Quality Assurance Process

Headline Messages

Review of 54 reports (PLA, Midway and End of Placement) across BASW final and first placements and MSW final placements 2018/19 academic year

Overall report rating

- excellent
- good
- adequate
- improvement
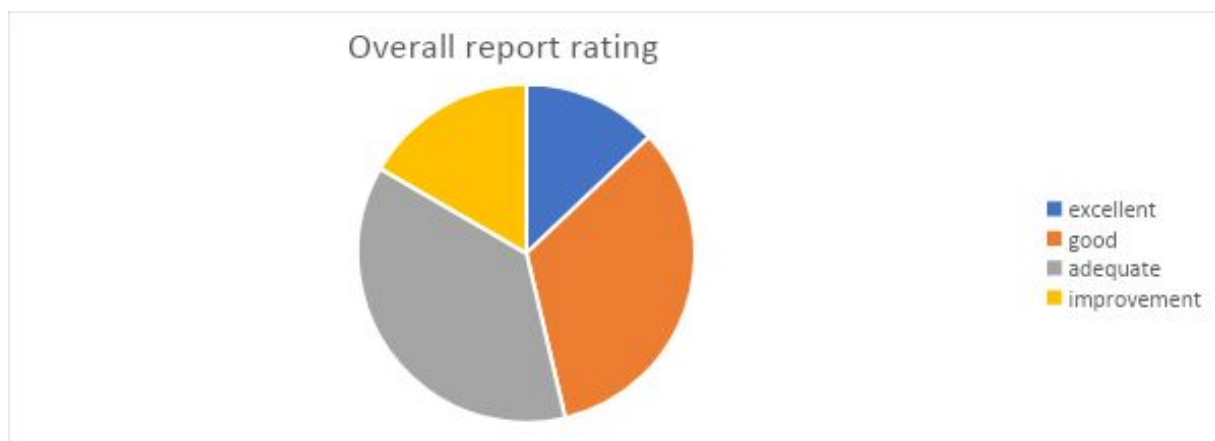
*exemplary reports identified in each sample, including student contributions.

*vast majority at least adequate

*approximately 18% considered poor

*most common areas for development were in holistic progressive assessment, demonstrating critical analysis of assessment evidence and identifying specific learning needs arising from assessment, linked to continuing learning and development

PE/OSS Survey of placement provision and support

A short survey of 54 Practice Educators

Stage 1	32
Stage 2	18
Qualified PEs	4

SATISFACTIONS (50% or more of respondents)

1. *Communication from the university, including setting up and preparing for the placement.*
2. *Support from the university (practice learning team, tutor, etc) with difficulties.*
3. *The learning opportunities identified in the PLA materialised.*
4. *The support of line manager and team to have a student on placement.*
5. *Time given to attend other organisational resources like workshops and groups.*
6. *Time to provide weekly supervision for their student.*
7. *Support through the provision of boundaried time to complete assessments of and reports on the student's learning and development.*

DISSATISFACTIONS

1. *Large-scale organisational changes were a significant barrier for a period of time in one organisation.*
2. *Although weekly supervision was provided, additional hours were worked regularly in order to complete own work and prepare for student supervision and assessment. Where there is a culture that working with a student is in addition to usual workload, much student work is done in own time.*
3. *Very variable support within own supervision for PE role.*
4. *Support through the provision of boundaried time to complete assessments of and reports on the student's learning and development was also variable.*

As the majority of respondents were trainees many of the additional qualitative comments focused on the PE course, associated PL Workshops and support from their own tutors. Most of those were very positive, although there were some comments about the inhouse process for allocating and quality assuring practice assessors.

Student focus groups and Tutor survey

Due to the unforeseen Covid-19 circumstances it was not possible to meet with students as planned or to seek the views of tutors.

This is considered essential in informing future QA processes.

KEY MESSAGES

From this review it appears that the majority of reports are being presented to at least a satisfactory standard, PEs are mostly satisfied with the systems in place to arrange and support placements and they are all satisfied with the availability of learning opportunities in their settings.

However, there are a number of areas which could be developed or strengthened. As a result, the following recommendations have been generated.

Kingston University and TP Team

1. The annual placement QA process led by KU should consider incorporating a wider, but targeted range of questions, which would allow for more qualitative analysis of placement provision, from all stakeholders' perspectives.
2. The process could consider alternative means for enabling stakeholders to contribute their views, eg. focus groups, Student Voice meetings, surveys
3. The annual QA process could be strengthened by actively sampling and reviewing a range of placement documents: PLA, Midway and EPRs, perhaps using a similar framework to that used in this exercise, across both qualifying programmes. This should be a shared responsibility (HEI and employer partners) and lead to both individual and organisational feedback for PEs, OSS and tutors.
4. Workshops to support PES, OSSs and PAs should continue to build availability of exemplars of high quality reports. This should also include exemplars of quality student contributions to reports, which could be used to promote student learning. Consideration could be given to making these available through electronic means, such as the Developing Together Teaching Partnership [website](#).
5. A Critical Writing Skills workshop to be developed for Practice Educators and possibly On-Site Supervisors.
6. A Report Writing workshop to be developed to focus on writing holistic and progressive reports through the placement lifespan.
7. Programmes of training and support for On-Site Supervisors to be delivered as a means of raising minimum standards.
8. Tutors should be actively enabled to develop knowledge and understanding of placement and PE course requirements, including their QA and mediation roles.
9. Continued work with employer partners to ensure minimum standards of support are provided for PEs, both in training and qualified, and to consider ways in which this could be strengthened/developed and good practice disseminated.

10. Practice Assessment Panels (PAPs), or a different form of such, should consider ways to provide balanced, considered, constructive and timely feedback to workforce development leads about the quality of all the reports completed by their PEs and OSSs. Current practice is that reports raising concerns are discussed with individual PEs, OSS and possibly workforce leads by a representative of the PAP, but there is little collective evaluation of reporting according to organisation. Highlighting examples of good practice could also promote the dissemination of those standards within an organisation.

11. For future similar QA reviews it would be useful if the EPR (Pan London) form clearly identified if the PE was experienced or a trainee. As this would need to be agreed through the annual pan London and South East change management process, in the interim PEs should be requested to indicate their status and the model of practice education being used, on EPRs.

Employer Partners

1. Employer partners should actively support and enable their PEs, OSSs and PAs to fulfil the responsibilities of their roles to a high standard, including completing the PLA, Midway and EPR and all the other placement documents. Without this regular 'space' for reporting and reflecting, writing processes can be rushed, resulting in poorly evidenced assessment decisions lacking adequate detail, depth and critical analysis. Time needs to be prioritised and ring-fenced for PEs particularly, to review evidence, analyse and present it in a coherent, cohesive and comprehensive manner which will underpin the student's continuing development and learning.

2. Employer partners should continue to actively support not only trainee PEs, but also experienced and inactive PEs. Organisational support could incorporate a wide range of activities including mentoring. The refreshed PEPS (2019) identifies the mentor as a key person in developing PEs' skills and knowledge and providing practical guidance and support. Experienced, active Stage 2 PEs could be identified as PE champions or mentors and contribute to facilitating the return to PE practice of lapsed PEs and their own development as Practice Assessors or assessors of newly qualified social workers.

3. Employer partners should develop mechanisms to quality assure key reports, specifically the PLA, Midway and End of Placement Report. Reviewing midway reports could be a 'litmus test' for the final report - any concerns about the quality of reporting at the midway could then be actively addressed before preparation of the final report.

4. Employer partners should also continue to set standards for, and quality assure, the placement itself and aim to provide a consistently high level

of structured placements throughout the organisation. This could help ensure equitable opportunities and experiences for students placed in the same organisation, in respect of their learning, the support they receive and the tasks they undertake, as well as for all cohorts of students.

5. Employer partners should actively seek to respond to the supervision needs of all PEs; there may be a specific need for supervision training or support for those supervisors new to this role or unfamiliar with the requirements of the PE programme and/or the role.

Author: Dale van Graan

Date: 24 April 2020

.

The following themes and features of PLAs, Midway and End of Placement Reports are described in no particular order of priority:

A. 'Excellent' and 'Good' Reports

1. *Excellent* and *good* reports were 'easy to read' and gave a clear sense of the student's placement journey, progressive learning and 'work' undertaken – the *good* narratives made both the student and the placement 'come alive' making it easy for the reader to contextualise the student's whole experience.

2. A wide range of appropriate evidence was used, with good learning and practice examples, which highlighted the student's holistic and progressive development. The evidence was explicitly linked to clear, specific practice examples to illustrate their skills, knowledge, learning and development. Additionally, the best reports also highlighted areas for *continuing development* in each domain narrative, as well as at the end of the report, linking these specifically to PCF domains and KSS. The learning needs at the end of placement were therefore clearly identifiable as arising from the *analysis* of learning and development pertinent to each domain.

3. Narrative (and the detail within this) was given to the learning needs of the student with these being well linked to the PCF and, in the best reports, also to the relevant KSS. Additionally, the setting's learning opportunities and student's learning experiences were clearly described and linked to the PLA. These reports showed *explicit congruence* between the PLA, the Midway review and Action Plan and the EPR.

4. Students' contributions were easily identifiable and thorough, helping to verify, and adding to, the assessment and evidence presented by the PE and OSS, where applicable. Additionally, OSSs' comments 'joined up' with the comments of the PE, with this further demonstrating good communication between them. These strengths demonstrated good co-production, shared responsibility and shared ownership by the various contributors.

5. There was clear evidence of how supervision had supported the student's critical thinking/reflection and their overall progress and learning. Generally, the narrative also detailed areas of

development/learning needs of the student, although this was not always present in each of the PCF domains (section 3b of the EPR).

6. Often the PE had made good links to the social work methods and theories learned about or taught during the placement and had cited the learning/reflection tools used through supervision.

7. These reports often contained good use of feedback from service users or carers and colleagues, thereby strengthening the assessment evidence and judgement.

8. The best reports paid attention to detail, such as including dates and signatures, with all sections having been completed fully and a good narrative provided in well-constructed and well-presented writing.

B. 'Adequate' Reports

1. *Adequate* reports generally provided a holistic assessment narrative of the student's learning journey and development, but this often lacked focus and/or depth in relation to the student and/or the learning opportunities. There was little exploration or evidence of the progressive nature of this learning. There may have been 'just enough' evidence to demonstrate how the student had met the PCF level requirements and domains, but this lacked substance, depth or critical analysis of *how* the placement and student's learning journey had progressed, including gaps or barriers to learning and how and to what effect these had been addressed.

2. If learning needs were explicitly mentioned, for the start and/or the end of the placement, they were written generically and not linked to the student's development or to their continuing learning needs for their ASYE.

3. Generally, more attention to detail was needed to thoroughly complete all sections of the report, eg. some sections were only minimally completed in terms of words/narrative and the provision of a range of evidence from a variety of sources was lacking (even though presentable evidence was contained in the 'Index of Evidence' in the final section of the EPR). These reports lacked depth or evidence of critical thinking and analysis by the PE. Additionally, more attention to the standard of writing was required, such as grammar and sentence construction, suggesting possible time management difficulties, workload pressures or PE/OSS development needs as barriers to good standards of writing practice.

C. 'Require Improvement' Reports

1. *Require Improvement* reports tended to have little depth in the narrative and, on occasions, there was no narrative at all, only bullet points. These reports struggled to evidence either an holistic or progressive assessment of the student. The lack of a meaningful narrative resulted in the presented evidence purely describing the list of tasks undertaken by the student, without even linking the tasks to the student's learning and/or the PCF domains.

2. There was a lack of critical analysis related to the student's learning journey and their practice development.

3. The reports were poorly written, with weak grammar and sentence construction and lack of attention to detail.

4. At times, in the individual PCF domains sections (section 3b), there were only minimal sentences written which described tasks undertaken but failed to adequately evidence how the student had demonstrated that particular PCF domain.

5. There was no joined up assessment/dialogue/writing by the PE and OSS. Additionally, if an OSS did complete their section, it was with very few words or citing little direct evidence or with a very generic reference to the student.

6. The student's learning needs or areas of development were rarely mentioned, completely absent or very generic. They were often not linked to the professional standards, the KSS, the PCF or the student's own career interests.

7. There was little to no contribution from the student, raising some concern about the extent to which they had been consulted or taken up the opportunity to comment on the assessment. **NB:** It was noted by reviewers, however, that it was not a requirement for students to comment on the report prior to submission on Canvas and that this could account for the absence of the final commentary by the student in the reports reviewed.

D. Areas for Development for EPRs

1. It is useful when PEs make specific reference to *how* the student was transitioned into their placement, including some details about the induction and the required standards of learning, knowledge and skills to pass the placement, ie. links to key information identified in the PLA. There should be a holistic account of the students' learning journey, from start of placement, through PLA, Midway review to EPR and continuing learning needs.

2. Often the Holistic Assessment and/or domain narratives tended to be descriptive, rather than providing an *analysis* of learning from the tasks carried out, leaving the reviewer asking 'So What? How does this work evidence learning and development of social work skills, knowledge and values and how does this demonstrate that the threshold for the domain has been reached?'

3. PEs should be required to cite examples from students' practice, relating them to specific (but anonymised) cases where relevant, specifically in the evidence discussed in the Domains. These examples should also be linked to the relevant KSS and other professional standards.

4. PEs should make good reference to, and meaningful use of, the Index of Evidence. Additionally, they should be mindful to use a wide range of sources of evidence to support their assessments.

5. More use could be made of Supervision records as sources of evidence. These were occasionally listed in the 'Index of Evidence' but not cross-referenced in the holistic assessment or evidence discussed in each Domain. More use could be made of supervision as a site and method of learning, teaching and enabling and evidencing the student's critical thinking.

6. The 'Assessment of Learning Needs' (section 3c) should link students' continuing learning needs to the PCF and to the KSS – this is not only useful for the report itself, but also for students' preparation of their Professional Development Plans (PDPs).

7. In terms of attention to detail and modelling high standards for practice, there should be a focus on good grammar and sentence construction throughout, and all signatures and dates should be included. Bullet points should not be used to summarise evidence as these contain little substance, no analysis and no narrative of

how the student has met the PCF requirements and placement standards.

8. PEs need to be cognisant of their own skills and knowledge (PEPS), PCF level and KSS context of their practice, when writing their assessments.