



B.A. (Hons.) in  
**SOCIAL CARE**

PLACEMENT HANDBOOK



Department of Social Sciences

# PLACEMENT HANDBOOK

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# B.A. (Hons.) in **SOCIAL CARE**

Professional social care training aims to teach theories of practice and to develop both practice skills and a reflective capacity. These aims require the incorporation of both theoretical and practice placement strands on professional courses. The practice placement forms an integral part of the social care student's experience in college and all students must achieve a satisfactory grade in each placement to progress through the professional programme. As such, the role of the practice placement supervisor is a highly valued one. The following guidelines describe the respective roles of the placement supervisor and the college tutor, and to summarise the expected learning outcomes of the practice placements across the three years of the B.A. (Hons.) Programme.

## THE ROLE OF THE SUPERVISOR

The practice placement supervisor's role involves the following:

- Introduction of the student to the agency, familiarising her/him with agency aims and objectives, agency ethos, work practices and roles of different personnel.
- Establishment of mutually agreed learning goals towards which the student will work during the placement.
- Helping students in their development of observation, communication and relationship skills as essential requirements for effective social care practice.
- The development of an open, trusting and confidential relationship with the student, where opportunities for learning and professional development are maximised.
- The involvement of the student in the work of the agency as fully as possible/appropriate, depending on the experience level of the student.
- Setting aside a regular time for formal supervision with the student to explore issues arising from practice, essential learning points, and to give feed back on her/his progress. Students are expected to show evidence of preparation for these meetings.
- The completion of the Placement Assessment Form at the end of the placement. Students should be involved in this process and should be aware of the contents of the form before it is returned to the college tutor.

## APPOINTING A SUPERVISOR

Since the aim of social care training is to supply the sector with first rate practitioners it is desirable that practice placement supervisors be qualified and experienced practitioners. The supervisor should ideally be in a position to work daily with the student in order to arrive at a valid and comprehensive assessment of the student's abilities.



While it is hoped that the supervisor will be in a position to supervise the student for the entire duration of the placement, should unforeseen absences occur, it is essential that alternative supervision arrangements be put in place and indicated to the new supervisor, the student, and the college tutor.

## **SUPPORT FOR SUPERVISORS**

To aid the supervisors in their important work the college offers the following:

1. Training for placement supervisors. The college provides short courses in student supervision which are offered free of charge to supervisors. These courses are very popular and supervisors are encouraged to attend such a course prior to having a student on placement.
2. Supervisors' meeting. This meeting occurs annually. It takes the form of a seminar, which provides an opportunity for supervisors to discuss any placement related issues. A guest speaker is invited by the college to speak on a topic of interest to the field of social care. This meeting is also an opportunity for supervisors to meet each other and enables the college staff to express their appreciation to the supervisors for their vitally important contribution to social care training.
3. Visits of tutors to placements. These visits are arranged by the tutor in collaboration with the supervisor. They provide an opportunity for the student, supervisor and tutor to meet formally to discuss the aim and objectives of the placement, the student's progress, the specific learning opportunities of the particular placement and how these can be fully exploited to achieve the objectives of the placement. Two such visits occur for students during the academic year. The number of visits can be increased, if necessary, in particular cases.

## **THE ROLE OF THE COLLEGE TUTOR**

The tutor occupies a pivotal position between the college programme and the practice placement. Through visits to the placements, supervisor meetings and placement report forms the tutor will endeavour to assess the student's progress in placement.

Through regular tutorials the tutor will assist students to integrate the different elements of the college programme both across the various theoretical courses

and the learning objectives of the practice placements.

## THE ROLE OF THE STUDENT

Placements are designed to encourage the development of a social care practitioner who is:

- reliable, responsible and observant
- able to use both initiative and an awareness of the needs and rights of various client groups
- skilled in forming relationships and communicating with clients
- able to work constructively with colleagues
- able to maintain confidentiality which reflects a sound ethical practice base
- able to keep records and use case files
- able to use critical reflection to gain the necessary understanding for effective social care practice

First Year Students spend a total of thirty days on placement which is one day a week from mid October until the Easter break with two block weeks during that time. They are exposed to the practical world of social care practice in a controlled manner which facilitates the development of appropriateness in a work situation. Their role is largely an observational one where they witness social care practice in action and form open relationships with both clients and staff. With the help of their placement supervisors, students begin to understand the routine tasks, the unpredictable events and planned interventions with clients. They need an understanding of Child Protection Guidelines, Principles of Professional Practice and the importance of a Needs Focused Approach. They begin to develop an understanding of the importance of observation in social care practice and the demands of a teamwork approach. They also gain an understanding of the importance of supervision and of the roles of the participants in the supervision triad: the supervisor, the student and the college tutor. Through formal supervision sessions with practice supervisors and regular tutorial sessions with college tutors students begin to develop their professional identity. Placements are formally assessed and students require a satisfactory grade in their placement in order to advance to the next year of their course. A summary of the learning outcomes of the first year placement include:

1. Full exposure of the student to the atmosphere of the social care agency including periods of crisis and evidence of the student's recognition of the importance of preparation for and review of practice events.
2. An understanding of the roles of the social care worker in the agency.
3. An understanding of the implications of child protection guidelines for front line practice in social care.
4. An awareness of relevant practice guidelines pertinent to the role of the social care worker.

It is not envisaged that first year students be left alone with clients but rather, that they always be in the company of a senior staff person, preferably the supervisor, whose responsibility it is to determine when and for what purpose students interact with clients.

Second Year Students continue their professional development and spend sixty days on practice placement which is two days per week for the entire college year. Building on their first year experience students are now expected to undertake interventions with clients. There is a particular focus on residential child and youth care in the second year professional practice theory programme and many placements are, therefore, in this sector. In such placements students gain an understanding of the rhythm of clients' days, the intervention opportunities that can present in the clients' life space, and of the importance of care planning for individual clients. They are exposed to the planning process and expected to develop skills in assessment, programming, specific interventions, report writing, record keeping, evaluation, risk management. Students are continuously encouraged to reflect on the principles underpinning practice, professional ethics and statutory guidelines on child protection.

Learning outcomes of second year placements are:

1. Evidence of an understanding of the rhythm of the clients' day and the opportunities for intervention that this presents.
2. A demonstrated level of competence in the skills necessary for care planning, record keeping and report writing.



3. Evidence of a growing understanding of the relevance of the child protection guidelines for practice.
4. An ability to exploit opportunities to gain necessary front line practice experience
5. An ability to link theory and practice.
6. To be able/willing to identify further learning areas for the third year placement.

Third Year Students have a twelve week block placement which is a total of sixty days. The focus of this, the final placement, is the integration of theory and practice and the development of a reflective capacity. Students are now familiar with the responsibilities and opportunities of supervised placements. They undertake a progressively active role in interventions with clients. The importance of relationships with clients is emphasised and students are expected to demonstrate their ability to form, exploit and terminate relationships.

Demonstrating their understanding of attachment theory and behaviour, students develop skills around helping clients with transitions in their lives. Students are taught how to develop their observation and active listening skills and are expected to demonstrate evidence of their use of these skills on placement. Reflection techniques are also taught during third year and students are expected to demonstrate self awareness and practice analysis in the development of new understanding on placement. Students demonstrate their understanding of the integration of theory and practice in their placement portfolios which are completed during the final placement. Portfolio guidelines will also be given to third year supervisors. The learning outcomes of the third year placement are:

1. The completion of a written self-assessment through the use of the third year placement report form in which students acknowledge their practice strengths and recognise the skill areas they need further guidance/experience in.

2. Collaboration with the practice supervisor in the drawing up a working contract, which reflects the self assessment, and is aimed at improving competence in the selected skills by exploiting the learning opportunities of the particular placement.
3. Students illustrate ability to implement appropriate intervention programmes with clients paying particular attention to effectiveness and an ability to apply theoretical frameworks to practice.
4. Students demonstrate evidence of a reflective capacity.
5. Students show evidence of working from an ethical base of social care which reflects a commitment to collaborate with clients in order to maximise their potential.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS IN RELATION TO PRACTICE PLACEMENT

### Q1. What should happen if the student is arriving to the agency late or is not attending regularly?

Punctuality and reliability are two core qualities required in the area of social care practice and are therefore taken very seriously by the Institute. The placement supervisor should discuss with the student in the first instance indicating expectations in these matters. If the situation persists, the placement supervisor should contact the student and course tutor as early as possible. The tutor will liaise with the student and, if necessary, the agency to resolve any such issues. Any absence from placement should be notified to the agency as soon as possible and notified to the course tutor. Absences are treated as in the workplace and must be excused by a medical certificate or by submission of evidence that they are due to immediate personal or family emergencies.

## **Q2. What if the student lacks motivation in the agency?**

All students are encouraged by tutors, upon commencement of placement, to ask questions and present themselves in a professional, enthusiastic and focused manner. If the student seems unmotivated the supervisor should raise this with the student and aim to resolve any outstanding issues. If this persists the course tutor should be contacted for further advice and support.

## **Q.3 As a Supervisor, what should I do if the placement is not running as well as expected?**

If the supervisor has any immediate concerns s/he should raise them as soon as possible with the student and also inform the course tutor as the quicker the problem or issue is addressed the sooner it can hopefully be resolved.

## **Q4. What about the student who may not be suited to the field of Social Care?**

As in most professions some students may present to us for training who may be deemed unsuitable to the social care field of practice, perhaps due to personal difficulties or other issues that may only come to light on practice placement. It is desirable, where possible, that both tutors and supervisors work together in these circumstances. Some students may just need more time, experience, or training, to deal with personal issues and to help them reach the required levels of practice to work effectively in the field. Extended or repeat placements may be arranged for such students but only one repeat placement can be offered in any given academic year.

## **Q5. What if the student is dressing or behaving inappropriately?**

All students, prior to the commencement of each placement, are briefed by course tutors on placement expectations and appropriateness of behaviour and dress in the workplace. It is useful for supervisors to echo this upon placement commencement so as to clarify agency expectations to students in regard to their performance in the workplace.



# Comments from Supervisors re. Social Care Students on Placement

*"The DIT student placements are very valuable to our agency. The students bring fresh and new ideas and are also very willing to organise and carry out new activities with our clients. I also think the placement experience is very valuable to the students as it provides them with experience before they enter the social care workplace on a full time basis"*

Joan Steadman, St. Mary's Day Centre for the Elderly,  
First Year Placement Supervisor

*"We believe that students through their talent, skills, personalities and life experiences bring richness to the lives of our service users, their families and our staff"*

Bernie Nevin, Student Co-ordinator, St. John of God Services,  
Second Year Supervisor.

*'For the past three years, our project has had a student on placement from the Social Care course in DIT, Mountjoy Square. The placement lasts twelve weeks.*

*Our experience, overall, has been a positive one. The students have been motivated, and keen to take on appropriate duties and responsibilities. They were a valuable extra resource to have as part of our project team. They also displayed a level of skills and knowledge that they applied to the work of the project'*

Sharon Jordan, Local Coordinator, South Clondalkin School Completion Programme, Third Year Supervisor

*"Having a DIT student has been a rewarding experience for our service. We have always found it important to share the variety of skills and knowledge between the students and the team and to support and encourage the student to put their theory into practice"*

Clíodhna O'Sullivan, Manager, Daughters of Charity Aistear Beo, Third Year Supervisor.





## Suggested reading:

Lalor, K. & Doyle, J. (2005). The social care practice placement: a college perspective. In P. Share & N. McElwee (Eds.), *Applied social care: An introduction for Irish students*. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan.

Morrison, T. (2005). *Staff supervision in social care : making a real difference for staff and service users* (3rd ed.). London: Pavilion.

Wilson, K. & James, A. (2007). *The child protection handbook* (3rd ed.). London: Elsevier.



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