



**learning network**  
west

# Practice Teaching and Practice Learning in the West of Scotland

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This report was produced with love  
and care by 3rd Horizons Ltd on behalf  
of Learning Network West (2017)



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# Introduction

In April 2017, Learning Network West (LNW) commissioned 3rd Horizons Ltd to undertake a short piece of research on practice teaching in the west of Scotland. The purpose was to set out current practice in relation to practice teaching (and practice learning) in the thirteen local authorities within their area, and to identify key enablers and barriers in the development and effectiveness of practice teaching in the west of Scotland. The specific objectives identified were to:

- **Set out current practice in relation to practice teaching in thirteen local authority areas**
- **Identify key enablers and barriers in the development and effectiveness of practice teaching in the West of Scotland**
- **Identify and profile good practice in Practice teaching**

The research was overseen by a small Steering Group comprising:

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<b>Darren Chapman</b>	Learning Network West
<b>David Ramsay</b>	Inverclyde Health and Social Care Partnership
<b>Pat MacCowan</b>	Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC)
<b>Sharon Atkinson</b>	Argyll and Bute Council
<b>Sybil Lang</b>	Scotland's Colleges

# Summary Findings



## About practice teachers

- There is a clear relationship between Practice Teachers own experiences of placements and subsequent motivation to become a Practice Teacher.
- Practice teaching does not have parity of esteem with the Mental Health qualification and yet, the practice teaching award is seen as 'more difficult'.
- Many Practice Teachers become inactive on promotion to manager. (lack of time is often the reason cited for becoming inactive).
- While the amount of time varied in the responses, Practice Teachers talked about the need to set aside a day a week for a student. Many people did the work at home, in their own time.
- Participants recognised that practice learning should be given more currency in the development of new social workers (for many, there appeared too great an emphasis on case management and reports rather than, for example, observations and relationship building skills with families).
- Some Practice Teachers described the difficulty in failing a student, and the readiness of some student to deal with placements.



## Value placed upon learning

- Having dedicated coordinators in Learning and Development Departments is a huge advantage in developing capacity for practice teaching
- Authorities with dedicated Practice Teachers working in an Learning and Development environments seem to offer higher quality placements
- Actively building relationships with Service Managers is critical to ensuring positive environments for placements
- There is clear evidence of mirroring between the state of practice teaching and wider changes to the social work profession
- Overall, the process for placing students works, from pre placement interview to final report. However, it is a reactive process, varied in effectiveness, and not well embedded.
- There is evidence that Practice Teachers value getting together more, both formally and informally (within authorities as well as across authorities)

# Summary Findings



## Role of Learning Network West

- > Many cited the support offered by LNW as invaluable – placements, advice, events and materials
- > There is scope for LNW to be far more visible in its messaging directly to Practice Teachers
- > There is a question how much support LNW could / should give to authorities who do not have dedicated learning and development coordination support
- > There is a possible leadership role in giving stronger trust and permission messages across Partnerships
- > There is probably a role for LNW to amplify more the importance of Practice Teachers and the frustrations experienced by Practice Teachers to universities and regulatory bodies
- > The direct relationships between PTs and the Universities works okay but could be improved. There is perhaps a greater and more visible role for LNW to influence and broker relationships, ideas and knowledge with Universities and policy makers.



## Expectations on Practice Teachers going forward

- > A growing culture of hot-desking and working off site, together with a lack of physical space for students and, in some cases, no laptop for students, negatively impacted on the placement experience
- > Children's services are often seen as the most suitable, relevant and complex work in offering a good placement experience
- > For the majority, but not for all authorities, health and social care integration had made little impact in the approach to practice learning. However, many recognised it might in the future with potentially hybrid training programmes and placements.
- > Participants often struggled to think critically about the expectations on Practice Teaching in the future and were conflicted in their views.
- > There is a tension being held by Practice Teachers – recognising the positive contribution a student makes to the office environment but knowing too that having a student is often seen as an extra work by the wider team.

# Strategic Context

This exploration of practice teaching and the role of Practice Teachers has been commissioned at a time of considerable change and reflection in the sector. Wider policy development has led to the introduction of health and social care partnerships as the avenue for greater integration, and to the promotion of self-directed support as a mechanism for greater control by the individual.

Meanwhile, the detail of the training for social work practice is being examined through the Review of Social Work Education (RSWE) initiated in 2014 and being led by the Scottish Social Services Council (2016). The Review is working towards recommendations for improving the design and delivery of the social work degree qualification in a revised Framework for Social Work Education in Scotland. This has included consultation on the Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE), with the resulting revisions due to be implemented from 2018/9.

Reports on ten shared areas of inquiry were also commissioned from HEIs. Number eight asked the question, 'what should practice learning look like?' (SSSC, 2016b). The Review takes place against the backcloth of the strategic vision, Social Services in Scotland: a shared vision and strategy, 2015-2020.

A number of recommendations have emerged from the second phase of the RSWE (November 2016). The focus of those to be implemented during the current year (2017-8) embraces:

- **revise, publish and implement updated Framework and Standards in Social Work Education (now postponed to the first quarter of next year)**
- **explore graduate level apprenticeships and other work-based routes into social work**
- **develop a new Standard for Continuous Professional Learning for social service workers.**

Three further recommendations are being looked at in greater detail as to their implementation and funding implications

- **development of a shared approach to social work professional learning**
- **introduction of a mandatory, supported year for newly qualified social workers (NQSW), the so-called probationary year already operating in England, Wales and Northern Ireland**

# Methodology



Prior to the study, LNW had issued a baseline questionnaire to the strategic leads for Practice Teaching in each of their thirteen constituent local authorities.

Building from this, an initial literature review was conducted to inform and shape the initial research questions. Thirty-six semi-structured interviews were then conducted with a mixture of Learning and Development staff responsible for co-ordinating placements, active Practice Teachers (defined as those who have supervised at least one student in the previous two years) and inactive Practice Teachers (those who have not had any students over the previous two years). The reason for inactivity may vary but was most often related to seniority of role. Twenty-three of the respondents were female and 13 were male. The number of people interviewed in each local authority is listed in the next Table.



# Methodology

Location	Number of interviewees
Argyll and Bute	3
Dumfries and Galloway	2
East Ayrshire	3
East Dunbartonshire	3
East Renfrewshire	3
Glasgow City Council	3
Inverclyde	3
North Ayrshire	3
North Lanarkshire	3
Renfrewshire	2
South Ayrshire	3
South Lanarkshire	3
West Dunbartonshire	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>

It should be noted that this recruitment route precluded discussion of the Practice Teacher experience in the voluntary sector (around 40 per cent of placements in the Learning Network West territory).

The length of time that individuals had been involved in practice teaching ranged from one year to 25 years.

Years as PT	1 – 2	3 – 5	6 – 10	11 – 20	21+	No info	Total
	3	4	11	8	2	8	36

The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the transcripts were then coded for an initial textual analysis. Emerging themes across each local authority were identified and further secondary analysis has led to identification of the key areas discussed below.

# Organisational Models

This section offers a backcloth against which to locate the key themes identified in subsequent sections. There is considerable variation across the thirteen local authorities in the arrangements they have adopted for the delivery and support of practice teaching. At one extreme there may be a handful of Practice Teachers with little formal support from the organisation – ‘no culture, no structure to bring these two Practice Teachers together’; at the other are dedicated Practice Teacher teams with strong managerial backing. One such team was augmented by an annual full time secondment for practice teaching – ‘we are very lucky that we get that because it makes a big difference; it shows commitment from management’. Between these extremes a variety of structures was outlined, some primarily dependent on a spread of Practice Teachers across the authority’s social work teams with co-ordination from a learning and development individual or section, others relying in the main on a small number of individuals focusing primarily on practice teaching. Often in the latter arrangement Practice Teachers would be distant from the specialist teams. Although this often assisted in the management of student arrangements, it could be seen as perhaps less positive for the professional development of the individual Practice Teachers and for the student – ‘if you are a full time practice teacher, it’s a very insular compared to the cultures that move very quickly with regards to integration and how that actually affects people on the ground’. [023]

‘I think what doesn’t work well of that is, and having done it myself, if you do that for too long you lose focus on the practice element of your CPD and your development. So the full time Practice Teachers are keen to maybe during the summer doing some shadowing, and go back out to Teams and do some work in different various teams. So I would say that’s probably the thing that doesn’t work as well.’ [027]

‘I think the danger is if you are removed from it and you are a full time Practice Teacher then you are not up-to-date with what’s going on. You are not in the ‘coal face’ and then you lose sight... sometimes Practice Teachers have got Students writing in-depth selective accounts left, right and centre. Whereas ‘yes’ you need that but you have got to get the balance between the practice and you need to reflect, you certainly do need it, but you should be talking and reflecting. I think the talking and reflecting and writing and reflecting there needs to be a balance between them.’ [032]

# Organisational Models

On the other hand, dedicated roles could strengthen the visibility of the Practice Teacher role – 'more focused acknowledgement of where practice teaching is and the importance of that and we can take a leadership role'.

Similar discussion on pros and cons arose in respect of what could be characterised as a Practice Teacher model informed primarily by a social work perspective (a practitioner, reflective practice approach) versus a learning and development which would major on for example learning styles. Significantly the focus of the Professional Development Award in Practice Learning (PDAPL), developed within the framework of the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), is on the transferable skill set and is aligned with the other Professional Development Awards.

At a time of substantial regrouping into more corporate arenas, a concern was the extent to which the distinctiveness of learning and development roles for social work could be sustained. One respondent put it succinctly: 'we used to have a dedicated training section and the team we are in did quality assurance training; we are now just quality assurance'. Another speculated that with the demands such as integration – 'I can't say at the minute that hand-on-heart that the practice teaching is going to be very high up on anybody's agenda'.

Less prominent than in the past was a policy of 'grow your own' enabling their own unqualified staff to embark on formal social work training, primarily through the Open University route. At least two authorities, however, still see a strong role for such a strategy – 'you can come from school and you can become a Chief Social Work Officer without leaving, it might happen, you never know'. What is termed 'rotational experience' in different parts of the department is provided for the in-house trainees, and although its extent is markedly reduced from the past it is seen as highly beneficial.

**'We have done a lot of development and outcome-focused work with our staff and they have got that, they know that and that underpins what they do. So no matter what setting they go into and whatever statutory limitations that might be on that, that still underpins their practice. They are also much more confident in working with other agencies. They are much more confident in their roles than a straightforward student who is coming in after two placements.'** [O21]

This authority also perceives that the in-house training has assisted with the recruitment of Link Workers their value being appreciated within the teams. Link Workers can fulfil a critical function in ensuring good support for the student in their placement; again this can be of particular importance if the Practice Teacher is not located within the team. A number of respondents lamented however that they found it difficult to persuade Workers to progress to practice teaching – 'we have a lot of Link Workers but the percentage that go on to undertake PDA is very small'. In contrast to the 'grow your own' strategy, a number of authorities referred to subsequently employing students who had been in placement with them, the authority able to have a foretaste of the quality of their practice – 'we have been able to choose people who had done particularly well in their placement'.

# Organisational Models

The thirteen members of the Network are given student placement quotas based on the number of qualified social workers in the authority. The majority of the authorities manage to meet these quotas although some have not been able to take all their allocation in recent years and one at least has filled less than half – 'we've met only around 43% of our expected annual allocation over the last ten years'. At the same time there has been an increase in the number of Independent Practice Teachers, with at least one authority working with the Learning Network to develop this avenue.

'In our patch we rely quite a bit on Independent Practice Teachers. We have a few of our own that we kind of use regularly and then we will also liaise with the Learning Network who can sometimes help us identify Independent Practice Teachers.' [033]

Not all favoured the emergence of Independent Practice Teachers. Some perceived that the option had been taken up by some individuals for monetary gain following severance and expressed concerns as to quality assurance – 'I think that's a downside to practice teaching and I don't know how that's regulated in terms of the quality of independent practice teachers' [023]. Others stressed the value of the local connection.

'I think there's a great wealth of knowledge of having a Practice Teacher that's working in that field, for all we could have highly skilled independent practice teachers they are maybe a bit removed. Arguably the learning experience might not be as fruitful as it could be.' [024]

A dimension that generated considerable debate was whether or not individual Practice Teachers were received any financial recognition for students placed with them. Authorities receive £18 per student per placement but it is up to each authority how they use these funds. Practice varies: some make an additional payment to the individual for each student; some give a small increase in salary; others retain the payment to benefit the department as a whole. Two authorities pay individuals £750 for each placement, one £500 and one £400. Smaller payments of £200 or £250 are paid to Link Workers in these areas. One learning officer outlined their justification for the payment.

'Well it is unusual in the sense that lots of folk used to do it. It is just that it's stopped happening over years. So probably economic pressures have developed it into that. I have just been able to defend that and protect that. The way I do in terms of justifying that, is that's an additional responsibility that carries supervision, that carries quite a strong statement. You are actually recommending whether somebody should become a qualified social work or not in part and parcel of that course. And the time that has taken to do that and the responsibility is quite high. So I think it is unfair to put that on a social worker in normal practice with normal work pressures and to ask them to take that responsibility.' [013]

# Organisational Models

In two authorities those attaining the Practice Teacher Award progress to the title of Senior Practitioner, bringing with it a modest (but one-off) increment. Elsewhere however this was a reward for Mental Health Officer (MHO) training but not for practice teaching. The majority do not pass any of the monies onto the Practice Teachers; this has led to some disgruntlement in areas where this has been a recent development and for a couple of authorities a sharp reduction in interest – 'they got additional payment and since that has stopped the number of staff prepared to do it has dramatically reduced'.

**'The Local Authority no longer pay us for being a Practice Teacher. So again, that's another issue because, from my point of view, there is a lack of recognition and also a lack of worth in what you contribute both to the Profession but also to Social Work Education. I know a number of people were put off because you take a heavy and often complex caseload and then the Local Authority turn round to say 'we are not even going to pay you for the additional work' that you then have to take on.'** [035]

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It is interesting to compare this overview with the models identified in an earlier study for the Learning Network (Gordon *et al*, 2009). They contrasted the traditional singleton model, one Practice Teacher to one student, with emerging alternatives. What were termed 'long-arm' Practice Teachers, employed either within the organisation or independently, had the potential to allow students to undertake their practice learning opportunities in more than one agency. There was reference also to group supervision models, Universities employing Practice Teachers and the secondment of social services staff to undertake practice teaching. It is perhaps disappointing that, one or two notable exceptions apart, there was little evidence that such alternatives had taken root to any great extent. Moreover, there was no mention of any of the innovations from wider afield identified in that report: the 'service delivery model' (Butler, 2007) whereby students took responsibility for providing support and the practice learning opportunity was seen as a contribution rather than a potential burden; the involvement of service users as a key partner in practice teaching; and the use of e-learning options. Cornish and White (2014) outline the development of a student-centred and empowering practice learning unit, the Centre for Development of Social Care Practice (CDSCP) in Bedfordshire, a reframing of the traditional student unit. Even further afield, Crisp and Hosken (2016) have detailed the development of a remotely managed student unit, SWAN-AU, an example of an action learning placement model.

# Learning Environment

Whatever the internal arrangements of each area, key concern of practice teaching is to provide a learning environment which is supportive to students. The hope is that it can provide a positive experience, offering support and guidance but also challenging when necessary. The desire for a positive experience applies equally to the Practice Teacher and wider team as to the student, not least in order to generate ongoing commitment – 'Positive and supportive for staff and students to learn'.

One Practice Teacher leading the process within their authority spoke of the importance that should be paid to placement design and preparation:

'So I would identify matches, so I would get my quota and forms, I will go through those forms in detail looking at people's life needs versus their learning needs. I will then share that with my partner authorities and we will swap and we will do our best to try and make sure that we match best to that potential learning.' [013]

Another echoed the benefit of this careful analysis.

'It depends on what they have come looking for, I call it "bring and buy" right because if you say "what's your learning needs" they will go "oh I don't know". So we have this wee scale "what do you bring to the placement and what would you want to get out of it when you leave". And my student had been like that "well I don't know how I would deal with conflict" so we just set that up. As "oh you are going down to that duty then and I will go down with you". And she was absolutely fantastic at that.' [022]

This meticulous approach was not thought to be commonplace.

'At a national level I don't think we have addressed the growing need in terms of placement design, or placement requirements across Scotland. We have not kept track of that, I don't think that we are placing enough responsibility on local authorities to be a stronger part of that. So it comes down to individual commitment.' [013]

The *physical environment* for the student is important in making them feel welcome and relaxed. One Practice Teacher described their own preparation.

'You need to know exactly when your student is coming, you need to have different things in place for them, IT equipment, phones, pens. So things like that. If you have not got that in place I think when a student arrives they just feel they are not valued. And I think that is dead important for them to feel part of a team... There are students walking around with a letter to introduce themselves for the first couple of weeks instead of an ID badge and that's not necessary.' [009]



# Learning Environment

Referring to the *student learning environment*, the main discussion focussed on how all teams and individuals tried to be supportive to students and mentor them if they were struggling. Almost all of those interviewed indicated that both they and their colleagues tried hard to make it a positive experience, to support, guide and challenge students as well as offering mentorship if students were failing. There was recognition by individuals of the key role they occupied – 'I think it is important for Practice Teachers to try and extract that passion from students'.

'The students basically that I have had or just now it is mostly about getting their head down, getting through the course, getting through their placement, and there's nothing wrong with that. But there's something missing from social work and potentially academia if they are coming to a placement, they are seeing disadvantage and they are not taking steps to even to talk about that in supervision.' [026]

'And I think for me as well, you know, trying to enhance people's ability to be critically reflective in their practice, which is difficult. So we really need to get people to think, it is a difficult thing to think reflectively. I think it is tied to that critical dialogue, you know, 'what would you have done different, why would you have done it differently' all that kind of thing. And trying to get them to, not just talk about em... not just ask them... a bit of a story, but actually getting them to really evaluate what was going on.' [034]

Several respondents expressed a strong view that students should not be seen as a mechanism for relieving pressure on the caseload.

'We give people good experiences, we don't give them stuff they can't deal with. We don't see them as just a place where you can dump a whole load of work. We would never do that... But also you hear about folk going to placements where there are no opportunities to learn anything and they are just doing dogsbody stuff. I mean again we would never do that.' [007]

A slightly negative twist was brought out by a couple of interviewees who were concerned that 'when it gets too busy it is perhaps unfair to students'. It was also suggested that 'teachers who are too nice, can give a bad experience in a placement'.

# Learning Environment

There appeared to be considerable autonomy in how Practice Teachers structured the learning with students, suggesting that what the student is exposed to depends very much on the individual Practice Teacher: 'it's an individual decision on how you do it'; 'it can be down to individual Practice Teachers what learnings the student gets'. One respondent spoke at length about the importance of supporting the student to understand 'the big picture', linking them to resources within the community and emphasising the importance of research – 'I think the research part is crucial to the overall outcomes of students'.

**'In the past, I just bought my own books. There is a lot of online stuff. And I found it very good where I can, for example download books onto the Kindle where I take my Kindle to the student. So rather than a bag full of books I have got my Kindle with all the different books and I say look at this one.'** [002]

Another Practice Teacher has developed a groupwork programme for students, with 15-25 students coming together for sessions across three neighbouring authorities. In another authority the Development Officer organises group visits to local resources, including Women's Aid, the prison and dementia training, 'instead of having dribs and drabs of students all popping out to places'.

The student is also likely to be working within a wider team and an important dimension was the general *involvement of colleagues*. There was considerable endorsement of the positive support received from wider team members – 'everyone helps and protects the students so they get a good experience', 'everyone supports placement students'. Importance was given to the 'cultural understanding within the team on the value of having a student'. Both the privilege and the responsibility of the learning environment in creating awareness and empathy was identified by one respondent.

**'It doesn't cost more money to create excellent practitioners. It doesn't cost more money to create confident people. It might be more challenging for the managers to contain us a little bit more and be challenged a bit more. But it doesn't cost more money and the outcomes would be there, it would happen.'** [003]

## Key implications

- Pre-placement preparation for the student's arrival is important in creating a supportive and enabling environment
- Practice Teachers develop their individual ways of working with students
- Opportunities for group supervision opportunities and visits should be encouraged
- Participation and support from the wider team is a key element for a high quality learning environment



# Motivation

Respondents were asked about their motivation for becoming a Practice Teacher. There was a strong sense of reciprocity, of giving back or contributing to the discipline they had benefitted from themselves. The table below offers an overview of these sentiments.

Giving back			
Inspiration	Pay back	Improve students	Pass on
Found teachers inspiring	Pay back for what I have got	They provide better service	Want to give that experience to others
Inspirational teachers	Growing your own social workers	Good experience myself and want to influence the profession	Enjoy watching learning develop
Great experience and teachers	Give something back		Pass it on
Inspired by a PT	We owe it to our own profession		Always love teaching and seeing students develop
Inspirational experience	Great experience myself – pay something back		My experience was good – love to see others learn. Like to see them learn and grow

Several spoke of having had inspirational teachers themselves and wishing to replicate the experience for their own students.

'I had fantastic practice teachers who inspired me... Those were the ones that were interested in practice teaching were the ones that really motivated me towards being with social work. And social work values.' [003]

'I know that the reason I wanted to be a practice teacher was that I had a really good experience for my final placement and the practice teacher was just fantastic. And once I qualified and started working I thought 'I want to be able to give that experience to other people as well'. [008]

# Motivation

Individuals also referenced their own passion for social work and their desire to see that passion develop for others.

'Social work is something that I am passionate about. And through Practice Teaching, one thing that I can hopefully do, is to kind of stimulate that passion. And also to give people the same experience I had when I was a student.' [035]

Some highlighted their sheer love for the activity.

'I actually love it and my last student just finished there and actually that's what I remember saying to her 'I actually love this' and it dawned on me I have never complained about practice teaching. I complained about every other role in my work at one time or another. And I haven't complained about practice teaching.' [022]

'It was my second placement that the Practice Teacher I had I felt it really inspiring. I thought to myself at that point, while I was in my second placement, that that's what I want to do. It was great because I enjoyed the whole 'ripping everything apart' situation, getting right into the nitty gritty of why you were doing a thing. What was really going on. Just getting into the depths of it.' [031]

A second motivational theme cited by respondents referred to *personal or professional development*. People wanted to be good at their job, to stay up-to-date, and to develop their skills, including in mentoring and coaching. Getting involved in practice teaching was considered a useful trigger for activity that might otherwise get shelved – 'it helps you keep in touch with stuff in terms of current theory, current practice'.

'The challenges that students bring I think actually keeps you really sharp. You will look at research, you will look at journal articles when you have got a student. You will do just a wee bit more than if you are working and you are tired and don't have the time to do that 'I don't have time to read that I will read that another time'. If you have got a student you will look for pieces of work and things that they can look at and explore as well.' [023]

There was also reference to involvement in practice teaching as a protection against complacency.

'Because when you have been practising for a number of years you can lose that, you are just on autopilot most of the time. Keeping a grip on, as you say, the aims and values and the goals of social work and not just getting bogged down with the rushing from one task to another.' [008]

# Motivation

Working with students was also cited as a catalyst for development within the wider team – 'sometimes students give us a bit of a shake up as well', 'students bring a new air of motivation and people realise that actually they need to be thinking about it positively'. Providing that they are exposed to the latest policy and practice initiatives in their university courses, students are well placed to bring contemporary thinking to those who may have been in practice for many years – 'students bring fresh eyes and knowledge'.

'The other motivation is I think students are really good for teams. I think they bring a lot of energy to the team, get people thinking differently and, especially in residential, I think it is really good for both the student social workers and the residential workers to have a student on site.' [014]

'Some people in here have been in a long time and are out of touch with what's being taught, what theories are sort of fashionable etc and I learned all that from students or newly qualified workers. I can see the real potential for having students.' [016]

Not unrelated were motivations connected to *career advancement*. A number of respondents viewed being a Practice Teacher as a good way to demonstrate leadership and hence progress up the career ladder to management – 'getting another way to add to work makes you part of the elite'. Ironically, several highlighted that progression was also the route out of practice teaching, people finding more senior roles incompatible with the role of Practice Teacher. Although there were a number of examples of people continuing their practice teaching into senior roles, many, particularly team leaders, found the demands of their post precluded taking further students.

'What I find is, as a team leader, it is really difficult to have enough time to have a student and that is really more about the fact that you need to do people in supervision. So if you have are supervising six members of staff, having to do monthly supervision with them. To put that weekly supervision in with a Student is really really difficult.' [031]

Recognition as a Practice Teacher could also bestow status on the individual, although a number commented that training as a Mental Health Officer (MHO) or undertaking Child Protection training seemed to be perceived more highly in status terms.

'I feel that we seem to be the wee Cinderella side of the continuing professional development, that there is not enough focus on Practice Teacher.' [002]

This was despite one individual who had gained both the awards declaring 'to my mind the Practice Teaching role is far more difficult than the Mental Health Officer role'.

# Motivation

A final strand in the motivation of Practice Teachers was a desire to influence the *content* of the students' learning: 'we need to keep the practice part of learning for students'; 'make sure the practical aspect of learning is kept'. This touches on the much wider debate of how the practice and academic elements of social work training interact and the extent to which the aspirations for shared professional learning can be met (Scottish Social Services Council, 2016).

'I think there is a lot of focus on the written work that social workers do now. There is a lot of assessment obviously and there's a lot of care management issues. And there's not so much focus on building up of relationships with people. [002]

Another spoke of working on the challenge of managing the ending of a placement, while a third spoke of the need to develop the student's resilience:

'I think they need to build the resilience within the Students... how they keep themselves safe emotionally and well. Because in the first couple of years if you are in something like this people can 'burn out' because they are not prepared. So I think practice teaching I think a lot of it should be on that.' [032]

Whatever the individual motivation, the extent to which individuals are able to follow through on their aspiration to become a Practice Teacher or to practice in the role will depend on a number of enablers and barriers. These are explored in the next two sections.

## Key implications

- Reciprocity, giving back, and replication, recreating their own positive experiences, are major drivers for Practice Teachers
- Practice teaching is seen as a useful trigger for sustaining professional development
- Students can bring energy to a team
- Practice Teachers feel their role does not carry the same status as that of the Mental Health Officer

# Enablers and Benefits

The differing organisational arrangements for practice teaching across member authorities have already been highlighted above. A further consideration is the extent to which authorities seek to maximise the opportunities for practice teaching and Practice Teachers. One respondent detailed the proactive strategy they are pursuing.

'We try to have a developmental approach. We have tried to work towards every team having their own Practice Teacher and Developing Practice Teacher because we don't have them. We have just put somebody on from the Youth Justice Team and they have been taking excellent placements for years but there was nobody going to become a Practice Teacher but somebody is on the current course.' [001]

In some authorities, on the other hand, learning and development staff have been subsumed within a wider corporate structure, practice teaching forums have fallen away or been replaced by on-line rather than face-to-face encounters.

Differing models will bring their own benefits and challenges. *Structural support* was identified as a key factor in achieving effective practice teaching, with management commitment and appreciation of the value of the role and of the wider context of learning a major asset. Acknowledgment of any difficulties that might arise and support for their resolution was also appreciated.

'I think you have to be quite strong as a practice teacher. You have to stand your ground sometimes and make sure that there's some kind of workload relief and that people recognise the work that you are actually doing.' [004]

Support from an individual's team and from other workers within the organisation was invaluable.

'Everyone takes a really active supportive role when a student starts so she gets the benefit from multiple perspectives; it is a real team approach to learning'. [005]

Several of the enabling factors identified by respondents built on their original motivation. For example people considered that as individuals and teams they benefitted from *performance improvement from students*. They gained from new views and up-to-date theories, approaches and research, and their own skills were therefore refreshed – 'it's a two way thing, we learn from the students as well'.

'And the good thing about being a Practice Teacher is it keeps your practice very sharp as well and it stops you becoming honed-in in your own speciality. You then get an awareness of new procedures, new practices in other areas of social work.' [023]

## Enablers and Benefits

A number recounted how the enthusiasm of students could reinvigorate a team.

At the same time, there was a view expressed by a number of respondents that students are less engaged in the practice environment than in the past, less prepared to be pushed or stretched. This is obviously a complex area and would require further investigation but may be linked to what is perceived as an erosion of social work values and a greater emphasis on managerialism. One respondent recalled their own experience and reflected on their dilemma in challenging students.

'I had one massively radical Practice Teacher who challenged me, stretched me academically, pushed me ethically, pushed me in my personal development. He really, really challenged me because he understood that unless I was challenged I couldn't have the privilege of challenging others... I probably push my students a tenth of that. It is such a watered down version because students typically aren't interested and can't handle that now. They are not expecting that. They feel very uncomfortable when you just ask a few sort of more kind of personal development, if you like, questions. And like emotional intelligence and self awareness, all these sort of things that push then on that stuff. And they are not really up for it. Not that I want to make them uncomfortable in an unnecessary way. So I am very sensitive to that one so I probably don't push them as much as I was pushed.' [003]

In addition to promoting dialogue and discussion within teams, participating in practice teaching could generate wider connections and developmental opportunities – 'you meet other Practice Teachers when we make networks'. People cited both informal and more formal support networks, the setting up of a practitioners' forum, and a range of other 'refresher' opportunities. There was perhaps surprisingly little reference to the Scottish Organisation for Practice Learning (ScOPT), although a few referred to use of their toolkit, ScOPT Box.

'We used to have a Practice Teacher Forum... it gave you the opportunity to speak to other Practice Teachers within the council. It also gave us the opportunity to have a discussion about who had students and about getting the students together. And we would sometimes do group supervision, so there were sessions like that that were helpful. But that seems to have fell by the wayside a wee bit.' [009]

Those involved in practice teaching valued a commitment to teaching students from the wider team and appreciated when team members took time to interact with students. One respondent acknowledged that 'it is good to be challenged as well and be out of your comfort zone'.

# Enablers and Benefits

A thread running throughout this report relates to the strength of the support for the Practice Teacher from the wider organisation – 'I think at the moment the structure around practice learning is a bit dependent on the kind of organisational commitment'. A strong learning and development section and strong management support was helpful in sustaining practice teaching and practice learning. One staff development officer identified a range of supportive measures they had put in place, including Practice Forums and training for Link Workers who could share in supporting the student.

'I also lined her up with a Link Worker and they formed a really good relationship and she went to the Link Worker for a lot of practical support. So I think that was key. I think I would have struggled as well if I didn't have somebody else as a kind of back up.' [011]

Another authority had introduced an annual event which had proved popular.

'We had a 'talking wall' so we asked people to post stuff up about how we could support them more, or what would make their practice teaching flow better or less challenging, or remove some of the barriers. So we repeated that again this year and it has been really successful and the feedback was really positive.' [030]

Practice teachers, particularly those in full-time development positions, also considered it important to be physically visible to the teams, basing themselves around the locality teams and nurturing applications to take on practice teaching.

'People who are undergoing the practice teaching qualification I give them a lot of support in terms of their application, in terms of thinking about what are some of the bigger conceptual ideas that around in practice teaching. So we try and offer as much support as we can.' [011]

Conversely, the absence of such support could leave the Practice Teacher very much on their own.

'I think once you have got your qualification and you have had your first student and you have been supervised through having your first student, it feels like you are just left to get on with it. It is just the case of you get an email every year to ask "can you take a student" "aye that's fine send me their profile" and that's it.' [009]

## Key implications

- Wider organisational support is an important element in facilitating practice teaching
- Engagement with practice teaching can lead to performance improvement within the team
- Students often appear less willing to be challenged and extended than in the past



# Barriers

Whatever the individual or organisational aspirations for practice teaching, a number of barriers may inhibit individuals taking on or continuing with the role. A key barrier cited by a substantial number of respondents was time. Several respondents who were carrying the role alongside core responsibilities estimated an input of around a day a week, and many highlighted that there was no protected time or reduction in workload. One expressed frustration that seniors have no time to be Practice Teachers as 'their roles would be brilliant insight for students'. There were, however, examples of seniors who continued with the role.

**'We probably have got two seniors who love practice teaching so much that they continue to take them even although they probably don't have the capacity.'** [001]

Respondents from several authorities highlighted the large number of Practice Teachers that become inactive. One development officer detailed:

**'Out of every five that I put through, probably four of them immediately go on and get a Team Leader's post. So out of that effort to put five people through the course, I am only getting one Practice Teacher who is continuing. And that's with every cohort.'** [011]

It was suggested that some undertake the training solely to boost their promotion prospects, while for others there is genuine commitment. One authority harnesses the committed team leaders to act as champions for the role amongst their team members, encouraging individuals to undertake the training.

**'I think my argument would be if you are doing the practice teaching I think it is really important that you give back in a sense by working with students and spending a bit of time and actually using these skills that you have learned on your course.'** [033]

Closely related to the lack of time are inhibiting work conditions. People who are already busy can struggle to find the additional time that is required within their working day, even though they may value the role.

**'People are immensely supportive of practice teaching and people understand the importance of it, but when it comes down to individual worker and the individual team leader looking at what needs to be done in that team, it is very difficult for people to be freed up to allow them to work with students.'** [011]



# Barriers

Moreover there may be a legacy of open cases for the Practice Teacher when the student leaves – ‘if cases are still going on when the student leaves, we have to take them on’.

**‘What I find with them all is that the impact on my work is horrendous. My workload goes through the roof when I take on a student.’ [020]**

The recurring issue of payment can be an element here; if individual payments have been discontinued (or not existed) individuals may no longer feel there is sufficient incentive.

**‘When workers are feeling quite undervalued and unappreciated, even saying “we are going to give you £500 for every student you take” it is not going to turn the world around. But it might pay for a weekend away or buying a new pair of shoes.’ [011]**

A range of other aspects of the process of working with students in the role of Practice Teacher is cited as barriers. In some authorities there is little sense of internal support for Practice Teachers.

**‘In terms of support for practice teaching, I think we probably all feel that it’s an ‘add on’ on what you do. And there’s not really any recognition of the task. I think that’s been a perennial. There’s not really any enhancements in terms of financially or anything like that for doing it. In order to achieve the award now it takes a long time to do it. I think there’s probably a feeling now, there’s a lot of effort for not much reward at the end of it.’ [034]**

A number of individuals also spoke of a lack of support if they had a failing student, with some perceiving implied criticism of their own role or pressure to avoid failure – ‘there are a few people that I have spoke to that have tried to fail students and never managed to’.

**‘It is very difficult to fail a student and it takes its toll on you when a student is failing so it’s easier for to pass them. And we need to look at that in terms of we need good, qualitative people to do this job, because this job is getting harder and harder. So I think that’s where we need to look at something that ensures that the people we have got as Practice Teachers are the right people.’ [023]**

More generally some considered there was little encouragement or motivation to become a Practice Teacher and that it could be seen as a lower priority when there were staff shortages or financial constraints – ‘cuts mean we can do less of everything’.

## Barriers

Others highlighted that there was little integration with other areas such as health and that there could be difficulties in interacting with the systems of other organisations. This is inevitably a key area in the current climate and will be addressed in the discussion of future directions. Some did however speak of benefitting from integration generated by co-location.

'I think being part of a community campus also allows regular discussions formal and informal with other practitioners from health and education because we have occupational therapists and we have nurse specialists. We have also got the school teachers as well. So there's a lot of networking there within that one environment that you wouldn't maybe get if you were just based in an area team which is not at the heart of that wider campus system.' [002]

Internally, an increased focus on agile and mobile working could make it difficult to give students easy access to colleagues and a supportive working environment.

'They don't get sitting in amongst the team that they are working in. They are stuck down the other end of the office on a fixed desk. The students miss a lot of what's going on within Children and Families. Like hearing phone calls, hearing how social workers respond, hearing even chatting amongst themselves, what you need from your colleagues, stuff like that. Creating care plans and talking about if you are writing a report and you are asking somebody "what do you think of this or that". I think they miss out a lot on being isolated that way.' [032]

A further limiting factor that was raised was that decision-making often lay with managers rather than the Practice Teacher. This could be the decision as to whether students were taken on and any allowance in terms of protected time and could be very individualistic – 'most of the time it's an individual decision by managers if we can have students'. This could lead to Practice Teachers feeling they lacked autonomy and were subject to the vagaries of individual managers.

'We have to look at practice learning from a higher up strategic perspective, I think. And that way it will work from the top down. It feels to me that sometimes it is a bit ad hoc. There are pockets of really, really good practice. We have probably got into this kind of spiral where it was the same Practice Teachers yet we have a breadth of Practice Teachers.' [030]

# Barriers

Finally, a number of individuals outlined how *placement difficulties* could act as a barrier to practice teaching. Teams may not want students, making it difficult to get placements filled, and authorities were not always able to offer the full range of placement experiences.

'We are constantly knocking on people's doors and we were constantly on our knees saying "please can you take this student". Where I suppose my personal view is it is not a very strategic way to try and manage what is a complex piece of work.' [030]

One respondent concluded: 'I think there are more disadvantages at the moment to being a Practice Teacher than there are advantages'.

It is interesting to note that much of this account of enablers and barriers echoes the findings of a survey of practice educators in England (Waterhouse et al, 2011). The support most valued was briefing from Universities, updates on developments in practice education, and student feedback. Barriers to the provision of learning opportunities were workload pressures, lack of time, and lack of financial incentives.

## Key implications

- Many perceive time to be a barrier to active practice teaching
- Many Practice Teachers become inactive on promotion to managerial posts although some, though enthusiasm, do manage to continue in the role
- Absence of payment or workload reduction can be a disincentive
- Agile working and hot-desking introduces challenges to the working environment for the student
- There can be difficulties around managing failing students
- There is variation in the organisational support for the Practice Teacher role

# Resourcing

Almost all interviewees highlighted issues relating to resourcing, in particular under-resourcing of their roles and the additional commitments of practice teaching. Staffing was a key limiting factor. Obviously placements can only be offered if the key resource, namely a Practice Teacher, is available. At its worst there may be not enough placements, Practice Teachers or Link Workers. Individuals may be placed inappropriately for the sake of a placement or a reducing number of Practice Teachers may take on all the work leading them in turn to withdraw. Reduction in team members is likely to reduce the quality of supervision.

More general resourcing and logistics issues have already been touched upon. Hot desking makes it difficult to provide dedicated space or computer access for students. This has the obvious implications for physical location, but also has reverberations in terms of the extent to which students feel welcome and included within the team. One learning and development officer had been able to secure funding for five laptops.

**'Now that might not seem like very much but when people are trying to get used to new office environments, there are issues about workspace, there are issues about resource. If you can get around that by just saying "we provide that" it makes a difference.'** [007]

*People related resource limitations* can be explored in greater detail. Many focus on the shortage of Practice Teachers, for which they offer a number of explanations. People are retiring and not being replaced; Practice Teachers may train but then move on; short staffed managers may protect their teams from doing too much and practice teaching may be the first to be cut back. Shortage of Practice Teachers, including the more experienced, can impact in turn on the quality of supervision or the ability to rotate through teams – 'people are being asked to do more with less resources or time'. There was also a suggestion that social workers are 'feeling flat' – 'unmotivated Practice Teachers don't give good placements'.

**'It is down to the motivation of the Practice Teacher to maintain a good standard of placement for the student. So I think there are more challenges to provide a positive placement to a student than there are opportunities.'**

**'I think the motivation and the passion for practice teaching is still there. I think why I get this frustration is the organisational constraints and pressures that we are facing that's making it difficult.'**

# Resourcing

Time as a barrier to getting involved in practice teaching has already been identified. *Time related limitations* also feature heavily amongst those who are actively engaged as Practice Teachers. A fairly universal refrain was that there 'was never enough time', 'we all struggle for time', 'not enough time to do it well'. Those who persevered highlighted that very often they were working outwith their contracted hours to complete their practice teaching duties – 'whatever commitment I make to practice teaching really is done in my own time', 'I end up working at home to get time back', 'I end up doing teaching stuff at night'. This invoked again the lack of protected time – 'need to have free time not taken by my case load' – or to have a reduced case load – 'need to reduce my case load to have time'. Respondents asked 'how can I manage a busy caseload but also support students' and spoke of the challenges of marrying their commitment to practice teaching with their role as a social worker. For some the time pressures could lead to them asking 'is it worth it, is it achievable.'

Not surprisingly there was also reference to *financial limitations*, with budgets reducing, and to limitations on wider *support resources*. This had led, some argued, to a greater reliance on individual Practice Teachers themselves making resources available and on informal teaching networks – 'informal sharing is the best support we have'. A couple of those interviewed highlighted their concerns that in the face of dwindling resources, the need for social services was inevitably growing – 'more and more families need help'.

## Key implications

- Shortage of Practice Teachers appears to be a perennial problem
- Practice Teachers often complete their practice teaching activities outwith their working hours
- Practice Teachers draw on their own teaching resources and networks to support students

# University Interaction

The Practice Teacher is at the heart of the interaction between the academic training provider and the delivery of the local authority placement. Members of the LNW work primarily with students from five universities: University of the West of Scotland, Glasgow Caledonian, Strathclyde, Robert Gordon, and the Open University. Each of these institutions has their own structures and requirements – ‘the Universities’ way of working are all different’. There may be differences in how placements are arranged and in induction and very specific expectations in terms of how reports are written and presented. There may also be unwritten rules; for example one person described how her first placement with a student had proved problematic but the University was unwilling for her to be accompanied to the Practice Assessment Board by a fellow Practice Teacher.

There may also be differences between external students and their own employees following the Open University course. One Practice Teacher recalled:

**‘The very first time I did supervision with an OU student I was just about to sit down and do the supervision minutes when the student posted them to me... They are brought up to expect that they have to take their turn at all of these things.’ [012]**

The *lack of standardisation* in working with the different institutions generated considerable negative comment. Pathways, timings and expectations all varied and many felt that there should be more attempt to work to similar models. Individuals commented that ‘their time frames and ours don’t always match’ and ‘some need placements later than others which is difficult’.

**‘All of the Universities that we work with, although the standards that the Students have to meet are exactly the same because they are National Standards, the process that each of them use and the methods are different at times.’ [030]**

As well as differing requirements, individuals highlighted that the nature of contact with institutions could very much depend on the individuals involved – ‘some help with what they want you to do, others don’t’, ‘communication is good, but largely depends on the individuals involved’. This variability does however offer the opportunity for the local authority to be selective: ‘we choose which universities we take students from’.

One of those interviewed was able to reflect from the perspective of a number of different roles.

**‘I suppose having been, not just being a Practice Teacher but being an Associate Lecturer, when you see the experiences that people have across the board in different organisations, or different parts within our organisation. So I think it would be nice to have a degree standardisation. Not so much about the specialism, because obviously there are maybe different things going on depending on where you are, but about the quality in terms of the knowledge base, the access to resources, it is just giving a bit more standardisation of that. Because there is a huge variation between quality placements that people have.’ [031]**

# University Interaction

A second theme identified in respect of the institutions was the need for greater *University support* for the Practice Teachers. Individuals indicated they would welcome help with teaching methods – ‘teach us how to teach better’ – and considered there could be better provision of guidelines and templates. A number felt too many reports were required from Practice Teachers and there was a concern that the priority of the institutions was to get them to take on more students – ‘they just always seem to want us all to take more and more students’. Others expressed some appreciation – ‘the training days and student days at Uni are good’.

More detailed responses addressed the *nature of contact* with University staff. For some this was positive, with good links, clear communication, helpful tutors and good relationships sustained by staying in touch – ‘they are dead forward they have been good’. Practice Teachers welcomed the opportunity to get involved with the selection process and other joint activities.

**‘I think we have got very good relationships with the Universities actually and we also work with the Universities we offer, we sometimes Tutor when they are short of Tutors. OK. So there’s a good partnership between all of the Universities. And within the Team we all link individually to Universities... We also offer support to Universities when they are screening their application forms for the Students and we also help out with their interviews.’ [030]**

**‘When the paperwork comes I know who the Tutor is, we have contact details for the Tutor. And then normally you prepare your pre-placement and you plan for a date and everything else. So there’s a clear route then for contact with the Tutor both in terms of telephone, email and setting up meetings. So even from the beginning of placement I know who to contact and that for me works well.’ [035]**

Others expressed the need for greater integration and contact with the universities, clarification of expectations and improved communication. One commented that Universities didn’t always understand the logistics of the practice environment, citing delays in being able to start a placement as IT had not yet been put in place.

Some spoke with regret of the demise of Practice Teacher conferences that they had valued.

Respondents also expressed their views on the academic and applied work content. Of particular concern was the balance between the two elements, with a number suggesting that there could be an over-emphasis on the academic at the expense of the practical – ‘need to make sure they are prepared with real work as well as academic stuff’, ‘need to work so that we don’t lose the practice components of teaching’, ‘getting more academic by the year’.

There was a criticism that ‘students learn the same old years old stuff’. It was also recognised that there was variation across students – ‘different University students vary in how good they are.’ A number of respondents judged that ‘students turn up unprepared for actual practice’, ‘first placement students lack skill to fit the environment’.



# University Interaction

'I often find they struggle to meet the required competencies and often come here with a big gulf I think in terms of, you know, the learning in the First Placement compared to all the ground we are going to cover with the second one.' [034]

A number of individuals commented on what they perceived as an excessive burden of report writing, with one observing:

'There's parts of it that I felt that I was actually writing more than the student. And it shouldn't be like that. It should be the student giving their evidence and you commenting on their evidence.' [009]

The same individual recounted being asked to grade a student's assignment.

'If a lecturer at Uni is grading an assignment they have got 30 or 40 assignments to base it on so you will know this is the excellent end of spectrum, that one not so good and this one falls somewhere in-between. So you have got a bit of an idea of – right OK it is maybe two thirds of the way up so maybe about 60% per cent 70% is fine. But as a Practice Teacher I have nobody else to compare this to. Whilst you are reading it and thinking "aye it is maybe a decent report" is it an A or a B+ I don't think that's for practice teachers to do.' [009]

There was also a concern that the requirements for the Practice Teachers' own reports had escalated over the years.

'Over the years, originally when I started Practice Teaching you would write a page in a report, now you are working ten pages maybe more. So I think the level of detail and the requirements for the reports, the requirements for observations, all the bits about practice teaching I think are more complex than they were and it takes more time.' [029]

A number of authorities spoke of 'trying to explore new ways of working together' (see Bellinger and Ford, 2016).

## Key implications

- Universities all vary in their patterns of working and requirements
- This lack of standardisation complicates the practice teaching role
- Practice Teachers would like themselves to access the expertise of University staff, for example in how to respond to different learning styles
- Contact with University staff was general positive
- Practice Teachers felt there was often an over-emphasis on academic content, at times outdated



# Learning Network West



Practice learning, including the Professional Development Award in Practice Learning (PDAPL), is one of the three key activities of Learning Network West (LNW). The other two focus on the delivery of Mental Health Officer training and supporting learning and development more generally. In addition to facilitating and organising the two assessed placements required to qualify as a social worker, they cite as one of their objectives 'sourcing new and innovative placement settings and locations for students studying social work'.

Those interviewed for this study were asked to reflect on how the LNW meets the needs of practice learning and specifically of Practice Teachers. Respondents were generally positive about the *process of involvement* with the Network – 'pretty good organisation and support', 'a huge help'. Their role in brokering placements and their support during setting up was appreciated, as was their activity in spreading information – 'the Network are doing a fantastic job'. People were also pleased that they were able to accept or reject the students they were offered.

**'Another area that has been very good is in co-ordinating the placements. Providing that link with the Universities. So they do a lot of work, and it's not an easy job to set up, get placements in place. It's not always easy. Practice Teachers are not always easily available and last year was probably one of the worst for a long time.'** [001]

People also highlighted some of the specific supports the LNW offered. There was reference to good workshops and resources, and appreciation that resources were now on-line. The strategy meetings were also valued, with the opportunity to hear about possibilities – 'good to hear what is possible and available'. The provision of training for Link Workers was complimented.

**'One thing that is good before the Practice Teaching stage is the Link Worker Training. I know a lot of people within our Area Team go on that. So I will phone them and contact them and they will tell me when the Link Working Days take place. But they have also offered to come out and meet with teams or individuals and potential Link Workers on a one-to-one basis which is really helpful.'** [033]

There was also mention of the role of the Network in providing links to Independent Practice Teachers, although one Practice Teacher felt 'it works better for Independents'. One development officer highlighted the strategic contribution of the Network.

**'And more recently the Network started to represent us on wider bodies you know in terms of Triple SC and links with them and the review of the Practice Teaching Award of course.'** [021]

**'I can see they are giving a voice at a National level, they have got a representative in Social Work Scotland and hopefully that productively view as well. Especially in relation to the new Degree Programme.'** [028]

# Learning Network West

There was also felt to be a role for the Network in advocacy, in highlighting the critical role of practice teaching in providing the workforce of the future.

'I think the Learning Network has been very good at providing that overall perspective, about the decline in local authority placements and the increase in the voluntary sector and saying to local authorities "well if you are looking for qualified staff" and I think that certainly from a local authority perspective it is unrealistic to expect students to hit the ground running when they have not provided the placements in the first place.' [029]

Reflecting overall on how supported by LNW they felt, there was a range of positive and negative responses, as detailed in the table below.

<b>Support from LNW</b>	
<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative</b>
Does provide good support	Support more from the council or local authority or Uni
Great course	Not enough support
Lots of info	No learning support
Pretty good organisation and support	Nothing is offered no teaching support
Always on the end of the phone for support	No support nobody gets in touch
Supportive when doing the cert	No links now though
Really good and supportive	No connection
Good at setting it up supportive	Bit of a neutral relationship with them at the moment.

Some of these negative features should be resolved relatively easily.

'I would say the Learning Network, when I was in the process of doing the Certificate they were really good very, very supportive. And the programme I thought was really good. Since then, from my point of view, I don't see that I have got any connection, I don't feel any connection with the Learning Network. I don't feel as if there is any route by which I could go with an issue, or with a question to the Learning Network because I don't know who to contact. So I don't feel as if I have any relationship with the Network.' [035]

# Learning Network West

Other suggested areas for improvement reflected a number of issues already referenced and included more opportunities 'to teach us to teach', a greater need for standardisation, and a suggestion to run support and networks for all authorities together. There was also a request 'to help get students to the same level when they turn up'.

Particular credit was given to the Learning Network for the work on the assessors' award.

'There's a new approach to the ... award which I think the Learning Network need to be credited for. They are doing tremendous work in developing that award from where it started. And there has been continual improvement as a result of that.' [001]

In terms of innovative developments, reference was made to a joint project between LNW and Glasgow Caledonian University which included a part-time Practice Teacher supporting placements within a prison setting and the piloting of placements linked to a hospital setting. In this particular authority, however, a crisis in terms of the need for more Mental Health Officers had led to people being diverted from practice teaching and such developments to MHO training – 'the Older People's MHT they told the social worker who wanted to be a practice teacher "no you have got to become a MHO".'

There was speculation as to whether the status of the PDAPL could be a disincentive for people.

'I do wonder whether the PDA being an SVQ qualification has any impact on people, as opposed to like an academic qualification. People at social work it is because they already have a degree sometimes find SVQ is a step down. It's definitely a different way of learning and a different way of putting things together. No one has specifically said that.' [021]

'I think maybe, I don't know if this is a bit controversial but maybe the Learning Network offer the PDAPL the route to the qualification is the PLU from Robert Gordon University and maybe it is about giving people a choice. Several Universities have all started the Masters in Practice Teaching and if people think it is an academic qualification maybe that would be an option to persuade people to do their Practice Teaching because it is at a Master's level. And it is a University qualification as well.' [028]

## Key implications

- Many valued the support offered by the Learning Network West – placements, advice, events and materials
- Others however felt little connection to the Network and were not sure how to contact it
- People were ambivalent about the role of Independent Practice Teachers
- The contribution of the Network at the national level is important
- The PDAPL should lead to an academic qualification

# Looking to the Future

The rich interviews with the 36 respondents have revealed a wide range of issues which have hopefully been captured in the exploration above. As a prelude to looking to future challenges and opportunities, a subjective assessment was made of the current status of practice teaching within each of the authorities. This was solely based on the interview data and should therefore be regarded as indicative only and dependent on individual reporting. With these provisos, it is suggested that practice teaching in three of the authorities can be rated very highly (committed staff, valued activity, high levels of Practice Teacher satisfaction), six are delivering satisfactorily, and four might be characterised as struggling (isolated Practice Teachers with little support, low priority from management). These assessments should be viewed with caution: particularly in the larger authorities there may be considerable variation between different areas; elsewhere there may be additional challenges such as rurality. It does seem the case, however, that greater quality is attained by those authorities which include dedicated Practice Teachers working through a Learning and Development section. Having a dedicated Practice Teacher coordinator also contributes to the development of capacity.

With a view to shaping potential changes and improvements, those interviewed were asked to respond to the question: 'If you had a magic wand, what one thing would you do to make Practice Teaching and practice learning as a whole better?' Their priority actions for change can be encapsulated as:

- more money to Practice Teachers
- more protected time for Practice Teachers
- more recognition of practice teaching and more empathy and awareness of the importance of practice teaching
- increase placements in adult care
- create more Practice Teachers to avoid burn out of active Practice Teachers
- make practice teaching a compulsory part of being a social worker
- create better links with Universities
- less paperwork for Practice Teachers
- create more quality placements
- restate social work values and link into practice teaching.

These thoughts, hopes and recommendations can be explored on a number of dimensions. Not surprisingly there are echoes responding to concerns expressed in the earlier sections.

# Looking to the Future

The first dimension relates to **improvements to structure**, embracing in turn a range of suggestions. There is a desire to develop more of a Practice Teacher *community*, creating clearer channels of communication and expectations with University partners and developing mechanisms, for example a community of practice, for the exchange of ideas with other Practice Teachers – ‘formalise a wider support and sharing network’.

**‘It is that inexperience part of having your first few students that got me wondering “where do you turn for support in the early stages of being a Practice Teacher”. I think that could be looked at whether it is in the form of a wee bit of group working with other Practice Teachers.’ [002]**

Learning Network West was seen as pivotal in being able to foster such a community, with the request for example ‘to bring us altogether for a day’, suggesting that not all were aware of existing opportunities.

Reflecting earlier discussion of the extent to which individuals can continue practice teaching as they increase in seniority, a couple suggested more flexible arrangements could be explored – ‘find a way to get us to stay linked to practice teaching even if we can’t do it for a while’, ‘use senior Practice Teachers as mentors’. There was also support for a whole team approach.

**‘That person being able to learn and develop with other people as well as myself. And it doesn’t just take some pressure off me as the Team Leader trying to do the dual role, it’s also a more richer experience for them.’ [010]**

A general desire to raise the profile of practice teaching was expressed – ‘Practice Teachers should rotate through the different teams’, ‘make sure managers know what practice teaching involves’. It was also suggested that general administration could be improved – ‘maybe share governance across localities’, ‘one person as admin support’. One reflection was that rather than placements being secured on the goodwill of individual Practice Teachers, there should be a requirement for different teams within an authority to fill an allocation – ‘give placements by area and they are responsible to fill them’.

Responses from a number of people suggested that they were looking for more formal structuring of the content of their role. People talked about needing to be ‘taught how to teach’, ‘a system of coaching and mentoring’. There was a suggestion also that the values base of social work needed to be more prominent. One spoke of the need for ‘a value-defined social worker practice structure’, another ‘to give students a bigger picture of where social work fits’.

For a number of people this translated into a need for greater *standardisation* – ‘help us make sure we all assess the same’, ‘need to standardise the placements’.

## Looking to the Future

In the context of structure, many reflected on how practice teaching should respond to the opportunities and challenges of *integration*, specifically health and social care integration – 'more demand for joint learning in health and social care' – but also the opportunities for 'more cross disciplines and groups'. There was recognition that new structures presented opportunities and responsibilities and there was a call for 'that respectful understanding approach to joint working and partnership working'.

'One thing a student or a learning practitioner isn't going to want is to have a Practice Teacher harping back to the "good old days". There's an element of needing somebody that can equip their student to engage with and function in the changed world within CHP. There's a lot of advantages and sound principles around multi-disciplinary working and working with health practitioners and other practitioners is absolutely sound and valued.' [003]

'I think there's going to be more demand for joint learning opportunities across health and social care. So at some point over the next year the people who are involved in the Integration Programme are going to be saying "well how do we know that health staff have some understanding of what social workers do and how do we make sure that social work staff has an understanding of what health do.'" [005]

'We probably could go further on the integration. That might be a next step it would be maybe getting together with health colleagues and looking at what kind of placements they give to district nurses and much more dialogue about their approach and our approach and where we might offer opportunities for those students to develop.' [001]

Examples were given by those who had already developed initiatives around integration. One it is worth quoting at length.

'We are linking in just now with the BSc Mental Health Nursing and we will start to work in partnership to enable students, both social work and mental health, to experience each other's placement environments. And that will be focused on child and adolescent mental health, initially, as a pilot. We have also piloted a second year Masters Social Work Student who was in a health environment ward but not in the social work team, managed by a Senior Charge Nurse. And we are currently writing it up as a story document in relation to the experience. So we never looked at it from a placement, we looked at it from integration and how folk thought, what folk's fears were. Things from staff saying "what are they doing down there, what are they placed there, what does that mean for us" and all these things because I think that's what integration is about sometimes about how people view themselves. So if you are not dealing with that in real stories I think we are missing aspects of what we could be doing.' [013]



## Looking to the Future

People expressed some caution, however. They suggested that the nature of training in health is very different, with shorter placements and only limited assessment.

'I don't think you can immediately transfer what's done in health with what's done in social work because health training is very different and I think there's more expectation that people take students on placements but they are very short, and the level of assessment is very limited in terms of practitioners in teams. I worked quite closely with learning disability nurses in a previous post and the students would come and go quite rapidly. But I think there was more expectation on team members to provide support. But I don't know if it really went much beyond finding the support. I don't think it was the level of assessment, written assessment, observation etc required. So I don't think you can necessarily just transfer what the model for health is into a model of social work or vice versa. Some of that kind of work and people can quite quickly say "if health is required to do it so why can't social work". I don't think you can just do that. [O29]

This led to exploration of how closer working could be attained without the loss of essential social work values.

'At the bottom level of social care and NHS there will be a lot of integration, I think. Beyond that level, there is how you retain your professional identity and the professional skills and it is harder for social work to justify that because health can be practical and clinical about it. Whereas social work you are talking about risk assessment, you know, social aspects of care, which are much more nebulous concepts for people to follow. So it's harder for us to put forward a case.... In terms of practice teaching, I am not sure how that will go. Health have a lot of students, they have a culture for students, they have student supervision across various professionals. So that should help and I think it will be seen along that way.' [O21]

One predicted that social work training will remain a separate entity but some of the practice learning opportunities will be expanded; another speculated 'there might be maybe an increase in partnership type placements, health placements. I think that element could change. I think actually it might create more opportunities'. One respondent recounted that three service managers in the authority had taken on practice assessment for Practice Teachers for the PDA since integration – 'I think they feel it is keeping them more grounded in practice, which is interesting, not a spin-off I expected from integration'.

An alternative dimension was the suggestion that practice teaching should be incorporated into social work learning more broadly, for example by making it part of all social work courses – 'practice teaching should be a social work value not an optional extra'. A supplementary comment was the suggestion that 'grow your own' should be brought back – 'get a good student and equip them to join the team'. There were however differences of opinion as to whether subsequently taking on the role of Practice Teacher should be seen as compulsory, not least because practice teaching was considered essential to the continuation of the profession – 'if practice teaching dies out it will be hard to get social workers'.

## Looking to the Future

The stronger argument was that there was a need to be selective 'you need people who are wanting to take on that role and I don't think it is something that could be done by, or should be expected to be done, by everyone' [029].

'Because it is a particular skill and not all social workers are cut out to be Practice Teachers. And what I mean by that is that the course itself goes into things about Adult Learning, Learning Environment Theories and Adult Learning Theories, not all social workers are geared up to think like that or do that course. So it is not natural that every social worker will become a practice teacher.' [013]

A corollary of this was the dimension suggesting the creation or recreation of *specific funded roles* dedicated to practice teaching and its support – 'make Practice Teachers and independent qualified paid role' and have a 'dedicated role to support Practice Teachers' 'paid Practice Teacher co-ordinators'. Overall a need to increase the number of Practice Teachers, both full and part-time was highlighted. Increased resourcing was suggested as a critical driver – 'introduce better payments for taking on students', 'Practice Teachers need to be better paid and recognised'.

'I would make co-ordinator roles paid, full time paid co-ordinator roles in local authorities. I would reflect the work that practice teachers do, you know, financially, particularly from the money that local authorities get and also in their workload.' [005]

Money alone however may not be sufficient. A further dimension addressed the need for more attractive conditions generally, for *career improvements* – 'practice teaching may disappear unless it is better portrayed'. A more clearly defined career structure offering opportunities for progression was seen as a potentially beneficial strategy. It was suggested that awards rather than certificates would create a more attractive qualification and would assist in communicating the value of practice teaching to the wider community. This value should be championed and celebrated.

'I think probably if I had a magic wand what I would like to do is I would like to see it having more recognition and being valued because it is such a valuable experience for the student, for the tutor, for the Practice Teacher, but also it is a really really good experience for the team. Staff members come back and tell us "we did brilliant with a Student there" and they learn from that. So I suppose if I had a magic wand it would be that kind of recognition and value. Because people recognise what it does, how many people benefit from it, I think it should be much higher on the agenda.' [030]

These responses suggest some of the short and medium-term imperatives that should be explored by the partners in practice teaching. There are also, however, more fundamental questions to be addressed for the longer term and these will provide the focus for the final comments.



# Key Areas for Further Exploration

## Potential vulnerability of the role

'The demands and the constraints and the resource constraints are getting tighter and tighter all the time. The demands on the staff are getting stronger and, therefore, that means, I think, that practice learning becomes more vulnerable.' [001]

A number of people found it difficult to imagine that practice teaching could survive in the current climate. It is important to reflect, however, on whether this perceived vulnerability is accurate. Bruce (2008) suggests that shortage of placements has been an enduring feature over many years, exemplified for example in a survey undertaken by PriceWaterhouseCoopers for the then Social Work Services Inspectorate in 2002. One of the respondents confirmed these sentiments.

'I guess I feel that things haven't maybe massively changed from when I started 20 odd years ago in terms of pressure for placements. It's always been placed on goodwill and you know there's always a last minute scramble about for placements. So the same conversations have been happening for a long time and we have managed to carry on.' [029]

A mapping of existing Practice Teachers and placement opportunities against projected demand could offer a useful baseline for more evidenced argument.

## Goodwill versus compulsion

'I think we need it to become a requirement for statutory social work organisations to offer a proportionately appropriate number of placements every year. And I think it would help if practice teaching became a developmental part of the basic grade social work career approach.' [001]

This respondent continued by describing a three tier approach to development for the basic grade social worker, culminating after four or five years with taking on a mandatory placement – 'every social worker has got a training remit on their job description'.

This approach was rebuffed however by a second respondent.

'It's one of the things that I have wee bit of concern about this piece of research in that once it's all brought together you don't want there to be a knee-jerk reaction with people saying "we will direct people, we will direct workers to take students" because that would be so counter-productive... it then becomes a negative experience for the student, it becomes a negative experience for the practice teacher and it then further adds to that culture of disengagement that I am trying so hard to break.' [011]

# Key Areas for Further Exploration

It is likely that the majority would wish to avoid forcing practice teaching on those for whom it is not their preferred choice. The most effective strategy, however, may be to work towards ensuring through rewards such as status, the provision of adequate support, and the imaginative introduction of innovative approaches that conditions are as favourable as they can be to attract practitioners to practice teaching. In the words of one of those interviewed, the appropriate culture needs to be nurtured – 'ethos underpins it all'.

## Marrying the worlds of academia and practice

'My worry is that it will become more academic rather than practice. Obviously there's not a separation between the two, the two are clearly linked and we need to understand the theory and how to put that into practice. But I worry that it is just becoming more and more a sort of paper exercise and it is all about degrees and Universities' league tables and what have you.' [008]

The respective roles of the University and practice learning for the student of social work have been hotly debated. An important contribution has been made by the review of approaches to integrated learning for social work education and practice conducted as part of the Review of Social Work Education (Kettle et al, 2016). This has led to the framing of the challenge as shared professional learning:

'Ultimately what is required is a cultural and professional shift towards a situation in which every social worker is a social work educator and every social work setting is a learning site.'

The RSWE is exploring this world of blended learning opportunities further over the current year.

## Promoting a culture of flexibility and creativity

'I have been very keen to suggest that when we expand we are going to need more practice teachers but can we second social workers part time so that they can still be in practice for half of the week but spend maybe six months doing a lot of practice teaching and getting practice at that.' [019]

A thread running throughout this report has been the need for flexible solutions and conditions conducive to creativity. Sometimes Practice Teachers use their own initiative to find imaginative strategies but often this is in the absence of more widespread support. A range of creative approaches and alternative solutions featuring in the literature have been referenced in this report and a strategy for replication and development led by Learning Network West would be valuable.

# Key Areas for Further Exploration

## Babies and bathwater

Finally, in the course of writing this report, attention was drawn to the LEEP project (Learning for Effective and Ethical Practice) conducted in 2004 (Bruce and Lishman, 2004; Bruce *et al*, 2005). The project developed what they termed the 'integrated approach. This consisted of six key elements (Bruce, 2008):

- To create opportunities for *interchangeable roles* between higher education institutions 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 coordinator of packages of learning opportunities as well as having a key role in the teaching and assessment of students
- To develop service specific and cross sector *packages of learning opportunities*
- To develop a team approach to student learning and assessment by engaging a *range of staff* who supervise or coach 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.

More than a decade later, this would not be a bad place to start.



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# ANNEX ONE:

## Phase One interview questions

The draft questions below are for all interviewees but worded slightly differently dependent on whether the interviewee is active or inactive or in a wider strategic role

### **You, your role and background**

1. Tell me a bit about your current role, your responsibilities?
  2. How long have you been a PT?
  3. Tell me a bit about your involvement in PT over the last few years?
  4. What aspects of PT work well in your area and what aspects don't work so well?
  5. What is your motivation to take a student?
  6. How does LNW meet the needs of Practice learning and specifically practice teachers?
- 

### **Enablers and barriers to good practice teaching and practice learning**

7. What has enabled you to continue to work as a Practice Teacher? Or 'what would be useful to you to enable you to be more active as a PT, for example, resources or networks or toolkits'.
  8. What is in your PT toolkit?
  9. As appropriate, why are you not supporting social work students currently? Why do you think others are not supporting SW students ?
  10. What, if anything, has got in way of development of Practice learning more generally
  11. Would you wish to re-engage in Practice teaching ?
  12. What resources would you find useful to support (re-engage) you in Practice Teaching
- 

### **Near term and medium term changes that need to be put in place**

13. How does your local authority/partnership value Practice learning and the role of the Practice Teacher?
14. What investments, if any, are needed by your LA/Partnership into Practice learning in future?
15. How is it talked about, communicated, seen as a priority by leaders?
16. What do you see as learning and development's role in Practice learning?
17. Do you think your Partnership sees itself as a learning organisation?
18. Describe the relationships between LAs / Partnerships and the Unis / colleges and other partners?
19. What needs to change, become better in those relationships

# ANNEX ONE:

## Phase One interview questions

The draft questions below are for all interviewees but worded slightly differently dependent on whether the interviewee is active or inactive or in a wider strategic role

### **Strategic direction of Practice learning and Practice teaching going forward**

20. What are the big drivers of change being faced in relation to social work in Scotland?
  21. What do you think the expectation on Practice teaching may be in five years time?  
How will it be operating?
  22. What do you see the impact of health and social care integration being on Practice teaching now, for example, students, learning and development, the Unis?
  23. What might the longer term impact be?
- 

### **Concluding questions**

24. If you had a magic wand, what one thing would you do to make Practice Teaching and practice learning as a whole better?
25. What response do you think others being interviewed gave to that question?
26. Anything else you want to add about the role of Practice Teacher?



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