**Transcript of three video recording shared during two webinars in March 2021.**

Please note that this transcript has been edited and condensed for clarity.

## **Transcript of SSSC recording on practice learning and COVID-19**

Welcome, I’m Gillian Ferguson one of the learning and development advisers from the SSSC professional learning team. We are just sharing some information about how the SSSC have responded to COVID-19 in relation to social work education.

SSSC has a number of functions in Scotland that you will know some things about. We are the regulator for social services workforce in Scotland, under the Regulation of Care (Scotland) (2001) legislation.

One of those functions is that we promote and regulate the learning and development of the social services workforce and assess the adequacy of training provision.

It is around this, and specifically Social Work qualifying education that we’re talking about in this recording.

We support the education and training of students to becoming social workers through setting professional standards. ​

We currently have 18 social work programmes in Scotland, some of these are postgraduate courses, some are undergraduate courses and some are distance-learning or work-based routes to qualifying. The courses are configured differently across the 9 universities that provide them.

All programmes have to be approved by the SSSC and meet all the rules and requirements for SW training in Scotland. If anyone isn’t familiar with these rules and requirements and wants more detail we have included a link to this in our supporting information.

All students qualifying in social work in Scotland are assessed against the Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE).​

These are part of the overall Framework for Social Work Education in Scotland, which outlines all the requirements around teaching, learning and assessment including the requirements for practice learning days.

Practice learning is an essential part of social work education programmes and gives students the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in preparation of joining the workforce.

So as part of the COVID-19 emergency measures taken last year, SSSC agreed a number of contingency flexibilities for approved programmes. These included some possibility for changes and reduction to the practice learning days, but also changes and alterations to the teaching of other modules in the universities.

The overall agreement was made in dialogue and partnership with universities in Scotland. We also work closely with the regulators in the other UK nations.

Anything which is a change required to be formally agreed with a clear rationale as to how students would still have the opportunity to meet the SiSWE, to be able to qualify and be equipped to enter the register as a social worker.

Some of the changes that have been made are alteration of the timetable for teaching modules, changes in assessment methods, reduction in practice learning days, patterns of practice learning, for example composite placements, delayed or altered timings for placement.

We’ve asked for a lot to be considered if making a change, including the clarity of detail for students, practice teachers and the fairness of any assessment strategy. This is done to ensure that standards are met, that programmes are fair for students, people are all clear on the assessment strategy and fundamentally this is done to maintain credibility of the qualification in Scotland.

All aspects of any changes have needed to be mapped to the SiSWE. Although things might seem a bit different across social work programmes, these are always slightly different, and we’ve been clear to consider the consistency of how any contingency measures have been applied prior to approving any changes.

Discussion has continued over the whole of the last year at each stage of the collaborative work on managing and planning for practice learning across Scotland. Some of this work has been developing guidance for resumption of placements and for example things like clarifying the position of students regarding vaccination roll out.

SSSC continue to work closely with universities and other stakeholders. We are an active partner in the national Social Work Education Partnership and you can hear more about that partnership work in one of our other video clips.

If you need more information about what we’ve included in this recording you can contact us at quality.assurance@sssc.uk.com.

## **Transcript of Social Work Education Partnership (SWEP) recording**

I’m Rosie Megginson, depute manager of the Social Work Education Partnership. I thought a good starting point would be to explain who and what the Social Work Education Partnership are as I imagine there are a fair few that may not be familiar. The Social Work Education Partnership (SWEP) was established in response to a recommendation of the Review of Social Work Education made in 2016. The Review of Social Work Education recommended the development of a formal partnership at national level to support and enable a shared approach to professional learning and to ensure shared ownership, understanding and accountability across key partners.

The SWEP strategic group consists of national stakeholders including SSSC, Scottish Government, university heads of social work, chief social work officers, local authority representatives, Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) and the third sector. To facilitate and drive the work of the strategic partnership, there are two programme office employees, myself – depute manager, and Linda Clark – partnership manager.

Of course, as has been the case for everyone over the past year, the work and focus of SWEP has had to adapt and respond to the significant challenges that have arisen as a result of the pandemic. The primary focus of the partnership has been supporting practice learning. Social work placements were suspended across Scotland in March 2020, resuming in August, facing a national uphill battle to secure placements (over 1400 students seeking placements during this academic year) in a climate where much of the sector was still working from home and facing ever-changing national and local restrictions.

Social work, and by extension social work practice learning, has always traditionally been an ‘in person’ profession, with face-to-face contact seen as a vital part of service delivery. So with social distancing, working from home and shielding all being part and parcel of our working lives over the past year, practice learning, along with the rest of the sector, has had to rapidly respond and adapt.

The Social Work Education Partnership has been working to support the wider sector to identify and develop practice learning opportunities, and to promote the vital role of social work students in local authority and third sector recovery plans. Initiatives have included establishing a ‘resumption of placement grant’ which offers placement hosting agencies a grant of £300 per student towards the costs of adapting their student hosting provisions. This has gone towards things such as the procurement of additional equipment and technology to facilitate students working remotely and training for students and staff, amongst other things. Acknowledging the continuing need, this grant has been extended through the next financial year as the demand for placements and need for additional support is projected to continue well into the next academic year.

The Social Work Education Partnership has also been working closely with universities in the west of Scotland, where demand for placements was overwhelmingly outstripping supply, to develop an ‘Advanced Skills Module’ to support students at first placement stage of their course, to engage with online and simulated practice and develop and enhance their practice skills in areas such as assessment, child and adult protection and applying theory to practice. The students are being supported in undertaking this module by practice educators from across Scotland, building foundations for students in engaging effectively with supervision and enabling robust assessment against many of the Standards in Social Work Education. This module is complemented by students undertaking an extended 5-6 month placement in practice at the final placement stage. This initiative has been one part of the contingency arrangements supported by the SSSC, and collaborative working across universities, SWEP, SSSC, service users, Learning Network West, practice educators and employers has been vital in developing this innovative resource.

Looking to some of the practice learning opportunities that have taken place over the past nine months, there is a wealth of inspiration and resourcefulness. Across Scotland placement providers have demonstrated that practice learning can be facilitated in the most challenging of circumstances. The aim of today’s session is to celebrate and showcase some of the creativity that has flourished across the sector. If you’re a student, this might provide you with some insight and encouragement as to how placements have been adapted to support effective practice learning. If you’re a practitioner or agency representative, and you’re considering how you might host placements, these may offer inspiration and models that could help facilitate this.

In undertaking the filming for the digital stories, I met with frontline workers across Scotland involved in practice learning opportunities. As you’ll see in the video we’re going to show shortly, their passion and commitment to social work practice learning and the learning and development of students is incredibly apparent, as is the contribution that students bring to their service provision and organisation. It truly has been a case of ‘thinking outside the box’, with practice learning opportunities, some that were 100% working from home, some where students and practice educators have never met in person, direct observations over telephone and video platforms, working in hospitals and out in the community, undertaking key pieces of research and learning, along with the rest of the workforce, how to engage effectively with service users digitally.

One of the digital stories, which I won’t be showing you today as it is a little longer than the others; Tee, Avril and Jessica, involves a student, link worker and independent practice educator, reflecting on a placement that took place between August and December last year. They faced challenges of shielding, being in different local authorities and at times different levels, home schooling and progressively tightening restrictions. In spite of, or maybe even because of, all of these challenges, their reflection exudes positivity around what the placement offered all of them. The learning, circumstances and practice we are steeped in at the moment, although I, as much as any one of you can’t wait for much of this to come to an end and aspects of ‘normality’ to return, there are parts that I hope we absorb into our practice going forward. Many of the learning opportunities students have had over the past nine months; digital security and confidentiality, engaging over video platforms, ‘remote’ supervision and dial in observations (that truly allow you to blend into the background as an observer). There are certainly lessons to be learnt and considerations about whether going entirely ‘back to before’ is best.

## **Transcript of recording of Avril McIvor from the University of Edinburgh on practice learning**

Hello everyone, my name is Avril McIvor. I'm the director of practice learning at the University of Edinburgh. A part of my role is to assess student readiness for practice and ensure that they are matched with appropriate learning opportunities.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected students right across Scotland with placements being suspended in March 2020. At the root of all the decisions made during the last year, student safety was at the core.

Between March and September 2020, we took a partnership approach with agencies because we knew that we could not support students to complete their social work qualification without the support of agencies, practice educators and on-site supervisors. To enable students to resume placements safely, neither the university, the SSSC or the Social Work Education Partnership programme could do this on their own.

Within the University of Edinburgh, we thought it would be helpful to get the agencies who were currently offering placements and practice educators together along with other universities on the east coast. We were mindful of the fact that when students were able to safely return there would be a potential avalanche of students needing placements while agencies were focused on doing a fantastic job in responding to service users’ needs.

We felt that in terms of supporting students, this situation needed to be managed in a way that agencies did not feel overwhelmed but also ensured that students would be returning to a placement that was able to meet their learning needs, while adding to the support available rather than adding an additional burden.

That approach was extremely helpful in terms of students being able to resume placements in August 2020. There were some adaptations put in place and agreed by the Scottish Social Services Council and the Social Work Education Partnership as we couldn't make these adaptations ourselves. We know from agencies that our colleagues were working remotely and that contact with service users looked quite different. We were able to maintain standards but adapt what that might look like in terms of contact with service users. I know from feedback from a practice educator they were enabled to undertake supervision remotely and that this was a very welcome adaptation.

We also slightly reduced the number of days in which a student would be in placement. Working remotely (for the first or final placement) is quite different for a student as they would not having access to their colleagues in the same way as they would physically in the workplace which was quite stressful and anxiety provoking for some students. They took this approach on board and welcomed the opportunity and said that what we were doing was much more meaningful.

The focus of the pandemic in terms the type of work the agencies were carrying out really helped them to focus on the role of being a social work student, but also the task of being a social worker. Adaptations were put in place to support students, but also to support agencies who were having to adapt their practice in relation to the work that was being undertaken during COVID-19.

One of the things I suppose I was slightly concerned about was in relation to maintaining the standards that are required for social work students, whilst undertaking the professional qualification. After the first round of placements have ended and now our final year students have finished their placement, some of their work automatically goes to an external examiner. This is someone who's not part of the university, who offers a much more objective view in relation to the work that students are undertaking. The feedback that we got from the examiner was that the work the students were doing was meaningful, that it was focused and was contributing to the readiness for practice both now and in the future.

We shared this with students in the hope that this would give them confidence that whilst their placement looked quite different, that this was a new way of working for everyone. We are in effect, preparing students for the reality of what practice might look like in the future and it's unlikely that we will all go back to what would be regarded as normal pre-COVID-19. We were delighted with that feedback I think it gave us confidence. We also were able to share that feedback with our practice educators and agencies who hadn't felt confident the first-time round to offer a placement in the hope this would encourage them to do so.

For the agencies who offered student placements, one of the things they said was it was their philosophy to see social work students as part of the recovery and response to COVID-19. Certainly, for students feeding back on their placements they felt that they were doing something very focused, something very meaningful and they also felt that they were contributing to the response to COVID-19.

If you haven't felt you've been able to offer a student placement then I would really encourage you to think about that now. I have to say that a lot of students have shown great resilience in managing how they have coped with the change in placement but what has been very much the focus of their work, is providing a service for service users. I would strongly encourage agencies to think about what you could be offering a social work student in terms of a placement. Think about what you may not have been able to do over the last year and how social work students might be part of the recovery, enabling them to contribute in a meaningful way to providing a service that maybe you and your staff just haven't been able to do to.

For practice educators if you look on the Scottish Social Services Council webpage, there are resources and lots of experience being shared by practice teachers who have offered supervision and support to students over the last year during the pandemic. So please take the time to have a read and listen to some of the experiences. There are still some adaptations being put in place so for example, supervision can still be done remotely if needed. Direct observations might look slightly different from what they have in the past. As lockdown is easing home visits for example can be taking place within people's gardens or in local park going for walks and stuff. People have been very creative in how they are managing workloads and how they are managing day to day contact with service users. Therefore, what I would do is look at, how they are doing that and adapting that to students. Students will also have creative and fantastic ideas of what they would bring to agencies as well. I would strongly encourage you, if you can, to consider offering a student a placement, let them see that they are part of the recovery from COVID-19 and that they have meaningful contributions to offer to you and to your agency, thank you