Practice Learning Requirements for Social Work Apprenticeship Students

Any organisation supporting an employee on the apprenticeship will have committed to making the necessary arrangements needed for them to meet the requirements for work-based learning.

- This agreement and a brief outline of the planned arrangements for work-based learning, now form part of our pre-application job role analysis.

You can access a detailed overview of the practice requirements on the Job Role Analysis form; by choosing Social Worker from the drop-down menu and we hope the further guidance below is helpful.

What practice experience do I have to arrange for my apprentice?

As participants on a Social Work England approved programme, employers must evidence that they have put in place suitable practice learning opportunities in line with the Education and Training standards 2021 and the apprenticeship standards.

The main element of these standards require:

"Students to spend at least 200 days (including up to 30 skills days) gaining different experiences and learning in practice settings."

As your apprentices is an in-work learner the 200 days in practice is very easily achieved.

- It is vital that apprentices are afforded the opportunity to embed their learning, develop their skills, and support people engaging with a range of different services.
- Every apprentice must spend time in **at least two practice settings** providing contrasting experiences, one of which must allow a focus on statutory work, providing experience of sufficient numbers of statutory social work tasks involving high risk decision making and legal interventions.

Throughout this time apprentices must be having regular reflective supervision with the social work qualified mentor allocated to them by their organisation.

What is contrasted learning?

To meet the requirements of Social Work England, apprentices need to have exposure to a breadth of social work experiences.

Many apprentices will be working in a social work team, so will have significant opportunities within an existing role. However, **all will need to have the chance to experience time in a contrasted setting**.

What constitutes a contrasted experience is not strictly defined, so we hope the key principles below will help you to plan and implement this for your apprentice:

- There should be a material difference in the nature of the work they are completing, **it should not just be doing the same tasks in a different location**.
- The location of the contrasted learning is not important, so they may not need to move geographically, it is **the nature of the work undertaken that must be varied** from someone's other work-based learning experiences.
- The apprentice should ideally be working with a group of people or individuals whose needs are different to those they have worked with before as part of the apprenticeship.
- An apprentice should be able to identify how their practice has changed based on the new experiences they have.
- The apprentice should be able to identify the knowledge, skills and behaviours that they have developed or evidenced within each setting.
- There should be an **opportunity for meaningful learning** that allows the apprentice to develop capability within each setting.
- **Where an apprentice's substantive role does not allow them to have sufficient experience of statutory work, this will have to be factored into their contrasted learning**.
- Conversely, if an apprentice's substantive post has a significant statutory element, this may allow more flexibility to explore other areas of social work and social care through their contrasted learning.

A clear contrast would be an apprentice who typically works with children and families, having the opportunity to work with adults, an apprentice who works in safeguarding adults/children undertaking contrasted learning in a setting with children with disabilities or a specialist mental health service, or an apprentice who works in a school or within the independent or voluntary sector undertaking contrasted learning in a social work team. However, the contrast can be far less pronounced and if it is structured in line with the standards and principles described, it is likely to be suitable.

- We encourage you to start planning for your apprentices' contrasted learning early in the programme. If you have any questions about whether what you are planning will meet what is required, please talk to your apprentice's skills coach who will be able to help and refer for further guidance if appropriate.

How long does contrasted learning have to be?

Every apprentice must be able evidence they have completed 200 days of supervised practice learning in line with the education and training standards.

Within those days the contrasted learning should be **meaningful**; a period that is sufficient to develop and consolidate knowledge and skills, work with people accessing services, and include sufficient time to be observed in practice by a qualified social worker. This can be evidenced as part of the apprentice's practice portfolio, which requires three direct observations.

What is statutory social work?

Statutory social work typically involves practice within legal frameworks and mandates, undertaking roles and responsibilities defined by law, and it includes high-risk decision-making.

Social Work England require that over the course of their work-based learning, social work students can undertake tasks and make decisions in the context of one or more of the following pieces of legislation:

- Children Act 1989: Section 17 and/or Section 47
- Care Act 2014
- Mental Capacity Act 2005
- Mental Health Act 1983

This experience can be in organisations who may be delivering services under contract, or in collaboration with local authorities, including but not limited to health and social care services, education and third sector organisations. Work should include high risk decision making (within limitation and with support from a social worker), assessment of need, plans, reviews and the delivery of appropriate interventions.

Version Control			
Version #	Date	Approved by	Changes (if applicable)
1.0	30/09/25	Andrea Collins	
2.0	14/09/26	Tara Peters	Amended wording to give greater clarity about contrasted learning content and duration.