

Practice Educator Guide: Concerns on Placement

**Practice Learning Unit
Division of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work
The University of Manchester**

**November 2020 (Version 6)
Review Date: July 2021**

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Glossary of Roles and Terms used within this Guide

Title	Role / Remit
Practice Educator (onsite)	Suitably qualified Practice Educators based in and employed by the placement agency have responsibility for the day to day assessment, support and management of the placement.
Practice Educator (offsite)	A suitably qualified person external to the placement agency that the University will allocate to undertake assessment and support tasks.
Onsite Supervisor (OSS)	A nominated member of staff at the placement agency who will be an on-site supervisor to the student. This person will be the student's first point of contact in the agency.
Lecturers in Practice Learning	Based at the University, they arrange practice placements and oversee the practice learning element of the MA in Social Work.
Academic Advisor (AA)	<p>University member of staff who provides a crucial link between the University and the placement agency. Each student has a named Academic Advisor who acts as a first point of contact for all those directly involved in the day to day operation of the placement.</p> <p>The Academic Advisor also acts the student's first point of contact for pastoral, general academic and professional development support. The Academic Advisor offers guidance to the student to assist progress towards professional practice.</p>
Head of Social Work	University member of staff who leads, manages and co-ordinates all activity relating to the student programme and student experience.
Examinations Officer	University member of staff who oversees student academic performance on each course unit, providing a link between course unit teams, the overall programme and external examiners. Acts as a point of contact for students regarding assessment queries.
The Practice Learning Unit Administrative Assistant	The administrative assistant based in the Practice Learning Unit within the University of Manchester supports the administration of practice learning in a number of ways e.g. maintaining databases, disseminating information related to available training and ensuring that rooms are available for recall days and training events.
PARE	Practice Assessment Record and Evaluation - online Placement Portfolio.

Introduction

This document is intended to act as a guide for Practice Educators (PEs) involved in the learning and development of social work students within the practice learning environment.

As a first principle, we aim for all practice assessments to be fair, open and transparent. Concerns about a student's performance or progression should be raised with the student **as soon as possible**. There is no need to wait for an interim review date. It is also vital that concerns about performance or progression are not left until the final PE report, as the student will not be aware of the areas requiring development and will not have had the opportunity to demonstrate improvement and learning.

Expectations of Practice Educators on Placement

The Practice Educator (PE) role is important and vital to supporting social workers of the future. As part of the Practice Educator role it is expected that you:

- Provide and manage an effective induction programme or ensure that it is provided by the agency;
- Participate in the completion of the Social Work Placement Learning Agreement together with the student, Academic Advisor and OSS (if appropriate);
- Provide regular supervision in line with the Social Work Placement Learning Agreement;
- Provide an appropriate workload and learning opportunities consistent with the requirements of the PCF/Professional Standards or ensure that these are provided by the agency;
- Regularly review the student's written work and provide constructive feedback;
- Assesses both formatively and summatively the student's direct practice skills;
- Provide regular, constructive feedback on work undertaken in order to promote the student's learning;
- Provide an interim review report (formative – interim assessment) and placement assessment report (Part 1)(summative – final assessment) and provide copies to the student and Academic Advisor on jointly agreed dates;
- Inform the student and Academic Advisor at an early stage if any difficulties/issues arise;
- Undertake direct observations of the student (2 in the first placement and 3 in the second placement). One of these in the second placement may be delegated to an appropriate third party. Alternatives to this arrangement must be discussed in advance with the Academic Advisor to ensure they meet the assessment requirements. These direct observations must be formally recorded and submitted with the placement assessment report (Part 1);
- Liaise with the Academic Advisor and course as appropriate;
- Ensure that the student has obtained feedback on their practice from service users and or carers;
- Record, or ensure that the OSS records, student days of attendance at placement and any absence or illness;
- Facilitate the student in linking theory and practice and in reflecting on their practice;
- Be open to learning from your student.

What Practice Educators can expect from an Academic Advisor

The Academic Advisor is available to:

- Facilitate the identification of the student's learning needs in preparation for practice learning;
- Facilitate the Placement Learning Agreement and interim review and to ensure that a range of learning opportunities and appropriate evidence gathering opportunities are provided and that the student's learning portfolio is completed;
- Facilitate any additional meetings that may be required during the placement;
- Support the student in creating the portfolio that evidences their capabilities;
- Provide regular contact (by email or telephone) with the student, Practice Educator (PE), and if appropriate, the Onsite Supervisor (OSS) at negotiated intervals;
- Be the first point of contact for the student, the PE and OSS at an early stage for any difficulties or problems that arise;
- Offer advice and guidance to the student, PE and OSS as and when required;
- Read and comment on one Critical Analysis of Practice prior to the Interim Review Meeting;
- Complete the placement collaboration agreement with each placement provider (as required by the professional registration body) on behalf of the University.

What types of concerns may I have?

Some examples of the issues of a student's behaviour which may cause concern are as follows:

- Poor time keeping / attendance.
- Poor communication or skills development.
- Unprofessional attitude or conduct / good character.
- Not meeting the learning objectives agreed in the Practice Learning Agreement.
- Not engaging in safe practice.
- Not maintaining good health.

When evaluating a student's professional development in practice, it is important to clarify what evidence is available to support your concerns.

Why is it important to raise my concerns?

As a Practice Educator your first duty is to protect the public from harm and this, in part, will be enacted by your safe supervision of students. If you have concerns about a student's professional behaviour, values or level of practice, you are asked to:

1. Identify these at the earliest opportunity to enable the student to implement the changes required.
2. Document your concerns and actions to be implemented (to support the change).
3. Provide regular constructive feedback on the process.
4. Access the appropriate support and guidance you require.

Who do I discuss my concerns with?

Raising concerns about a student can be a difficult situation for some Practice Educators and this may be due to a wide variety of reasons. For example, many people initially want to give the benefit of the doubt; there may be challenges with defining professional issues; and uncertainty about the reliability of the assessment process (Duffy, 2003). Recognising the challenges this situation brings, there are several individuals who can support you. These include:

- The Academic Advisor
- The Lecturer in Practice Learning.

An overview of each of these roles is available via page 2 of this document.

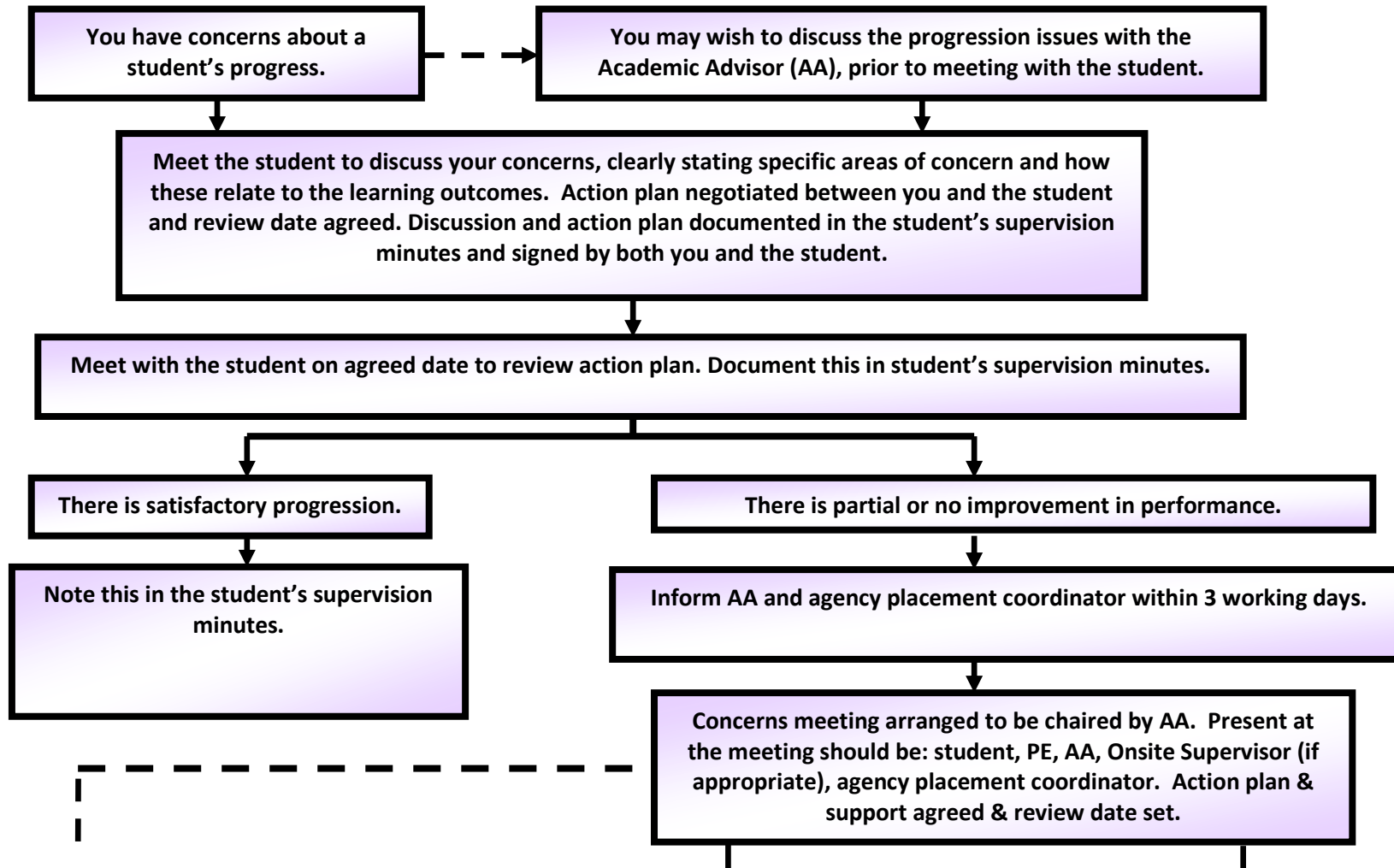
The Practice Learning Unit also offers three Practice Educator workshops between March and June each year where you can receive peer support from other Practice Educators. These workshops are highly recommended in both preparing new Practice Educators to undertake their roles and supporting all Practice Educators – regardless of experience.

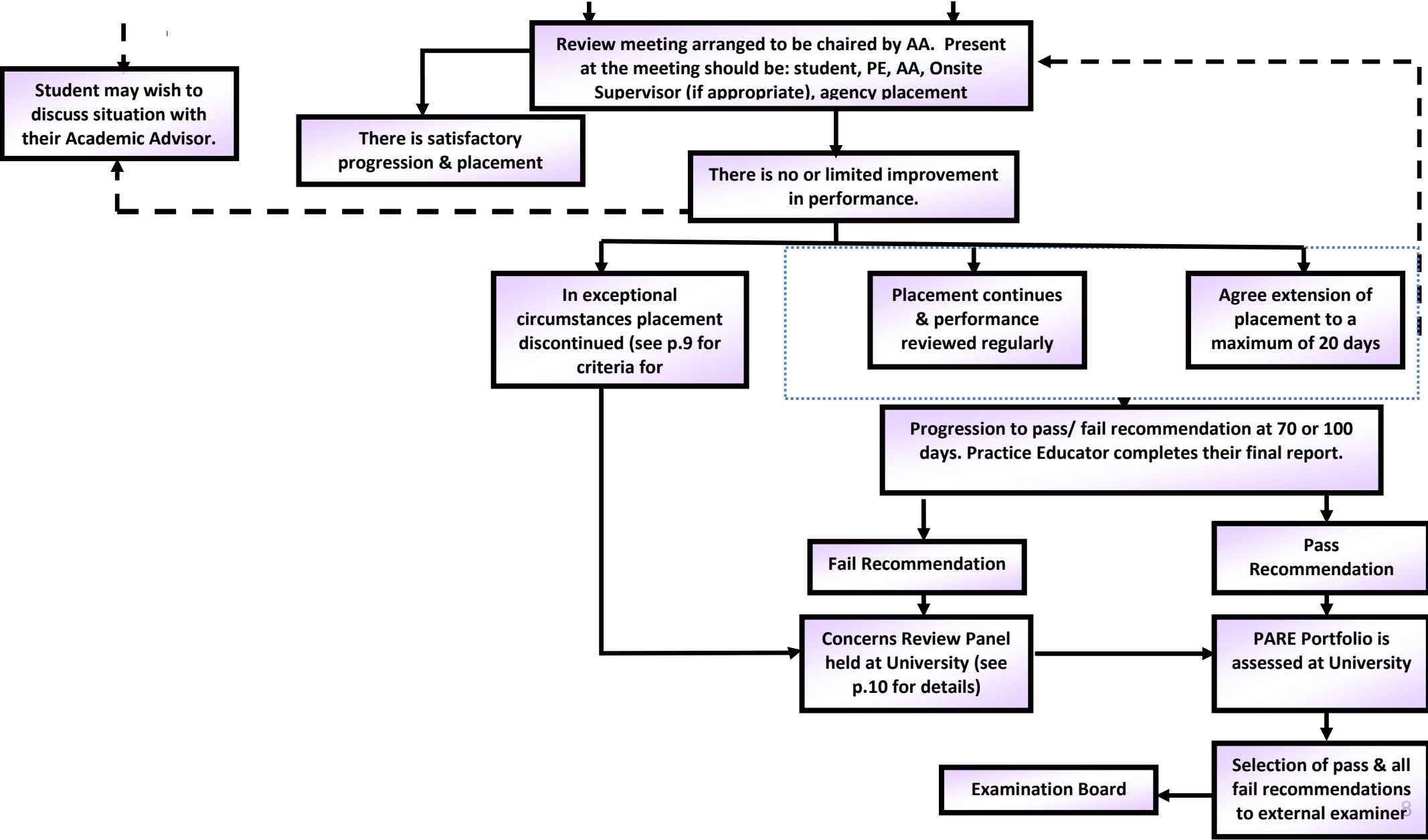
What does this mean to me?

Each Practice Educator is responsible and accountable for ensuring that the student is assessed at the required level of capability and professional behaviour.

Each Practice Educator must be accountable for confirming that students have either met or not met the Professional Capability Framework and Social Work England's Professional Standards and are capable of safe and effective practice.

Concerns Regarding Student Progression / Development





Concerns Regarding Student Progression / Development

It is our expectation that students will be offered the full 70 or 100 day placement. However, if you are concerned that the student is making insufficient progress to be able to pass the assessment of their practice; you should express this concern to your Agency Placement Coordinator and the student's Academic Advisor at the earliest opportunity. It is important that the assessment of the student's practice is open and transparent and that they are informed about their progress and any concerns in relation to this. The Academic Advisor is available for support and can offer objective support and consultation to both the student and you.

Where necessary a Concerns Meeting can be convened, for reasons such as those detailed on page 5 of this guide. The Academic Advisor will chair this meeting and you, the student, Agency Placement Coordinator – and where appropriate the Onsite Supervisor will be invited to attend. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the nature of the concerns raised by you, to hear the student's views on what is happening, and to agree the best way to progress. The Academic Advisor will complete the Concerns Meeting Report Form that will include a written action plan detailing what needs to be done and by whom within a given timescale to enable the student to work towards passing their placement and addressing any concerns. Minutes of the Concerns Meeting and the Concerns Meeting Report Form will be distributed to all present at the meeting.

Arrangements to review the action plan should be agreed at the concerns meeting and regular contact maintained with the Academic Advisor in the intervening period.

As part of a progress review, any concerns about the student's practice should be discussed at the Interim Review whether or not a Concerns Meeting has previously been convened. It is expected that evidence, such as written supervision notes, is made available and that the Interim Assessment Report clearly highlights any concerns with reference to Social Work England's Professional Standards and the PCF level indicators.

If at the progress review the student is showing limited improvement in meeting the action plan agreed at the Concerns Meeting (or Interim Assessment if appropriate) a decision should be made as to whether or not an extension to the placement should be sought in order to give the student a further opportunity to demonstrate their learning. Extensions should not exceed 20 days in duration and have to be agreed by you, the student, the Onsite Supervisor and their line manager and the Academic Advisor. The agreement should be formally recorded on either the Concerns Meeting Report Form or Interim Assessment Report. The reason for the extension request should be clearly stated alongside the work the student needs to focus upon to successfully complete their placement. The Academic Advisor will inform the appropriate Assessment Officer at the University.

If at the progress review the student is showing no improvement in meeting the action plan agreed at the Concerns Meeting (or Interim Assessment if appropriate) you and your placement agency may take the exceptional decision to discontinue their placement on one or more of the following grounds:

- Any conduct which might conceivably render the student a person not fit to practice.
- The student's sustained failure to engage with service users and/or available learning opportunities as required to demonstrate their progress.
- The perceived inability of the placement to provide sufficient learning opportunities for the student reasonably to be expected to demonstrate competence.

- Health problems affecting the student's capacity to fulfil the demands of the assessment of practice.

This will result in the student being referred to the Concerns Review Panel at the University. Please see section below for details.

The above process is visually represented on pages 7 and 8 of this guide.

The final point to note is that you can of course discontinue the student's placement immediately if they breach Social Work England's Professional Standards or engage in dangerous practice. In these circumstances the Academic Advisor and Agency Placement Coordinator must be informed immediately.

Concerns Review Panel

The Concerns Review Panel will comprise of – the Head of Social Work, the MA Examinations Officer and an experienced social work practitioner who has no direct contact with the placement.

All placement Fail recommendations will be referred to the Concerns Review Panel.

The Panel will read all placement reports – from the practice educator and the student. As a Practice Educator you are asked to complete your Placement Assessment Report and to provide detailed evidence to support your assessment decision. The student will be asked to submit as much of the placement portfolio as possible. A report may be requested from the Academic Advisor.

The Panel may request additional information – either in writing, by telephone, Zoom or in person – from any of these parties. Students will be able to see all the evidence put forward in relation to the reports made available to the Panel and will be given the opportunity to provide an additional written statement if they wish to do so.

The purpose of the panel is to review the fail recommendation and to explore further where there are disputed facts in the assessment of the student. The Panel can recommend the following outcomes:

1. That the student is referred to Occupational Health.
2. That the Panel supports the Fail recommendation for a first attempt at placement (can be for either 70 or 100 day placement) and recommends this to the Examination Board. The student would then normally be offered a repeat placement following the Examination Board decision.
3. That the Panel supports the Fail recommendation of a repeat placement and recommends this to the Examination Board. The student normally leaves the programme if this is a fail of a repeat practice placement following the Examination Board decision.
4. That a recommendation be made that the student may resume the practice placement, subject to agreement of the placement agency and practice educator. Where it is not possible for the student to resume the placement, the student should be offered a repeat first attempt at placement without penalty. In such circumstances the student would repeat the full number of placement days if the placement is in a new agency

5. That there is insufficient evidence to uphold the decision to fail the placement and that a recommendation shall be made to the Examinations Board that the student should be offered a new first attempt at a placement without penalty. The student would repeat 70 days for a first year placement repeat or 100 days for a second year placement repeat.
6. Where there are concerns about a student's fitness to practice they may be referred to School or Faculty Fitness to Practice Committee.

Please see the link below to access information regarding the Fitness to Practice procedures:

<http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/bmh/teaching/teaching-activity/fitness-to-practise/>

The Fitness to Practice Committee may, following consideration of the case:

- dismiss the case;
- permit the student to continue with the programme with appropriate advice and guidance;
- permit the student to continue with the programme under close supervision;
- suspend the studies of the student for a specified time;
- require the student to resit a specified part or parts of the programme;
- require any other action considered appropriate by the Committee to enable the student's successful completion of the remainder of the programme;
- decide that the student's studies on a programme leading to a professional qualification be terminated but, if appropriate, permit the student to exit from the programme with an alternative award;
- decide that the student's studies on a programme be terminated and that his/her registration as a student of the University should cease.

Where it proves impossible for the student to continue their studies on a particular programme because the student is deemed by the Committee to be incapable on non-academic grounds (such as health) of completing it and will not therefore be fit to practise, the student's registration will be suspended whilst every effort will be made to offer an appropriate alternative course of study. However, if it is not possible to identify an appropriate alternative course of study the student will be required to withdraw fully from their studies.

Where a registered student is allowed to continue with the programme, or when the studies have been temporarily suspended, he or she may be required to meet with the Committee on further occasions in order that progress can be monitored.

What if a student has a concern about their practice placement?

Students are encouraged to raise any concerns they may have about their practice placement with you as their Practice Educator in the first instance. However, in some circumstances, students may not feel able to raise their concerns with you. In this situation, they may discuss their concerns with their Academic Advisor with a view to resolving the concerns by informal means.

The process that the students need to follow in relation to raising concerns is outlined in the Student Guide for Placement Concerns, which can be found [here](#).

Contacts

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