

**Guidance Notes for Direct Observations**

Direct observation of practice must take place **a minimum of three times each in the 70 and in the 100 day placements.**  One direct observation of the students’ practice should normally take place before the interim meeting of each placement, in order to inform judgements about student progress at that stage.

Three direct observations must be carried out during the placement. Where the placement has a qualified Stage Two Practice Educator, two of the three direct observations must be carried out by that Stage 2 PE and one direct observation may be carried out by an experienced colleague of the Stage 2 PE. Where the placement has either a Stage 1 PE in training or a Stage 2 PE in training, the Practice Educator Mentor of the PE has to carry out one of the three direct observations and the PE in training carries out two.

**1. Planning in advance**

1.1 Observations can provoke anxieties for both student and practitioner. It is important to discuss these early on so that they don’t get in the way of the observation. Good preparation and creating 'ground rules' with the student beforehand helps to reduce anxiety and clarify roles. You should discuss how you are thinking of going about the observation. It is helpful to acknowledge that you will be open to suggestions from the student, of situations they feel would be suitable for you to observe, helping them to take responsibility for their own learning.

1.2 There are many situations where observation of student's practice is already occurring naturally, if not by the Practice Educator, then certainly with colleagues. It is helpful to recognise these and make full use of them. They could include opportunities in the following;

a) Day Care and residential setting activities.

b) Group work.

c) Working in an office involves interactions with other workers, discussions and contact with service users and other agencies on the telephone.

d) Participation in team meetings and other meetings or discussions.

e) Joint or co‑working arrangements with service users ‑ where this is used as a method of working it is particularly beneficial for observation of practice and worth developing wherever possible.

1.3 As you may be involving colleagues or other workers in direct observation, it is advisable to arrange a discussion with your team, or the team where the student will be placed, to look at the requirements. Are they prepared to help you by observing and providing you with evidence? How will they provide you with evidence ‑ will it be by discussion or something in writing, etc. If expectations are shared early on, a more open approach can be achieved, which is beneficial to all, especially the student.

**2. Planning a specific direct observation**

2.1 Establish if it is a situation the student feels comfortable with.

2.2 The service user’s agreement is necessary, along with discussions about aspects of confidentiality and the purpose of observation. Some suggestion and guidance initially on how the student can prepare the service user is both necessary and helpful.

2.3 Ask the student to plan the observation ahead and be clear about their aims. Apart from being a good learning tool in itself, it provides a good basis for discussion and evaluation after the interview.

2.4 Allow some time for a pre‑observation discussion with the student to plan specifics such as:

a) Clarifying whether the observation is purely observational, being used for 'live supervision' purposes or whether it has any co‑working elements.

b) Who is in charge of the interview? If you are an observer it clearly should be the student who is in charge.

c) The student may worry about getting stuck. Can they ask you for help? Would the Practice Educator ever intervene? How will you feedback to the student, after help has been given?

d) If something unexpected crops up, can the student ask for a break to have a discussion with you? How can they do this? Who will explain this possibility to the service user?

e) Although initially discussing these ground rules can be time‑consuming, it does start to create a working model which, once established, makes it a little easier for subsequent observations!

2.5 Discussions after the observation. It is helpful to make this as positive a learning experience as possible for the student. It is worth reminding ourselves about the self‑evaluation in the learning process. An excellent starting point, therefore, is to ask the student how they have perceived their work, experienced their interactions and, if so, how they felt they had achieved their aims. From this starting point, your own observations can be shared and a useful learning process established.

2.6 It is possible to use the same direct observation to obtain service user feedback on the student's practice at the same time. This would, however, need to be planned and agreed in advance and the service user’s permission sought.

**3. How to use Direct Observations in Assessment**

3.1 Link what has been covered in observations to the practice requirements.

3.2 Record your observations, using the Direct Observation form to give feedback to your student and to be included in the Practice Portfolio as formal evidence.

3.3 Advise colleagues also involved in observing practice of the above requirements.

3.4 Ensure the student refers to the direct observations in their journal.

Please use this template below when observing the student's practice, noting relevant examples of how a student does/does not demonstrate her/his skills in the required areas. Clearly, not all of these areas may be covered or evidenced in any one observation, so do not worry if there are gaps in the form. Over the required three direct observations together, all the areas should be covered.