and the Practice Learning Implementation Group actively consider putting into place discussions with wider stakeholders to develop a range of flexible systems in order to facilitate the implementation of the approaches outlined across all sections of this report.

That ongoing research and evaluation of new roles within practice learning should be undertaken.

That funding is made available to develop further the connections between the university and the field in relation to Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

That while interprofessional learning opportunities are best developed at local level the drivers must emanate from strategic sources not least Professional bodies, with professional standards and requirements embedding such principles.

That change must be owned by operational and academic staff at the level of management equipped to establish and maintain such change

Viv Cree	Project Manager, Project 1.1
Brenda Gillies	Project Manager , Project 1.2
Linda Bruce	Project Manager, Project 1.3

6.0 References

- Bamford, D. and McVicer, H. (1999) 'Group Approaches within Social Work Education and Training'. *Issues in Social Work Education*, 19(1): 35-54.
- Billingham, J., Moss, A. and Williams, S. (1998) 'Integrated placements: fulfilling students' and practice requirements'. *Practice*, 13(1): 39 – 50.
- Burgess, R., Campbell, V., Philips, R. and Skinner, K. (1998) 'Managing unsuccessful or uncompleted placements'. *Journal of Practice Teaching*, 1(1): 4-12.
- Burke, P. (1996) 'Competences and the Practicum: Experience on One Social Work Course' *Social Work Education*, 15(3): 60 – 75.
- Cree, V.E. and Macaulay, C. (eds.) (2000) *Transfer of Learning in Professional and Vocational Education*, London: Routledge
- Davies, M. and Connolly, J. (1994) 'The Price of Taking Students'. *Health and Social Care*, 2: 339 – 346.
- Dick, E., Hendrick, D. and Scott, M. (2002) 'Practice Learning for Professional Skills: A Literature Review'. Edinburgh: Social Work Services Inspectorate
- Durkin, C. and Shergill, M. (2000) 'A Team Approach to Practice Teaching'. *Social Work Education*, 19(2) 165-174.
- Evans, Dave. (1999) 'Practice Learning in the Caring Professions'. Ashgate: Arena
- Gibbons, J. and Gray, M. (2002) 'An integrated and experience-based approach to social work education: the Newcastle model', *Social Work Education*, 21 (5): 529-549
- Henery, N. (2001) 'Night Porters'. *Journal of Practice Teaching*, 3(3): 24-40.
- Lawson, H. (1998) 'Inside the Long Arm Model of Practice Teaching The experiences of students, practice teachers and on site supervisors in Practice Teaching – Changing Social Work'. Lawson, H., ed., London: Jessica Kingsley
- Practice Learning Task Force. (2003) 'Practice Learning in Focus'. Edinburgh: Department of Health
- PriceWaterhouseCoopers, (2002) 'Review of Social Work Practice Placements, Stage 1'. Edinburgh: Social Work Services Inspectorate
- PriceWaterhouseCoopers. (2002) 'Review of Consortia, Fora and Practice Teaching Units'. Stage 2. Edinburgh: Social Work Services Inspectorate
- Scottish Social Services Council, (2003a) 'Practice Learning'. Dundee: Scottish Social Services Council
- Scottish Social Services Council, (2003b) 'Managing the Transition Diploma in Social Work Practice Placements' Dundee: Scottish Social Services Council
- Shapton, M. (2002) 'Practice Teaching beyond the caseload: Creating opportunities for practice learning in the new Social Work degree'. *Journal of Practice Teaching* 4(1): 61-70.

Sharp, M. (2000) '*A lot to learn*'. *Community Care*, 20-26 January: **24-25**

Social Work Services Inspectorate, (2004) '*Confidence in Practice Learning*'.
Edinburgh: Scottish Executive

Watson, D. and West, J. (2003) 'The role of the tutor in social work education: building an emancipatory tutorial relationship' *Social Work Education* (22) (2): 140-149