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Biographical notes

In terms of the contributors, Sarah J. Davies had 12 years' experience as Social Work

Placements Co-ordinator for UWE. Daryl Dugdale was the Programme Director MSc in

Social Work, School for Policy Studies at University of Bristol. He had previous

experience in the field of Social Work education as well as within training and

development; Rachel Hayhow had more than 15 years' experience as a Practice

Learning Co-ordinator and tutor, also in Bristol, and of off-siting assessing in the area.

Split placement development under the Professional Capabilities Framework in the United Kingdom

Abstract

The Professional Capabilities Framework has presented some considerable challenges for Social Work courses across the UK in respect of the structure of placements. Particularly for degree programmes, the shift towards two longer placements has raised capacity issues at a time ofreducedstatutory placements able to host final year students. This has of course been exacerbated by the current political climate of Local Authority (LA) cuts.

This paper examines the pros and cons of the use of final year placements split between the voluntary, independent and private (VIP) and statutory sectors to attempt to overcome challenges including capacity issues. Having reviewed the relevant literature, this paper conducts a preliminary survey of models of split placements currently being used throughout the UK and suggests points of future research. Findings suggest final year split placements divided between the VIP sector and a statutory setting are not in widespread use at the moment. However, different models of split placement are being discussed and piloted at a local level by Social Work programmes needing to find creative solutions. There is a desire for higher education institutions to share information in order to save time and share good practice.

Origins of the survey and audit of activities

This study originated from a meeting of partner agencies linked with two universities in the South West of England to provide Social Work placements- University of Bristol (UoB) and the University of the West of England (UWE). Both have long-established Social Work programmes based in Bristol.

In December 2015, challenges in providing suitable Social Work placements within the partnership and across the region were acknowledged. Shortages had resulted in UWE and UoB students beginning their placements late.

Members responded by setting up a sub group to investigate the potential strengths and challenges of introducing split placements linking statutory with voluntary, independent or private sector agencies (hereafter VIP). A discussion document would be submitted to the next scheduled meeting in March 2016

The sub group comprised members from both universities and members with local partner agency connections.

Key drivers for split placements:

- The increasingly challenging placement environment

- Need to ensure quality final year statutory placements across the region

- Ensuring students get the best placement experience they can.

Definitions

It is clear from the literature there are many different definitions of split placements. Various terms such as "network" or "integrated" are used, often interchangeably, to describe those placements split across two or more agencies (Boutland and Batchelor,

1993, p.1-2). It is usual the two placements will be linked in some way. Boutland and Batchelor define a "network placement" as, "a flexible type of practice placement, comprising two or more component parts which are connected, and having the potential to offer a variety of experiences according to the student's individual learning needs." (1993, p. 1). We would concur with Billingham, Moss and Williams in their definition of integrated placements as, "Placements where there is more than one management structure." (2001, p. 41). It is generally accepted the principle is to offer the student a shared placement in different practice environments with a variety of learning opportunities providing an experience, which may be eclectic and broadens their understanding of the Social Worker's role.

For the purposes of this study, we defined split placements as a placement which shares the above objectives, which typically (though not exclusively) takes place in two different settings. One of those settings would be a statutory LA Social Work team, whilst the other would be the VIP sector.

Context of research and audit of activities

This work took place between December 2015 and November 2016. For UoB's Masters programme and UWE's Degree programme, the new degree (using the Professional Capabilities Framework) started in the 2014-15 academic year whilst the old degree assessed according to the National Occupational Standards was phased out. One of the specific challenges posed by the new degree was the structure of placements and how this impacted at a local level.

Definitions

Previously, both UoB and UWE Students began their final year placements around September and finished between February and April the following calendar year. This pattern was approximately retained under the new degree.

Table 1 – Changes to Placement Length under the New Degree

Old Degree (pre-2015)	Number of days		New Degree (post 2015)	Number of days
UWE Degree year 1	35		UWE Degree year 1	0
UWE Degree year 2	80 (Feb-July)		UWE Degree year 2	70 (Sept-Feb)
UWE Degree year 3	85 (Sept-Feb)		UWE Degree year 3	100 (Sept-Mar)
UoB Masters year 1	85 (Jan-June)		UoB Masters year 1	70 (Feb-June)
UoB Masters year 2	115 (Sept-Apr)		UoB Masters year 2	100 (Sept-Mar)

Under the old degree there was scope for students to complete a statutory placement or placement with statutory tasks before entering their final year placement (i.e. during the second year of their degree programme or first year of their Masters). This provided a level of flexibility, a student who had already completed statutory tasks could be sent to a VIP sector organisation for their final placement providing the work was judged to be of sufficient complexity.

Under the old degree, agencies providing statutory tasks would often run year 2 and year 3 undergraduate placements back-to-back, so a placement could potentially be used twice a year. Even with protracted placements, teams might still offer to induct one student whilst the other was finishing.

University Context - The New Degree

With the introduction of the new degree, it became essential that all students complete a statutory placement/statutory tasks in their final year. This created a major shift in the degree programme towards two longer placements (see Table 1).

For both universities, the new degree also had the effect of creating a much clearer divide between VIP and statutory agencies leading to a narrower range of placements being considered suitable for the final year. On the undergraduate programme there was less scope for completing statutory tasks before entering the final year. New regulations from The College of Social Work had also dictated final year students could only be placed in agencies where there were other registered Social Workers (see Appendix A).

The final year placement switched to a minimum of 100 days for both universities, so UWE placements were effectively 'blocked' for longer with less chance of placing one student immediately after another. The 70 day placements were less problematic, being used by the two universities at opposite ends of the calendar year. Both universities were served by the same partner agencies:

- Bristol City Council (sub departments: Adult Care/Children & Young Peoples Services (CYPS))

- South Gloucestershire Council

- North Somerset Council

- Somerset Council (sub departments: Adult Care/Children & Families Services)

- Gloucestershire Council (sub departments: Adult Care/Children & Families Services)

- Wiltshire Council

This contributed to a shortage of statutory placements.

In the four years prior to this research, economic recession and a change of governments firstly a Coalition, then Conservative government within the United Kingdom (UK) resulted in several waves of cuts. The shrinking of LA budgets directly impacted on partner agencies who reported constant reviews and restructuring. A reduction in qualified and experienced practitioners who were able to act as Practice Educators (PE

s) to students resulted. There was also the strategic challenge of Practice Educator Professional Standards (PEPS) stage 1 and 2phased in by The College of Social Work. This meant it was harder to find suitably qualified practitioners to support placements within all agencies.

Regional Context

Social Work practitioners had conflicting demands on their time and were less willing to accommodate students. Undergraduate and Masters Students were in direct competition with Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) in terms of the potential Practice Educator's time (Appendix A & Full Meeting Notes). Increased competition for Social Work placements in the region was created by fast track government schemes

running from January 2016 and hosted by partner Local Authorities (LAs) using exactly the same PEs and placements settings (Appendix A). In 2013, the Social Work Programmes at UoB and UWE both began reducing their intake numbers for reasons including the unsustainable pressure on statutory placements and changes in the timing and distribution of student bursaries.

Subgroup Aims

The four aims were:

(1) To review the literature in relevant publications, academic journals and unpublished papers to uncover what research had been undertaken to date into the use of placements split between the statutory sector and VIP sector on Social Work Masters and degree programmes in England. We were specifically interested in findings relating to the two longer placements (70 and 100 days under the new degree) and not the now defunct first year placements.

(2) To gain a better understanding of the benefits and risks of using these kinds of split placements through all available sources and to summarise some of the recommendations and advice in terms of good practice.

(3) To explore what provision might look like and get a sense of the best model (in terms of structure) for a split placement.

(4) To measure scope for trialling some split placements in the local area.

Research Process

Initially, we followed up leads to specific studies, for example using the Google search engine to perform a keyword search on 'Boutland/Batchelor and 'patterns that connect'. We then performed a keyword search for all relevant books/journals in the Social Work field to establish what had been written about split placements (according to our

definition) since 1990. Our keywords were as follows: social work student placements; integrated placements; integrated social work placements; network(ed) placements; networked social work placements; split placements; split social work placements and linked placements. With all of the above electronic keyword searches, we initially used:

- The library catalogue systems of both Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

- The internet using Google

- Specialised databases such as Social Care Online

- Subject journals such as Practice: Social Work in Action and the Journal of Social Work Practice.

We used the bibliographies of the most pertinent works to conduct further research. Parallel to this process, we attempted to track down any unpublished research of relevance.

Throughout this project, we continually drew on expertise within the very long established collaborative Practice Learning Partners Meetings run jointly by UWE and UoB. Many members had a lifetime's experience in social work education and also belonged to social work networks/professional bodies. Group members were used both as a source of knowledge and information but also as source of suggestions in terms of who to contact to follow up our research and audit of activities.

From our report, the partners were struck by the lack of recent research into split placements within the public domain. It was suggested:

1. we contact Skills for Care, a national network which, "helps create a better-led, skilled and valued adult social care workforce," and provides, "practical tools

and support to help adult social care organisations in England recruit, develop and lead their workforce" (Skills for Care Website, July 2016).

2. We attempt to find out about split placements within our own health or social care related programmes. In particular, our partners were keen to know whether other departments within UWE's large Faculty of Health and Applied Sciences (HAS) – e.g. Allied Health Professions or Nursing and Midwifery - had trialled the model of split placements (see University of the West of England website for further information).

3.

By using Skills for Care as a source of information, we could fill in the information gap by conducting an audit of agencies or HEIs who may have trialled split placements. Consequently, a fifth objective became:

- To complete a preliminary national audit of HEIs, LAs and social enterprises who had previously used or were considering using placements split between the statutory sector and VIP sector.

Having approached Skills for Care, we decided to trawl for more information about any other relevant articles, publications or research that may have been missed, thereby also identifying any unpublished studies that might not show up using standard library sources. In composing our e-mail for circulation, we cited the key books and articles we had already found to avoid duplication.

This research and audit of activities that followed was inductive, letting our findings dictate the focus of our research energies and where we invested our time as the process got underway. For example, our focus group predicted the distribution of payment across split placement agencies might be an issue. If the Off Site Practice Educator

(OSPE) was also the onsite supervisor in one of the settings, this would mean very little would be paid to the setting in which s/he was not based, so we designed a question accordingly. Having read Boutland and Batchelor's *The Patterns that Connect* (1993), key findings in relation to the benefits and risks of split placements influenced the follow-up questions we asked organisations trialling split placements.

Findings

Academic

The most recent review of literature relating to split social work placements comes from the United States. Gough and Wilks (2011) specifically examine the question of the networked vs singleton placements model in terms of benefits and potential risks. However, they focus on a specific area - gerontological Social Work. They also look at one particular model, the rapidly growing "rotational field placement" which is similar to the hub and spoke model of placements used in the UK (Gough and Wilks, 2011, p.91). Though, as the authors suggest, there may be common areas of overlap in terms of findings and recommendations, this is a different model to split placements bridging the VIP and statutory sector within the context of the UK (Gough and Wilks, 2011, p.91).

Boutland and Batchelor's (1993) research proved to be highly relevant on two counts; the specific subject area of networked Social Work placements and parity in terms of geography and institution because their research was conducted in South West England. In fact, their original research had also involved the full time college-based Social Work Programmes at UoB, UWE (then Bristol Polytechnic) in addition to Bath University (1993, p.4).

Of Boutland and Batchelor's data collected in 1991 and cited in both their later publications, unfortunately placements split between the VIP and statutory sectors comprised a very small proportion - 8 out of 36 (See Boutland, K, Batchelor, J, 1993 and Batchelor, J and Boutland K, 1996). Their study predates current social work practices, pressures and arrangements for training PES (e.g. long before PEPS). The daily placement fee, arrangements for OSPEs and LA budgets were also very different then. It might therefore be argued that Boutland and Batchelor's findings were of limited use when applied to the world of practice learning 25 years later.

We approached this data carefully, looking at findings and recommendations that might be less context specific and might be seen as more specific to the nature of network placements. Unfortunately, we could not separate out the eight key placements and had to look at the dataset as a whole.

Potential benefits for the student- Key Themes

- A network placement would provide a richer breadth/variety of experience including two different cultures of practice, with more potential for a transfer of learning. The vast majority of students participating in Boutland and Batchelor's study saw experiencing different working styles as a positive (cf. Gough and Wilks, 2012, p.96-98; Billingham, Moss and Williams, 2001, p.42-43).

- The potential of experiencing different parts of the practice process. The two options may well complement one another and yet offer the student the chance to see different aspects of the service user experience.

- There may be less pressure on each supervisor and extra placement meetings were not necessary.

- Network placements offer more opportunities to collect evidence of the student's practice. The vast majority of PEs in Boutland & Batchelor's 1993 study agreed if network placements were clearly set up the assessment process can be fuller and fairer. The majority of tutors agreed with this (cf. Gough and Wilks, 2012, p.98-99).

Potential risks- Key Themes

- Careful thought was required in linking students to this type of placement opportunity and managing their expectations (e.g. feeling 'short-changed'). It could be argued the sophistication and pace would better suit a student who was self- motivated, previously experienced and who was well organised (cf. Gough and Wilks, 2012, p.101; Billingham, Moss and Williams, 2001, p.43).

- Confusion of roles and boundaries across the two placements.

- If the cultures of practice across the two agencies are so different then this may act as a barrier in the student's learning.

- This type of arrangement is time and resource rich compared with singleton placements, and so each member (including the student) would need to commit to this. Two thirds of PEs experienced a greater workload (Boutland & Batchelor, 1993).

- There is a potential loss to the student`s depth of understanding with a network placement compared to a singleton placement (cf. Gough and Wilks, 2012, p.91-95 & p.100-101).

- It is vital such arrangements are carefully planned, with consultation from the beginning with all practice supervisors (PSs) and PEs and HEI links.

- There has to be careful identification of roles and responsibilities across the Practice Educator (PE)/ Practice Supervisor group, who is doing what where and when (cf. Gough and Wilks, 2012, p.101-2).

Implicit in Boutland and Batchelor's 1993 study is the idea that, at worst, split placements run the risk of the student experiencing instability and failing to establish solid professional relationships with colleagues and service users.

Good Practice Recommendations

Recommendations from Boutland and Batchelor's 1993 study, which might be realistic in today's climate of dwindling resources include:

- Preparation of the student in college, pre-placement, for the particular structure and process of their network placement (cf. Gough and Wilks, 2012, p.104; Billingham, Moss and Williams, 2001, p.41-43)**.**
- Early preparatory work between HEIs and agencies, tutors, team managers, PEs and PSs, establishing open, honest communication. Securing the support and co-operation of line managers in particular is of key importance to the success of the placement (cf. Gough and Wilks, 2012, p.104).
- Clarify responsibility for the work accountability/ workload management within the various parts of the network with the PE, placement supervisor(s) and line or unit manager/ social work consultant. Include this along with the student learning objectives in the Practice Learning Agreement (cf. Gough and Wilks, 2012, p.95-96).

- Share responsibilities for educational/ professional development and for support of the student between the PE and placement supervisor(s). Ensure the student feels comfortable with these arrangements.

- Identify who is responsible for collection of evidence, writing of assessment report and decision to pass or fail a student.

- Identify special features of the network placement; e.g. workload and time management factors and ensure the student has a base. Acknowledge time needed for adjustment to two or more settings, resources, teams etc. and possibility of more breadth/ less depth of work.

- Plan all future placement meetings and an end 'debrief' at the outset, timetabled into all diaries.

Unpublished studies

A few members of the Practice Learning Partners Meeting group remembered a small-scale study of split placements bridging the statutory/VIP sector trialled in North Somerset conducted within the 2006-2007 academic year. Although no written copy could be obtained, the findings of this study had been presented at an event in the Taunton area run by its funders, Skills for Care.

Members of the Practice Learning Partners Meeting who had attended the presentation remembered that conflict of interest had been an issue arising with these splits. More specifically, where a VIP sector organisation had been linked with a statutory organisation within the same field, it had emerged that the two organisations shared some of their service users. Information shared confidentially in one capacity should not be shared in the second environment. This created some professional role conflict for the student.

We contacted the author, Stewart Granger, directly. He made the following useful comments, "The IVP opportunities really did give a great insight into the real world and people's lives and of course that is absolutely essential in the tool kit of a Social Worker." Similarly, to Boutland and Batchelor he therefore recognised the enriched learning provided by these placements. He also highlighted the PE's skill level to be of key importance, "It definitely takes a skilled assessor to be able to translate what is required from practice these days so that the student can view issues they are confronted with in the IVP in the right way, as well as get that insight into the real world." Granger confirmed the remembered challenge of conflict of interest for students was correct and had to be managed through, "careful support" (Granger, S. E-mail communication, 2016).

Further References

No additional references to published or unpublished sources were uncovered through our appeal disseminated through Skills for Care. Because we had a reasonable response rate from nine separate agencies to our other questions within the same e-mail, the lack of references supplied most obviously suggested a lack of scholarship in this niche area.

Other agencies or HEIs trialling placements split between the statutory and VIP sector

There were nine respondents to our appeal for more information about current practices in relation to split placements. Six organisations gave permission to share data as follows and just three of those were actively running splits at that time.

Table 2 Responses via the Skills for Care Network

Name of respondent	Summary of response (where consent given)	Further actions taken by focus group
HEI A	Pro split placements – respondent had decades of experience.	More detailed follow-up questionnaire completed over the phone.
Local Authority A	They do not organise splits between VIP/Statutorysector agencies.	None.
Local Authority B	They do not organise split placements for final year students.	None.
HEI B	Currently trialling splits for final year BSC & MSC programmes. Happy to share data once evaluations are complete.	Focus group has expressed interest in results of evaluations.
HEI C	Don't do splits – not in favour for 4 key reasons as follows: 1. LAs are not keen on split placements, which are seen as time-consuming compared with singleton placements. 2. PLC feels a 50% split resulting in two 50-day placements blocks the natural process of student progression. 3. The challenge of getting key participants to work together across two settings in a seamless way.	None.

	4. Because splits increase the importance of getting the right student for the right placement.	
Social Enterprise A	Provide 1st and final placements for undergraduate and postgraduate students. Offer a visit but do not elaborate upon the specifics of their splits. Instances of split placements usually come as a result of failed placements elsewhere e.g. LAs, voluntary agencies, schools etc. Literature supplied by this project suggests the model of splits is becoming more commonplace.	Possible visit to be organised.

For the three organisations actively running splits, we designed a questionnaire for a follow-up phone call with HEI A (see Table 3) and e-mail with Social Enterprise A (not returned). HEI B were still trialling split-placements at that time, so findings were not available.

One additional HEI (HEI D) was approached for more information using the same telephone questionnaire because local knowledge within the Practice Learning Partners meeting group suggested this university had successfully trialled split placements in recent years (see Table 4).

Table 3 - Questions for HEI A - telephone questionnaire 22/03/16

1. What kinds of organisations did you link with each other?
Placements which matched in some way- e.g. statutory children's teams and schools; youth offending teams and VIPs who worked with young & adult offenders; front line children's teams and VIP sector residential homes or homelessness organisations; statutory adult teams and VIP sector organisations concerned with homelessness or drugs and alcohol; statutory adult teams and health centres; adult field work teams and VIPs concerned with dementia.
2. Approximately how many split placements have you trialled & when?
HEI A had trialled approximately 10 split placements in the last 10 years, with a growing number within the last 7 years.
3. What year/level were the students?
These were predominantly 2nd & 3rd year students on a BA degree course.
4. Did the organisations you linked have prior connections with each other and how was the split instigated?
Some had existing connections but most didn't.
5. How did you select students to match with your networked placements?

Students normally 'self-selected' by stating preferences for working with a particular service user group. In the last 15 years, student selection was more based on how well they were deemed to cope with a split environment. Those who managed best could think about the crossover between the work rather than regarding the placement as two separate placements.

6. How did you structure the split each week?

This depended on the experience that the students were seeking and what was available in terms of the offer of statutory days. The structure was normally either 3 days statutory and 2 days VIP or occasionally 3-4 days VIP and 1-2 days statutory.

7. Was the extra workload associated with split placements a problem?

No. HEI A tended to select Practice Teachers who could manage the extra workload. The main problem was getting students to manage academic work alongside the split placement. Challenges, such as staying within prescribed academic word limits when potentially describing 2 organisations, were not complex for the 'wider thinking' student.

8. How did you manage the assessing side of things?

The main host became the dominant party and the main piece of work was generated from this setting, with one piece of work from the 'secondary' host. The remit for the assessed reflective piece was to reflect on their experience of split

placements. The model was either two workplace supervisors and one off-site assessor (3 parties) or one workplace supervisor and one workplace assessor within the other organisation (2 parties).

9. Did you need any extra placements meetings compared with singleton placements?

Where just 2 parties were involved, every other supervision would be a 'joint' supervision. With three parties, this was more difficult and had to be structured by arrangement & they had to be extremely clear about who was providing what. Mainly the supervisors were doing onsite supervision and workload management whereas the off-site was drawing together the learning from both experiences. This was not a problem unless the student preferred one particular personality involved or got conflicting advice from 2 or more parties, hence the importance of regular, well-managed, joint supervisions.

10. What were the benefits of a split placement?

The initial driver for split placements was giving students a varied experience- not a 'one-off' opportunity, like 'shadowing'. Later, the driver switched to opening up placements otherwise off-bounds – e.g. because statutory practitioners were part time and managers were reluctant for them to host a full time student. The more recent driver has been placement capacity/the need for students to complete statutory tasks.

11. What were the disadvantages of a split placement?

If the student is weak academically. Network placements need a motivated and enthusiastic student open to every opportunity. The experience can be negative for students who struggle with procedure and process, who tend to see a network placement as 2 distinct placements. A strong student might, for example, try to understand the process of referral from one sort of setting to the other. Some students can get confused, find this sort of opportunity threatening, and not understand why they are there. Students need to be proactive to do well – e.g. asking 'what can I do' if their supervisor is off sick. They also need to be flexible in how they learn. Conversely, very academically able students can flounder if they are singularly focused and are not strong on multi-tasking.

12. Did the payment side of things run smoothly?

Yes, this was fine.

13. Have your split placements run again?

In the early days of split placements, approx. 80% ran again. The rest were trialled but didn't work. HEI A had a long established split placement between a LA learning disability team and a voluntary sector learning disabilities organisation, which only ceased in the last 2 years.

14. Any other information not covered in the above questions?

HEI A is revisiting split placements within their partnership group. Findings suggest the VIP sector are very keen to go ahead, however, the LA teams are struggling with

the idea. They are currently doing some development work. There are many other

Social Work programmes on their doorstep, so capacity is a driver. They are

currently looking at:

- The VIP sector being the 'dominant' placement with 1 day a week coming from the statutory teams (e.g. within a fieldwork team).
- Having a block week, part way through the placement (i.e. with the fieldwork team).
- How the students can work on the duty system if the duty officer supervises them. Since the ability to input on to the LAs computer system remains an intrinsic part of the student's assessment, HEI A is trying to ensure students are trained to do this.
- The model of four students each doing a different day a week with one duty team, providing weekly cover for that team.
- Allocating specific pieces of work to students – e.g. on a Monday to help alleviate the backlog of weekend work for statutory teams.
- Sustainability- making split placements 'regulars' rather than something built up on the excitement/enthusiasm of one particular PE who might then leave.

HEI A's comments highlight the view that very specific 'types' of students should be

matched to split placements in order for them to succeed. It might be said this practice

builds a form of 'discrimination' into the placement finding process. Conversely, well

experienced Practice Learning Co-ordinators could argue the task of matching students

to placements in any cohort always requires a thorough knowledge of the placements

available, coupled with a consideration of where an individual will best thrive and

develop at a specific point in their education. According to this view, split placements

become just part of this complex mix.

Table 4 - Questions for HEI D – telephone call 03/11/16

1. What kinds of organisations did you link with each other?

HEI D hadn't recently devised a 'split placements' plan for setting up Social Work

placements, which arose "by default, rather than by effective planning". The 'extra'

(split) element was determined entirely by the work area 'missing' from the

student's main placement. Commonly, this involved needing insight into a legal

framework or perspective. One split placement had involved shadowing a qualified

Social Worker, then joint-working a case. Splits were often down to the

organisation(s) to determine and could involve taking on particular statutory cases.

2. Approximately how many split placements have you trialled & when?

A handful over the last three years

1. What year/level were the students?

All split placements related to final year students who needed an extra 'push' in

terms of their learning opportunity.

2. Did the organisations you linked have prior connections with each other and how
   was the split instigated?

One placement was set up between a children's centre and a Child Care Duty Team

where the student was given referral and assessment work. Another creative split,

between Developing Heath and Independence (DHI) and a city-based community

drugs and alcohol team had a logical connection, because they were working in the

substance abuse field. The student was allocated pieces of work that they needed in

order to 'step up a notch'. The duty teams helped on a purely good-will basis. In the

co-ordinator's view, the willingness to help related to established and positive

working relationships and the infrequency with which the favour was asked.

3. How did you select students to match with your networked placements?

They were matched with their main placement and the split was something that

came about by default (no selection).

4. How did you structure the split each week?

Most splits didn't have a pattern. One model was an arrangement to do a solitary

week within a duty team during placement. In another instance, the split emerged

due to two staff being part time workers. The student based within a neighbouring

LA fitted around this part time working pattern for their statutory component.

5. Was the extra workload associated with split placements a problem?

Not applicable.

6. How did you manage the assessing side of things?

The Practice Assessor of the primary placement took responsibility for managing the

whole placement (including the split component). If an off-site had been appointed,

they were paid for off-siting both components of the placement.

7. Did you need any extra placements meetings compared with singleton placements?

Not applicable.

8. What were the benefits of a split placement?

That it enabled a placement that was almost level 3 standard to be of sufficient

complexity to go ahead.

9. What were the disadvantages of a split placement?
IT restrictions had to be managed in relation to recording cases because students involved were given no [mandatory] training for the specific IT systems on the statutory side. They were given responsibility for joint-working a case and for decision-making. However, the allocated Social Worker then operated the computer -system & the student was never a named authority (e.g. on case notes/plans/assessments). No specific student complaints about split placements were made.
10. Did the payment side of things run smoothly?
Yes. The co-ordinator counted the exact number of student placement days spent with each team and split the payment accordingly. Off-sites, when used, were entitled to half the fee of both agencies.
11. Have your split placements run again?
No –due to the above- see Q3.
12. Any other information not covered in the above questions?
For this Practice Learning Co-ordinator, the depth and complexity of an opportunity at level 3 is the key factor, rather than whether the placement is located in a mainstream statutory environment. The co-ordinator seeks to get students more involved with Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (**MARAC**) systems, with a clearer role.

Operating from a position of necessity, HEI D reported finding a practical way to overcome the obstacles posed by IT systems and procedures for the student on the statutory side of their split placement. Some educators might regard this as a

controversial move, seeing the ability to master IT systems and taking direct responsibility for inputting case notes as an essential part of the job.

Findings - audit of activities within the UWE faculty of HAS

Colleagues who had knowledge relating to other health professions placements, such as Nursing, Mental Health and Occupational Therapy were consulted. A colleague with a decade's experience confirmed that although other programmes do have split placements (and often in response to a practitioner being a part time worker) the other side of the split tends to be within the same organisation. Technically, this model therefore fell outside of our working definition.

The same colleague asserted the drivers behind creating split placements in other health professions were as much about ensuring a quality learning experience as for capacity reasons. One major provider had used the hub and spoke model, chiefly for mental health nursing and for older adult placements (see White, 2015, p.24-29). This helped to manage capacity and provide a rounded experience, giving students some exposure to both inpatient and community placements.

Again, this involved different parts of essentially the same organisation but meant a greater number of students could meet the required experience on particular wards. With the hub and spoke model, a student might spend two weeks of a much longer placement with a different team and this would happen one or more times within the course of the placement.

Consulting our providers

Two members of the split placements pilot group met with an established partner agency to discuss the scope for trialling split placements (see Table 5). Evidence suggested split placements within their locality might potentially work for reasons including: geography; statutory team structure; known VIP sector agencies being willing to trial this. Our agenda was to obtain more specific information about the predicted strengths and challenges of such placements as well as the suggested models for trialling them.

Table 5- Summary- Split placements meeting with Partner Agency A

Strengths
 • The Practice Learning Co-ordinator acknowledged pressures on statutory adult care placements and considered that some split placements might "fit nicely" with the VIP sector.' Four 'complex' VIP sector agencies were cited as being of 'undoubtedly level 3 standard'. • Within this LA, practice education is officially recognised as a 'pathway' to career progression. • The Practice Learning Co-ordinator predicted split placements would <u>not</u> be seen as a waste of council resources due to having to invest in training more undergraduates on the IT system for a lesser return of placement hours/money. Students familiar with in house systems would be more likely to apply for council jobs, so the converse was true.
Challenges
 • Money could be a stumbling block for managers, with half the fee going to the off-site for 50 days (i.e. half the 100-day placement). Teams would therefore be getting ¼ of the money they would have had for hosting a singleton placement. Split placements would have to be presented as additional to, and not 'instead of', full time student placements. • The 'mood' from government level down is towards "increased statutory input". Senior Managers could take against split placements as 'diluting the statutory experience further'. • Concerns about what students could cover in 50 days due to the increasing amount of legislation within adult care.
Models

- With two distinct 50-day blocks, the 50 VIP days should run first so students could learn about services that the statutory teams might refer service users on to. However, conflicts of interest would need to be thought through first (e.g. a situation where the student might be asked to review a service they have just worked for).

Limitations of audit

This audit of activities relied on a third party (Skills for Care) to distribute our original e-mail. We cannot be certain our e-mail message was distributed by all Locality Managers for different UK regions or know how widely our message was circulated. Skills for Care has an adult care emphasis, even though professionals linked to both adult care and CYPS read its mailings. This audit could have missed some organisations successfully trialling split placements, particularly within CYPS.

Conclusion.

In terms of the benefits of split placements, we found nothing to directly contradict Boutland and Batchelor's findings approximately 25 years previously (Boutland, K, Batchelor, J, 1993). More recent studies of different kinds of split placements also seemed to support some of these findings. Some recommendations could not be followed in the current financial climate of austerity measures. In terms of the risks, HEI A's experience supported some of Boutland and Batchelor's findings – for example, needing to be very selective about students matched with a split placement. Others, such as the increased workload, were supported by some respondents, but not others. HEI C, for example, specifically mentioned LAs are not keen on split placements, which are seen as time-consuming compared with singleton placements. Whilst acknowledging the VIP sector are keener to go ahead with split placements than LA teams at the moment, HEI A did not agree (following a decade of experience) that

increased workload was one of the pitfalls of split placements. One additional risk identified by Granger and Partner Agency A was the potential conflict of interest with service user group.

The message for those involved in practice education and also for students is that the use of split placements under the Professional Capabilities Framework did not appear prevalent on a national level and that there were differing and often conflicting ideas about the best model for structuring split placements.

HEI A was currently exploring the one placement day a week model, with the VIP sector being the 'dominant' placement and 1 day a week coming from the statutory teams, which had also been trialled in South Gloucestershire. However, the limitations of this pattern were recognised since HEI A considered the idea of having a block statutory week, part way through the placement, to accelerate learning. HEI A also reported past success with the split week model where 2-3 days were spent in one setting and the remainder with the other.

The Co-ordinator within Partner Agency A felt the 50-50 split could be made to work. Other HEIs, such as HEI C, held a contrary view and cited the 50-50 split as one of the key considerations for not running split placements because this model would impede student learning. There is a need to pilot more split placements with different structures and collect more evidence on a wider scale in order to know the answer to this question. Obtaining QA feedback from HEI B could be helpful in this regard.

Our study found there would be problems trialling split placements within some LAs because organisational structures did not appear to lend themselves to this model from the Practice Educators' perspectives (Dugdale, Hayhow and Davies, *Proposal*, 2016). Within Partner Agency A, support from higher managers would have to be secured before any pilot could go ahead. This is because split placements might run

contrary to the political vision regarding Social Work education also because perceptions about income generation might interfere with a willingness to take students.

Recommendations/Future Research.

Our findings showed some HEIs (e.g. HEI A) had a much more planned and structured approach to organising split placements compared with others (e.g. HEI D). If split placements between the VIP and statutory sectors were to become more the norm in future, it would be useful for some guidelines to be developed to create some uniformity in approach to the setting up, supporting and quality assuring of these placements for final year students.

Recommended future work would be to conduct follow up research with HEI A, HEI B and Social Enterprise A, to see how the split placements work is developing and find what issues are being revealed through evaluation. Gathering specific information about areas which can be particularly problematic for split placements – such as the good management of joint supervision - could be particularly helpful for the practice learning community.

Appendix A - Minutes of Practice Learning Partners Meeting as sources of information used for this study

Minutes of Practice Learning Partners Meeting held at: UWE on 16th March 2016; UoB on 7th October 2015; UWE on 25th March 2015; UoB on 12th November 2014; UWE on 19th March 2014; UoB on 16th October 2013; UWE on 16th April 2013.

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