

Advice about what the 10 days practice experience might include

What sort of experience counts?

The practice experience is to ensure you have some introductory experience of the sorts of organisational settings and supportive relationships that social work or social care involve.

This can be very broad and can be as a volunteer or as a paid employee and in health, education or specific social care settings in statutory, voluntary or private sector.

What sorts of work does it need to include?

The practice experience needs to provide you with:

- the chance to talk with, and engage with, service users or their carers and understand their situation
- an appreciation of rules and guidance that show the way organisations expect their staff to behave and work with people
- expectations about the standards and codes that we need to consider when working with vulnerable people.

Observing a qualified social worker

If it is possible, it is useful for you to observe the work of a qualified social worker and what they do. Ideally, this would mean that you get the opportunity to shadow a social worker for the day and talk to them about the full range of roles and responsibilities they undertake. However, this can be difficult to arrange if your placement does not employ social workers.

As an alternative, you could observe social workers when they come in contact with your setting – for example, perhaps to sit in referral or review meetings, or arrange to talk to social workers who use the agency you work in about how they view their role. The verifier in your practice setting may be able to help you think about ways you can show that you understand what social workers do. Don't worry if this is not possible. You will have access to a range of materials where social workers talk about their practice and you will spend time in workshops clarifying your ideas about professional social work identity. This is particularly important if you think you want to go and study social work. You need to be clear about the differences in the professional role, compared to unqualified status and responsibilities.

What is the role of the verifier?

You need to ensure that someone in the practice setting will be able to confirm your involvement in their organisations. This is at a very beginning level of your understanding about social work and is really to indicate that your verifier feels happy that you have shown evidence of the basic requirements. By the end of the 10 days practice experience, they need to let us know whether they think you have:

- some understanding of the range of tasks that social workers carry out
- some ability to communicate appropriately with service users, both verbally and in writing
- some understanding of the experience of service users' use of services
- the potential ability to meet deadlines, be punctual and be reliable
- some understanding of the responsibilities as an accountable member of their organisation
- the ability to comply with the relevant professional code of conduct and ethics.

Some example of practice experience that previous students have used in the past

- Personal assistants or care assistants in residential or care agencies.
- Learning support assistants/classroom assistants in schools.
- Volunteer befrienders with Barnardos or Mind.
- Volunteer visitor to residential home or day care setting run by both private agencies and Age Concern.
- Foster carers.
- Pharmacist in a community health centre.

What can you do find such opportunities?

We recognise this can be difficult for someone who is not familiar with the range of sorts of care agencies or networks. These are suggestions that other students have used:

1. There are many organisations locally that seek to find opportunities for volunteers. You can find these online or look in local papers and you need to be requesting voluntary work in social care.
2. Many national Voluntary Organisations are organised so that there are local organisations that may have opportunities for volunteers. There are many organisations, but some you could consider are:
 - Mind
 - Age Concern UK
 - Barnardos
 - Mencap
 - Scope
 - Action for Children.
3. You can look online to find out how to contact these organisations and explore whether there are volunteer opportunities in your area.
4. You can contact your local authority social care department for adults or children by looking online, to ask if they have opportunities for volunteers or vacancies for unqualified workers.
5. You can use your own networks or ask in the tutor group for ideas or contacts (although it is important for you to be looking for this before the beginning of the module).