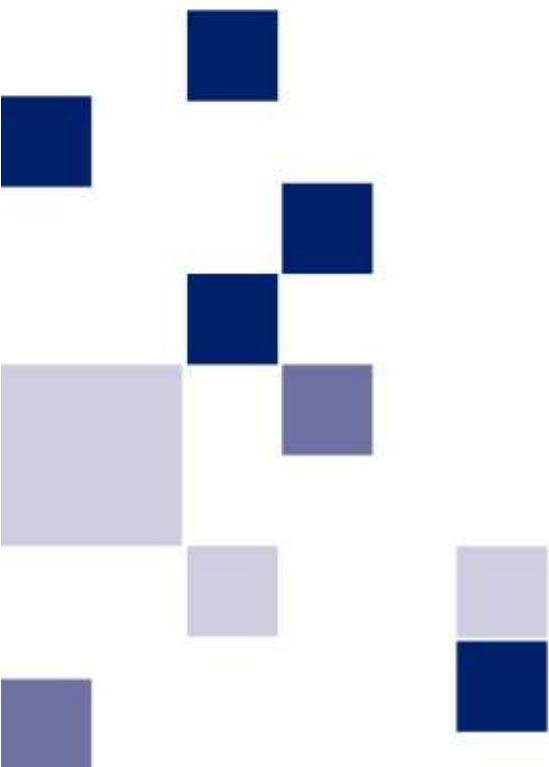# Evaluation of an Advanced Skills Module for social work education in Scotland

**Jean Gordon, Moira Dunworth, Susan Dumbleton and Alistair Brown**

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## The research team

The evaluation was undertaken by a team of social workers with a wide range of experience in practice learning, social work education, research and evaluation:

**Jean Gordon**, a practice educator, independent social researcher and university lecturer, led the evaluation. Jean researches and writes about social work practice, education and the law.
**Moira Dunworth** has a background in social work practice learning, social research and university education.
**Susan Dumbleton**, previously senior lecturer with The Open University's social work programme, is an experienced researcher and a member of SSSC's Fitness to Practice panel.
**Alistair Brown** combines experience in social work governance, professional development, supervision, reflective practice and communication.

## Acknowledgements

# Contents

# Executive summary

This report presents the findings of an evaluation of the Advanced Skills Module (ASM), an online student social work learning programme developed by Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU), the University of Strathclyde (UoS) and the University of the West of Scotland (UWS) in response to the educational challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. The study was commissioned by the Social Work Education Partnership (SWEP) with the objective of identifying the processes, outcomes and opportunities generated by the module's pilot presentation. Funding was provided by the Scottish Government and the evaluation contract was procured and monitored by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). The independent evaluation was undertaken by a team of experienced, Scotland-based social workers, practice educators, university educators, managers and researchers.

## Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought far-reaching changes in all our lives, not least in respect of disruption to world-wide learning and educational systems and practices. In March 2020, when the UK's COVID-19 pandemic lockdown restrictions were first imposed, social work student practice learning opportunities were suspended in Scotland. The SSSC introduced temporary contingency arrangements including, in Winter 2021, enabling the potential inclusion of an element of technology-enhanced, virtual learning as part of the national requirement for social work students to undertake 200 days of practice learning during their degree programme.

HEIs in the west of Scotland, facing a considerable regional shortfall in practice learning opportunities, opted to collaborate to develop the ASM with the support of Learning Network West (LNW). The 13-week online programme was designed to provide students with opportunities for authentic, simulated learning of advanced practice skills. Student learning was supported by HEI course tutors, and 30 independent practice educators (IPEs) recruited by LNW, who supervised and assessed students in small 'bubbles' of four to five students. Approval was sought and gained from SSSC for this temporary contingency arrangement, enabling students to gain credit for 40 days of practice learning on successful completion of the ASM, to be subsequently consolidated by 120 days' placement learning in the workplace.

## Evaluation aims

The evaluation aimed to assess and determine:

- the enablers and barriers to the ASM's successful delivery, and priorities for further development of the module

- whether the pilot was implemented in accordance with its agreed learning outcomes, meeting relevant regulatory requirements, and the Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE)

- the extent of equivalence between the ASM's practice learning opportunities and 40 days of placement learning

- the potential of the module to support future learning in social work education in Scotland.

## Evaluation design, methodology and methods

- The mixed methods evaluation combined outcome and process elements. It drew on qualitative and quantitative survey data collected from 23 students and 25 IPEs and a total of 33 semi-structured interviews with students, independent practice educators (IPEs), module providers and people who use services.

- Data analysis comprised basic statistical analysis of quantitative data from the survey, and thematic analysis of survey and interview qualitative data using analysis software (NVivo11).

- The evaluation took a systematic approach, drawing evidence from a range of ASM stakeholders using a methodology that aimed to add strength and depth to its findings. However, there were also limitations to the research, particularly low student participation and the shortness of the available timescale.

## Implementation: enablers and barriers

The ASM's implementation was particularly supported by:

- the motivation and determination of the module providers to enable students to keep learning and progressing to achieve their qualifications

- a collegiate approach to partnership working and mostly effective communication between the three contributing universities, IPEs and module contributors including local authority and third sector organisations and individuals who use services

- efficient and effective recruitment and selection of IPEs by LNW, and valued support systems for IPEs provided by LNW and HEIs

- an effective and complementary mix of skillsets and experience of module contributors, providers and IPEs.

However, some implementation barriers were also identified, especially:

- extremely short time scales for module planning and production and insufficient HEI staffing resources

- lack of clarity and/or differing interpretations about the extent of the IPE role and workload

- systemic technological barriers related to use of multiple IT platforms for learning events and the dispersal of learning objects and other resources to different locations

- insufficiently full involvement of people who use services in learning content design, and a lack of consistent feedback mechanisms for module contributors

- existing systems to monitor attendance and address non-participation that did not always seem adequate to identify students' variable levels of engagement with the module.

## Students' practice learning: enablers and barriers

Students were particularly supported in their practice learning by:

- learning together in small, collaborative student bubbles

- group supervision with their IPE

- simulated direct observations and assessment feedback from IPEs

- the safe environment for practice skill rehearsal and learning provided by the virtual learning environment

- authentic learning resources and a structure that mirrored workplace practice learning opportunities

- the diversity of learning offered about different social work roles and contexts as well as exploring personal and professional values, (eg in relation to anti-racist practice and intersectionality).

Perceived barriers to students' learning included:

- many students' sense of disappointment and frustration due to the unavailability of workplace practice learning opportunities

- students' home study challenges, including inadequate study space, problems with connectivity and the need to juggle study with family responsibilities

- IPEs' late start as they did not start supervising students until nearly halfway through the module

- large class sizes and over-reliance on pre-recorded content, especially in the first half of the module

- slow pace at the module start contrasted with insufficient time for students to process and reflect on learning later on in the ASM

- some unresolved challenges in meeting the needs of individual students, including responsibility for providing feedback on some learning activities.

## Students' learning and placement preparedness

- Students made most apparent progress in their confidence, sense of professional identity, reflective thinking and writing, recording and report writing, theory/practice integration, understanding social work role and process, assessment and analysis/critical thinking skills during the ASM.

- They made least apparent progress in developing skills in rapport- and relationship-building with people who use services, managing conflict, using professional authority and managing personal boundaries.

- Students' digital and remote working practice skills were found to have increased markedly during the module.

- IPEs tended to rate students' practice skill acquisition considerably more positively than students, who, without prior placement experience, found it hard to judge how readily their skills might transfer into direct practice.

- Nearly all IPEs found that the module content and approach had enabled them to gather sufficient evidence of students' ability to meet the SiSWE and the ethical principles on which the standards are based, although, again, students were less confident of their achievements.

- Based on their observations of students' progress and personal and professional growth, most IPEs and module providers thought that ASM had provided sufficient preparation for students' upcoming 120-day workplace practice learning opportunities. However, they also acknowledged a degree of uncertainty about the outcome for students of this untested approach to social work education.

## Equivalence to placement learning

- Participants had mixed views about whether the module offers students learning opportunities equivalent to 40 days of practice learning. On balance, the module was thought to provide partial equivalence, although a substantial number of IPEs (c.50%) found substantial equivalence between the ASM and direct practice learning.

- Over half of surveyed IPEs thought that the ASM, with certain modifications (see Recommendations), had potential to form an element of students' overall practice learning in the longer term, but others saw it purely as a contingency measure, and a minority did not find the approach sustainable in any circumstances.

- There was broad agreement from all participant groups that many of the resources and learning objects developed for the ASM are highly transferable locally and nationally, having potential to improve the quality of placement preparation and to enhance student learning across the curriculum.

- The value of the IPE role in the ASM was emphasised, but there were concerns about the future resourcing of IPE involvement should the module's approach be adopted more widely.

- However, it was acknowledged that assessing equivalence, or determining future sustainability was problematic due to the variable nature and quality of workplace-based practice placements and uncertainties due to the continuing pandemic.

## Conclusions

- The findings of this evaluation suggest that the ASM has broadly achieved what it set out to do, to give students a substantial grounding in a range of fundamental social work practice skills to support their move to their upcoming 120-day placements.

- The ASM enabled its students to meet the majority of the learning outcomes expected of a student after 40 days of their first practice learning experience but provided insufficient opportunities to demonstrate some key practice skills, especially in developing and sustaining working relationships with individuals and families.

- It may be unhelpful to attempt to equate the ASM with a traditional practice placement – it has the potential to offer learning opportunities that simultaneously exceed and fall short of workplace-based practice learning.

- There has been much learning during the COVID-19 pandemic about the benefits and limitations of hybrid social work practices that incorporate in-person and digital interactions. The resources and approaches developed by the ASM offer considerable potential to enable students to meet the challenges of a rapidly evolving technologically-supported practice environment.

- It will not become clear whether the ASM provides sufficient learning opportunities to students until they complete their 120-day placements – and, arguably, not fully until they move into qualified practice as newly qualified social workers.

- The evaluation found general acknowledgement that the ASM had been developed in difficult and unprecedented circumstances – for providers, IPEs and students – and that some improvements were required to improve its overall quality (see below).

## Recommendations

### Module design

- The ASM's pedagogy, articulation with the SiSWE and key assessment points require to be made explicit throughout the module so that providers, IPEs and students have a clear and consistent learning path from start to finish.

- IPEs should be recruited and ready to start to engage with students in their bubbles from the module start.

- Module planning and design should involve a wider range of partners from the start, including individuals who use services, and their organisations, LNW, former students, employers and IPEs.

- The module should be regarded as a full-time learning programme, and ideally should not be offered alongside other HEI modules.

- Careful attention requires to be paid to spreading module workload across the 13 weeks, ensuring a more consistent, integrated approach to student learning and demands on IPEs and providers.

### Module preparation

- IPEs require a full induction to the module to ensure that they have full understanding of their role and its content and approach.

- It may be wise to limit the number of student bubbles for each IPE to one unless an IPEs can demonstrate that they have sufficient capacity to meet the demands of supervising two groups.

- Responsibilities for individual feedback to students about their learning activities should be established from the start of the module, and mechanisms put in place to ensure that individual support can be provided when students require it.

- Students are likely to benefit from preparatory sessions to familiarise themselves with the ASM's approach and the differences and similarities of the module from direct practice learning opportunities. These sessions could usefully be supported by input from students who completed the first presentation of the ASM.

- Key employers and placement providers should be brought up to speed with the aims, approach and content of the module.

## Module delivery

- Postgraduate and undergraduate students should continue to be grouped in separate bubbles to take account of the differing expectations at SCQF Levels 9 and 10. Implementation of UWS's successful model of rotating student bubble leadership should also be considered.

- Every attempt should be made to minimise use of pre-recorded videos as standalone learning resources and to maximise opportunities for student interaction and feedback, with regular breaks to reduce screen fatigue and consolidate learning.

- Lecture class sizes should be reviewed with every effort made to deliver material in a context where student interaction is possible and encouraged.

- As far as possible, a single virtual learning environment should be used, enabling streamlined movement between small and large group activities.

- All midpoint reviews should involve HEI tutors as well as IPEs and students.

- The potential for enabling students from the recent ASM intake to take on a mentoring role should be explored.

- Additional opportunities for learning based on virtual shadowing opportunities should be incorporated into the module.

- Methods of monitoring module attendance (beyond basic collection of student login data) should be reviewed to ensure that all students are sufficiently engaged in practice learning throughout the module.

- Module feedback and evaluation findings should be shared with all module contributors, including people who use services and IPEs.

**Looking ahead**

- Effective ways should be found to share the ASM's learning resources and overall approach both locally in the west of Scotland (eg with social work employers) and nationally.

- The outcomes of this previously untested approach to practice learning should be evaluated, both during students' forthcoming 120-day placements and once students are in qualified practice as newly qualified social workers.

- Further evaluation of the ASM approach should incorporate inquiry into the extent to which the module meets the needs of students with disabilities, students from minority ethnic groups and those students who struggle or fail to meet the module's learning outcomes.

- ASM's resources could be widely used in social work education in Scotland and further afield with potential to introduce more simulated practice learning experiences at an earlier stage in some undergraduate social work degrees.

**Re-thinking practice learning**

Out of the pandemic's disruption has come learning that has potential to make an important contribution to continuing debates about the strategic direction for practice learning. In particular, this evaluation has found evidence for:

- the effectiveness and benefits of group supervision, suggesting that it could play a more significant role in practice education

- the benefits of collaboration and sharing of expertise between social work educators in the academy and the workplace, reviving the need to review ways of increasing the permeability between these two, often concerningly separate, worlds

- the potential that online delivery presents to draw on the skills and experience of a wider and more diverse pool of practice educators

- the future potential for creative use of hybrid opportunities for learning that enable students to rehearse advanced practice skills in preparation for, and alongside in-person social work practice.

# 1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of an evaluation of the Advanced Skills Module (ASM), an online learning programme developed by Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU), the University of Strathclyde (UoS) and the University of the West of Scotland (UWS) in response to the challenges presented by the Covid 19 pandemic. The study was commissioned by the Social Work Education Partnership (SWEP) with the objective of identifying the processes, outcomes and opportunities generated by the module's pilot presentation. Funding was provided by the Scottish Government and the evaluation contract was procured and managed by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC).

## Aims of the evaluation

The evaluation aimed to assess and identify:

- the enablers and barriers to the Advanced Skills Module's successful delivery, and priorities for further development of the module

- whether the pilot was implemented in accordance with its agreed learning outcomes, meeting relevant regulatory requirements, and the Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE)

- the extent of equivalence between the ASM's practice learning opportunities and 40 days of placement learning

- the potential of the module to support future learning in social work education in Scotland.

The independent evaluation was undertaken by Jean Gordon Consultancy, with a team of experienced, Scotland-based social workers, practice educators, university educators, managers and researchers.

## Research questions

The evaluation was designed to provide answers to the following questions, identified by SWEP in consultation with key stakeholders in social work education in Scotland.

- What were the key enablers and barriers to implementation of the new module across the relevant universities?

- Has the module been implemented effectively according to the agreed learning outcomes and regulatory requirements, including the SiSWE, and, if so, how?

- How were any barriers that were encountered overcome?

- To what extent does the module's content and approach offer learning that is equivalent to 40 days of direct practice learning?

- What do stakeholders' experiences suggest about the suitability and sustainability of the pilot module?

- What were the key successes and lessons learned?

- What, if any, were the unintended consequences of the piloting of the module?

- What are the priorities for the module's future improvement?

## Background to the evaluation

### COVID-19 and social work practice learning in Scotland

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about far-reaching changes in all our lives, not least in respect of disruption to learning and educational systems and traditional practices that have impacted on more than 94% of the world's student population (Pokhrel and Chhetri, 2021). Whilst social work practitioners and educators have long-standing experience in preparing for and mitigating crises, the pandemic brought pressing challenges to social work students, practitioners, and academic institutions as well as the communities they serve (Paceley et al., 2021). COVID-19 catapulted social work programmes into remote learning and teaching with a rapid increase in online delivery and use of virtual learning platforms[1]. At the same time, through necessity, this 'tsunami' generated opportunities for the development of creative approaches that enabled students to keep learning despite the many restrictions posed by the pandemic (McLaughlin et al., 2020, p.975). This spirit of innovation has not only been evident in the development of more imaginative approaches to class-based learning, but, as in the case of the ASM, finding ways to meet students' practice learning needs.

Practice learning is a key component of all qualifying social work programmes as identified in the Framework for Social Work Education in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2003). Students in Scotland are required to have sufficient practice learning opportunities to meet the SiSWE, spending at least 200 days in practice learning, of which at least 160 must be spent in supervised and assessed direct practice in social work settings. Up to 60 days of the supervised direct practice element can be subject to credit generated by prior experiential learning.

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[1] Unless, like The Open University, HEIs were already offering a distance learning programme.

In March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown restrictions were imposed, social work student practice learning opportunities were suspended in Scotland. A collaborative approach between HEIs, the Scottish Government, SSSC and other partners enabled many students to resume or start their practice learning in summer 2020 (SSSC, 2020a). SSSC introduced short-term contingency measures in November 2020 to alleviate some of the considerable pandemic related challenges faced in securing direct practice learning opportunities for students. Further temporary flexibilities were introduced in winter 2021, including specific expectations for practice learning that included the potential for inclusion of an element of technology-enhanced, virtual learning (SSSC, 2021). This option looked particularly promising for HEIs in the west of Scotland which have faced long-standing challenges in sourcing sufficient practice learning opportunities for the large numbers of students in the region (Gordon et al., 2009; Learning Network West, 2017).

## Regulatory approval for the ASM

Three universities in Scotland (GCU, UoS and UWS) worked collaboratively from November 2020 to develop a learning programme, the ASM, to address a very considerable shortfall of practice placements in the west of Scotland. Their aim was to provide a high quality practice learning experience to enable students to develop professional confidence and competence and prepare them for workplace-based practice learning. The distinctiveness of the resulting module lies in its offer of simulated assessed practice learning as a direct alternative to a proportion of regulatory social work degree requirements. The module also places particular emphasis on equipping students to develop the increasingly necessary digital practice skills required of social workers during a global pandemic. Funding for the module's development came from the Scottish Government, drawing on a combination of student resumption fees, put in place to support the practice learning of all social work students in Scotland during the pandemic and a daily practice educator fee for each student. In addition, a small grant was awarded to LNW and the HEIs to support technological development.

Each HEI subsequently sought and gained approval to develop and run ASM jointly as a temporary contingency measure. They were required to meet SSSC's expectations of the module, including the requirements that it:

- provide a maximum of 40 days of practice learning in the earlier stages of an HEI programme, followed by a minimum of 120 days placement learning in a social work setting

- be additional to, and more advanced than, the HEIs' existing preparation for practice

- specify clear learning outcomes, be firmly embedded in the overall social work programme and mapped to the SiSWE

- attend to ethical teaching, learning and assessment

- maximise opportunities to engage in interactive and critical dialogue with students, minimising use of pre-recorded lectures

- appoint and manage the expectations and role of practice educators with sufficient experience and qualifications to support the learning of a single group, or 'bubble', of four or five students (or, exceptionally, two bubbles)

- meet the principles and requirements of an indicative curriculum, including specifications of specified skills, assessment approaches and learning methods

- be followed by 120 days of practice learning, with at least two contrasting social work experiences, and opportunities to undertake statutory tasks, including legal interventions.

(SSSC, 2020b)

HEI applications to SSSC for approval were, inevitably, somewhat different for each HEI because of the different configurations of their programmes in, for example, respect of the timing of practice learning opportunities and assessment requirements. The three HEIs planned, developed and delivered the module together. All three HEIs agreed to make the module available to their Year 1 Masters (postgraduate, PG) and Year 3 undergraduate (UG) students due to undertake their first direct practice learning opportunity (UoS students will also have undertaken a short observation placement prior to the ASM). However, whilst GCU and UWS students undertook the programme together between February and May 2021, UoS students, when consulted by the university, opted for an autumn presentation. This evaluation is solely of the first joint presentation of the module for UWS and GCU students.

**Summary of ASM's key characteristics**

The 13-week module aimed to bridge the gap between classroom and direct practice settings with a mix of asynchronous and synchronous learning activities. The module was designed to follow the principles of inquiry-based learning, supported by a pedagogic framework that emphasises students' active exploration, reflection, and evaluation of learning (UoS, UWS and GCU, 2021a). Students were required to engage in learning for four to five days per week, supported by a module leader/co-ordinator from their own HEI and contributors from all three universities. Students took part in whole cohort workshops (up to 196

students) for two days a week, spending the remaining three days engaged in self-directed study, individually and as part of a group in their allocated student bubbles. Due to the speed with which the module was planned and developed, the 30 appointed independent practice educators (IPEs) only joined the module at the start of its sixth week. At this point students started to engage with group supervision in their small bubbles, working with their practice educator on a series of three case studies developed by the HEIs. Group supervision was intended to follow the pedagogical approach of the module, based on the 'reflect and review' stage of the pedagogic framework. The IPE role was described as one of combining student reflection on their experiences that week and the development of 'peer collaborative discussion on knowledge, values and skills' to support student learning and development (GCU, 2021a). Each case study was integrated with opportunities for simulated learning, including direct observations of practice assessed by IPEs. Student learning was reviewed at the midpoint of the module and a final assessment report provided by the IPE, both features that mirror usual practice in student practice learning opportunities (see Appendix 1 for the ASM's structure).

## Structure of this report

This report firstly briefly describes the ASM's development, structure and content, summarising the characteristics of student participants and the independent practice educators (IPEs) recruited to support student learning. Chapter Two sets out the research methodology, the methods used to access the perspectives of pilot participants and to analyse data, the study's ethical commitments and its strengths and limitations. The findings are then presented thematically, combining qualitative and quantitative data drawn from two surveys and interviews with students, IPEs, and module providers and contributors to respond to the evaluation research questions. The report ends by summarising the conclusions and identifying recommendations for further development of the ASM and its approach to learning. Illustrative quotes at the start of each section have been selected because they are representative of the views expressed during the evaluation. A Glossary of Terms is available at the end of the report.

# 2. Evaluation design, methodology and methods

**Key points:**

- The mixed methods evaluation combined outcome and process elements, drawing on qualitative and quantitative survey data collected from 23 students and 25 IPEs.

- 33 semi-structured interviews in Microsoft Teams with students, IPEs, module providers and contributors that generated a more in-depth understanding of evaluation participants' experiences of the module.

- Data analysis combined basic statistical analysis of quantitative data from the survey, and thematic analysis of survey and interview qualitative data using analysis software (NVivo11).

- The evaluation adhered to the principles and practice of good ethical governance including the anonymisation of data to uphold participant confidentiality.

- The evaluation took a systematic approach, involving a range of evaluation participants in ways that add strength and depth to its findings. However, there are also limitations to the research, in particular the low numbers of students who responded to the survey and the short time scale within which the evaluation of necessity took place.

## Evaluation methodology

The mixed methods evaluation combines process and outcome elements, paying attention to not only the extent to which an intervention has met its stated objectives, but also to what actually occurred during its development and delivery to achieve these outcomes (Robson, 2002). Process evaluations are especially useful for gaining knowledge about interventions that, like the ASM, address complex issues, and involve a dynamic range of interacting contingencies and systems (Moore et al., 2015).

The **process evaluation** sought to determine how module learning outcomes were met by seeking answers to questions about, 'what works, for whom, in what circumstances, to what extent, and in what respects,

and how?' (Pawson and Tilley, 2004, p.2). Qualitative methods were used to access and analyse participants' experiences of, for example, the learning approaches used, challenges experienced, resources drawn on and innovative practices required to deliver effective support and assessment.

The **outcome evaluation** aimed to measure to what extent the pilot ASM met its stated learning outcomes. It collected and analysed quantitative data including information about participant characteristics and ratings of progress in learning. This, combined with qualitative data provided a more in-depth and nuanced understanding of what changed as a result of the pilot.

## Evaluation methods

### Survey

Two surveys were designed in consultation with SSSC and SWEP, one for students and one for IPEs. Using a cloud-based survey tool, SurveyMonkey, they collected demographic data, asking participants to identify:

- their social care/social work/practice teaching experience

- enablers and barriers to student learning on the module

- their assessment of the ASM's learning outcomes

- suggestions for further improving or developing the module

- views about the extent of ASM's equivalence to 40 days of direct practice learning and the future sustainability of the module (IPEs only).

(See also Appendix 2)

In addition, students and IPEs were asked to supply their contact details if they were happy to take part in a short interview about their experiences of the module. Seven students and 19 IPEs agreed to do so. No identifying information was requested from other survey respondents.

The student survey link was distributed to all students by UWS and GCU via email and the HEIs' student learning platforms. The IPE survey link was shared with IPEs by LNW. A follow up reminder was sent to all participants a fortnight later. Responses were collected between 1.5.21 and 28.5.21. Response rates and evaluation participant characteristics are summarised in Table 1. Of those that responded, a total of 18 students and 24 IPEs completed all survey questions.

| ASM role | Survey responses | Total sample | % overall cohort |
|---|---|---|---|
| IPE | 25 | 30 | **83%** |
| UWS Undergraduate (UG) | 6 | 61 | 10% |
| UWS Masters (PG) | 4 | 21 | 19% |
| GCU Undergraduate (UG) | 9 | 79 | 11% |
| GCU Masters (PG) | 4 | 35 | 11% |
| All students | 23 | 196 | **12%** |

**Table 1: No. and % of survey participants by role**

**Student characteristics**: Most students (78%) were under 45 and two thirds identified as White Scottish. All but four of the surveyed students had some experience of health and social care practice, two thirds as practitioners and one quarter as volunteers.

**IPE characteristics**: Most were in the 55–64 age category, and there were none under 35. Three quarters identified as White Scottish with no non-white ethnicity recorded. All the IPEs who responded to the survey were based in Scotland, mostly (70%) in the Glasgow area, with the remaining respondents based in other locations in the south and south-east of Scotland.

**Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews took place in Microsoft Teams. All were recorded with participants' written permission. Apart from the pandemic-related necessity for use of this method, recent research suggests that videoconferencing platforms provide viable means of collecting qualitative data due to their ease of use, cost effectiveness, data management features and security options (Archibald et al., 2019). The audio recordings were then transcribed in NVivo 11[2] transcription software, . Semi-structured interview topic guides, developed in collaboration with SSSC and SWEP, addressed similar core process and outcome themes to the survey's questions (see also Appendix 3). Four groups of stakeholders participated in interviews.

- Eight IPEs, a purposive sample selected from survey respondents who had offered to participate in an interview. The sample aimed to include as broad a range of IPEs as possible, incorporating diversity in terms of gender, age, employment status, practice teaching experience and nature of student bubble(s) supported (HEI, student qualification route). The sample included three IPEs with two student bubbles, two of whom had one UWS and one GCU bubble. Overall six IPEs were working with GCU, and four with UWS

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[2] A software programme used for qualitative and mixed methods data analysis.

students. Two IPEs identified as male, and six as female. A further IPE provided responses to the topic guide questions in written form.

- Five students, out of a possible seven willing to take part in an interview; two students did not respond to an interview invitation after a follow up reminder. This was a much smaller number than the anticipated sample of 12. Three were UWS students (2 UG, 1 PG) and two were GCU students (1 UG, I PG). Four students identified as female and one as male. Due to the small size of the student sample and potential identifiability of respondents, further demographic details, including ethnicity and disability, are not shared in this report.

- 12 out of a possible 13 HEI and LNW participants, identified by SWEP and SSSC, involved in a range of aspects of the module, including its quality assurance, development, delivery, recruitment, support of practice educators and evaluation.

- Eight individuals with lived experience of social work services who collaborated with HEIs to develop learning content and offer learning sessions. Seven who had contributed to student learning about creative approaches to self-directed support participated in two interviews and a care-experienced young adult took part in a further interview.

## Desk-based research

A range of desk-based research was undertaken to gain an understanding of the nature of the module and the processes associated with IPE recruitment and management. Documentation and ASM hosting platforms accessed and analysed included:

- GCU's Blackboard Collaborate 'GCU Learn' platform

- UWS's Moodle platform

- HEI module and programme handbooks and assessment requirements

- ASM content, including You Tube videos, Power Point presentations and written tasks

- LNW's recruitment documentation

- SSSC requirements and their learning advisors' reports on the progress of HEI applications for module approval

- feedback from IPEs at the third LNW IPE forum.

## Data analysis

Data analysis combined basic statistical analysis of quantitative data from the survey, and thematic analysis of qualitative data from the survey, and interviews. Individual survey responses were integrated with those generated during follow-up interviews with students and IPEs. Braun and Clarke's six step approach (2006) to thematic analysis was used to inform the coding of transcribed interview data in NVivo (Version 11), before identifying and clustering themes to create a thematic map of the evaluation findings cross-referenced with the research questions.

## Research ethics

Jean Gordon Consulting and its associates adhere to the Ethical Guidelines of the Social Research Association (SRA, 2003) in relation to its obligations to research participants, colleagues and funders, as well as to society. The research design and conduct are compliant with the terms of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Key commitments made to participants are summarised below.

- All information provided by individuals to the survey, during interviews and in focus groups to be anonymised in any reporting of the research. Neither names and employing organisations nor locations of participants to be shared with SSSC, SWEP or HEIs in any verbal or written reporting.

- All records made in the course of the research, whether written or audio recorded, to be held securely in password protected locations and destroyed on acceptance by SSSC and SWEP of the final report.

- Interview participants provided with information about the research and asked to complete a consent form before taking part. Participants informed that they were free to withdraw from the research at any point during their involvement.

## Terminology

'**Module provider'**, is used to describe HEI and LNW participants with a range of different ASM roles.

'**Module contributor'** is used to describe individuals and organisations that contributed to developing learning materials, including third sector and local authority organisations and people who use services.

'**Direct' or 'workplace' placement/ practice learning opportunity** is used to describe practice within a social care or social work service setting. Note that 'direct' does not necessarily imply 'live' face to face

practice since, at the time of writing, a great deal of social work practice is being conducted remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Strengths and limitations

The evaluation design has a number of strengths. Its systematic approach, combination of outcome and process elements, mixed methods and the involvement of a wide range of individuals associated with the pilot add strength and depth to its findings. However, a number of limitations should be taken into account when interpreting the findings.

- The student response to the survey, at 11%, was very low. There are a number of possible reasons for this, including student fatigue at the end of a demanding programme, pandemic-related challenges and the coinciding of the evaluation with a parallel HEI research. It is difficult, therefore, to assess, to what extent the student views reported here are representative of the wider student cohort.

- This evaluation, like the ASM pilot itself, has been designed and conducted within a very short time frame. Data collection took place during May 2021 before all students had submitted their final assessments and before HEIs' exam boards, limiting a full commentary on student assessment. Time constraints also limited opportunities to, for example, assess students' learning and development on the module over time, or to find more creative ways to involve a larger number of students in the evaluation.

- Time limitations also impacted on data analysis, so that there was no opportunity for a second comparative check of survey and interview coding and analysis.

- Many participants, especially students, have pointed out that the true potential of the module will only become evident once they embark on their 120-day practice learning opportunity. Indeed, the outcomes of ASM in terms of practice confidence and competence may only become clear as these students qualify and enter the workplace as newly qualified social workers. This evaluation should therefore be seen as part of a longer process of outcome evaluation, rather than a final statement about ASM's ability to provide adequate preparation for qualified social work practice.

# 3. Process findings: Implementation enablers and barriers

**Key enablers**

- The motivation and determination of the module providers to enable students to keep learning and progressing through their qualification.

- A collegiate approach to partnership working and mostly effective communication between the three contributing universities, IPEs and module contributors including local authority and third sector organisations and individuals who use services.

- Efficient and effective recruitment and selection of IPEs by LNW, and valued support systems for IPEs provided by LNW and HEIs.

- The mix of skillsets and experience of module contributors, providers and IPEs, including digital and remote working skills.

**Key barriers**

- The extremely short time scales for module production.

- A lack of clarity and/or differing interpretations about the extent of the IPE role and workload.

- Some systemic technological barriers related to use of multiple IT platforms for learning events and the dispersal of learning objects and other resources to different locations.

- Insufficient involvement of people who use services in learning content design, and a need for more effective feedback mechanisms for all module contributors and IPEs.

- Existing mechanisms to monitor attendance and address non-participation did not always seem adequate to identify some students' variable levels of engagement with the module.

The process element of the evaluation aimed, firstly, to gain an understanding of the enablers and barriers to module implementation. Enablers and barriers to student learning are addressed in Chapter 4.

## 3.1 Key implementation enablers

**Motivation, determination - and sheer necessity**

> 'I think that we all felt a deeply held sense of responsibility to do everything that we could to get our students through the programme and deliver a good learning experience.'
>
> (Interview, module provider)

Module providers almost unanimously highlighted their strong sense of commitment to continuing student learning through the pandemic, despite the many challenges that this posed. The considerable shortfall in placements left HEIs with few options, and there was great reluctance to suspend placements once again because of the negative impact this would have had on students professionally, personally and financially. This sense of 'esprit de corps', identified by one module provider, also extended, for the most part, to IPEs and the students themselves:

'…I think students recognise that in some ways they were kind of guinea pigs for this. But the feedback I got was that people were saying, "Well, that's not what we signed up for. But, you know, we recognise there was a pandemic, and we couldn't operate as normal"'.

(Interview, IPE)

**A collegiate approach**

> 'Collaboration has worked really, really well. And I think that it's been one of the real positives of this, of the whole pandemic skills module, the level of collaborative partnership work that has taken place. And just the goodwill between the universities - we've done a lot on mutual trust.'
>
> (Interview, module provider)

Module development required a rapid and an intensely collaborative approach between the HEIs and LNW, working alongside SWEP and SSSC. All but one interviewed module provider reflected on the success of this partnership approach, especially between the three HEIs. It was also said that co-operative module planning, development and delivery had been essential for pragmatic reasons, as the workload entailed would have been impossible for a single HEI to contemplate, and there was insufficient time to recruit a project manager.

IPE feedback in the survey and interviews also highlighted a sense of teamwork between the module teaching staff and the HEIs, of all working together, despite periodic glitches (see 3.2), to try to ensure positive learning experiences and outcomes for students. Whilst the two IPEs with both UWS and GCU student bubbles said that they had had more work than their colleagues to familiarise themselves with the requirements of both HEIs, neither reported marked differences in the universities' overall guidance and approach. HEI IT support was also viewed positively by students and IPEs who had experienced difficulties with computing software or in accessing or using online platforms. Overall, three quarters of surveyed IPEs found communication with LNW and the universities to be 'excellent' or 'good'.

An inclusive, collaborative approach was also evident in HEIs' commitment to involving the third sector and local authorities in the development of learning content and, in the case of Self Directed Support Scotland (SDSS), direct module delivery. Engagement with colleagues in a range of services, accessing, for example, anonymised practice examples and examples of local authority documentation assisted in meeting ASM's aim to, as far as possible, 'replicate placement experience' (UoS, UWS and GCU, 2021b). This intention was also reflected in the involvement of IPEs and design of the second half of the module with standard components of a workplace practice learning opportunity, including supervision, reflective writing, direct observations, midpoint reviews and final assessment.

**IPE recruitment and support**

'Recruitment was straightforward, it was quick, it really met all my expectations.'

'One of my students left the module a few weeks ago… I felt supported with that by the HEI, and had no concerns about how that was managed.'

(Interviews, IPEs)

A key element of the ASM was the involvement of IPEs to supervise, support and assess students in their bubbles. LNW, already very experienced at recruiting and supporting IPEs, took on responsibility for advertising for up to 40 IPEs. Working closely with HEI practice education leads and employing a range of local networks, LNW successfully recruited 32 IPEs, 30 of whom went on to work on the module. Most of the applications came from Scotland, but there was also interest from other parts of the UK and one from a Scotland-trained social worker in Europe. Surveyed IPEs' experience of the application and selection process was uniformly positive, most frequently described as 'straightforward'. The majority of IPEs (66%) were motivated by professional interest in the

ASM development, one quarter also seeing involvement as supportive to their own professional development. A further three IPEs were attracted by the opportunity for paid work in a challenging economic climate. Two thirds (16) of recruited IPEs would undertake a similar role again, seven would 'maybe' do so, and only one IPE would choose not to because of the lack of 'hands on' experience offered by simulated and remote learning.

Likewise, IPEs were generally very positive about the support they were offered by LNW and the HEIs. Three quarters of surveyed IPEs had attended at least one LNW forum, and it was evident that LNW constituted an important source of information and IPE support during the module. Other valued ongoing support came from GCU's Padlet forum and from practice learning co-ordinators at GCU and UWS.

## Providers and contributors' skillsets and experience

'Everybody pitched in…so we had practice experience from right at the start of the pandemic and access to exactly what was happening out there in practice. There's a lot of very live connections to practice. And quite frankly, I don't think we could have done it without staff with really developed digital skills.'

(Interview, module provider)

A final key enabler for the module's implementation related to the mix of skillsets and experience of the module providers. To some extent this was, in the words of one HEI provider, 'serendipitous' since both UWS and GCU had staff members who combined recent practice experience and digital skills. This enabled them to, for example, make rapid links with practitioners to seek relevant case study resources, and to develop a range of learning content including, crucially, the case study simulations that facilitated students' direct observations of practice. All three HEIs also referred to their growing interest in use of simulation to support student learning and offered examples of the ways in which face to face simulation was already being used, for example by GCU to give students experience of hospital and court settings. Further areas of expertise identified included leadership capabilities, sensitive staff support, experience of quality assurance and a willingness to network widely to broaden the scope of the learning curriculum. The willingness and 'generosity' of colleagues in academic and practice settings to contribute to the module in a variety of ways was also noted several times by module providers.

A second key area of expertise lay in the motivation and wide-ranging experience described during interviews by individuals who use social work services. A care-experienced young person told us, for example:

'..I am very driven to make the system a better place for all the people in Scotland and to use my experience to help teach others as that's something that I'm really quite passionate about.'

(Interview, module contributor)

Finally, analysis of survey responses from IPEs demonstrates the considerable level of experience they brought to the module. Their social work practice experience ranged between 8 and 41 years. There was, in contrast with LNW and HEI expectations, a surprisingly high proportion of IPEs who were in current social work practice roles. 40% of the IPEs combined their ASM role with social work practice, whilst about half mainly worked as self-employed practice educators.

The IPEs mostly also had considerable practice teaching experience, the majority having supervised ten or more social work students over the last five years, only three having experience of supervising fewer than three students. Most IPEs' practice teaching experience was very recent, 80% having supervised a student in the last two years. This currency was also reflected in their familiarity with the revised SiSWE, all but one respondent having a 'good' or 'fairly good' understanding and experience of the standards. Additionally most also had considerable experience of virtual learning, perhaps reflected in their original interest in working on the ASM, 88% rating themselves as 'confident' in working within a virtual learning environment. This accumulated experience in social work practice and facilitating learning enabled most IPEs to both 'hit the ground running' when they joined this new, unfamiliar module and to motivate and support their students from the start:

'I'm confident enough in my practice from years of being a practice teacher that I knew what I was doing and was adaptable to what was required for the module.'

(Interview, IPE)

## 3.2 Key implementation barriers

**Time and resources**

'The demand on staff was been significant in terms of their time and resources. And we're not in a bubble. All the things that the pandemic is affecting are affecting us as well. So people are juggling a lot of pressures.'

Time and resource pressures, and their impact on the module, were referred to by all module providers and most IPEs in interviews and survey responses. SSSC's final approval for the module to go ahead was not given until late November 2020 so the module had to be planned and developed very rapidly to enable a February 2021 start. Although the pedagogy and structure were agreed before this date in consultation with SSSC and SWEP, learning content for the later weeks of the module continued, of necessity, to be developed after it started. This speed of development and HEI capacity issues placed intense pressure on module providers as well as creating corresponding resource gaps in other aspects of at least two of the universities' social work programmes. Senior HEI staff put significant amounts of their relatively costly time into module development and production taking their attention away from other duties. Despite measures put in place to address time-related constraints (see Chapter 5), the speed of production also had an impact on student learning opportunities. Crucially, the initial intention to involve IPEs from the module start was not realisable because of the time required for recruitment and selection, an implementation barrier that had a number of important ramifications, including a 'squeezing' of case studies and direct observations into an abbreviated six week time frame (see Chapter 4).

**Lack of clarity about IPE role and workload**

'I think the information that we are so used to now in relation to preparing students… we're quite thorough in all of that preparation before the placement begins. None of that was in place because it couldn't be, I think, so there were lots of things that were different.'

(Interview, IPE)

While IPEs appreciated the attention paid to their HEI and LNW led induction when they joined the module, the evolving nature of the module, and inconsistent understandings of the difference between ASM and a direct practice learning opportunity contributed to a lack of clarity about their role. In particular, there were thought to be 'mixed messages' about the level and nature of individual student feedback required. There was also marked variation in IPEs' level of satisfaction with HEIs' expectations of their workload, with about half of the interviewees finding this 'manageable' and the rest excessive and, in one response, 'colossally underestimated'. IPE reports of the average time they spent working with one student bubble differed greatly, from four or five hours to 25 hours per week instead of the anticipated six to seven hours. Nevertheless, most (71%) thought that their remuneration was 'sufficient', a reflection perhaps of an enhanced rate of pay (£28/day for each student) in

comparison with the standard self-employed practice educator (£18/day for a single student).

Overall, survey and interview responses revealed some divergent understandings of the IPE role and tasks, which impacted on their approach to supporting student learning:

'You're talking about 30 different individuals there with different styles of practice, teaching and different commitment levels as well. I got a distinct impression that there were some not worried about because they were doing just what they were required to do. And there were others that were seeking more information, spending more time because that was in their nature to do that.'

(Interview, module provider)

These differences seem likely to have had an impact on the student experience of the module, although the low student survey response rate precludes an accurate assessment of whether their satisfaction levels correlated with differing IPE approaches. It is also important to note that practice educators' diverse styles are likely to vary in some similar ways during placements in the workplace. IPEs had a more consistent view about the variable pace of work with especially tight timetabling of direct observations and midpoint reviews, as well as some late changes in HEI guidance about their timing that caused additional stress and workload management problems.

'There were some weeks when it was completely unmanageable - when we had two direct observations (one was formative) and all mid points in the course of two to three weeks.'

(Survey, IPE response)

**Systemic technological barriers**

'It was different platforms for different universities. And I think that people struggled with that.'

(Interview, student)

The most frequently identified barrier to remote and digital learning related to the use of multiple online platforms. Module content was presented within three different virtual learning environments (VLEs) hosted by the HEIs. Student bubbles, on the other hand, met in Microsoft Teams. Although it appeared that students, after some initial problems, mostly adjusted to this format, constant shifts between platforms were

initially experienced as disruptive. There also appeared to be some issues with student permissions to use the chat box in the online learning platform used by one of the universities. Lack of integration between VLE and small group discussion in Teams was also highlighted by users of services who facilitated an SDS learning event. They suggested that this session could have been much more effective if the presenting group could have individually joined students in break out rooms within the VLE. Instead, the students 'disappeared' into their Teams rooms, missing out on the potential of a more rewarding interactive learning experience.

The hosting of learning objects, such as videos, on multiple HEI platforms with variable access is also, at the time of writing, serving as a barrier to assembling all the module's elements in preparation for future presentations of the module, including UoS's first delivery in autumn 2021, an issue related to ASM's attenuated time scales.

'We've never had the reflection time to try and bring it together into one coherent framework and so that's a huge issue now…it is really, really, really challenging.'

(Interview, module provider)

## Barriers to fully involving people who use services

'I think if we had sat down with the university at the beginning of a process and the conversation was about, "What do you think should be covered in this module and what do you think you can bring?", that could have been a very different conversation.'

(Interview, module contributor)

A further barrier to involvement was identified during interviews with people who use SDS. Whilst recognising the time constraints associated with the module, their earlier involvement in decision-making about learning content and approach would have helped to 'design something that will actually be more effective' in promoting student learning about more creative, and less service-driven approaches to social work. Both they and a young care-experienced individual also regretted the lack of student evaluation feedback. Additionally, although the young person had contributed to video content viewed by students, she had not herself seen the video. These barriers to ensuring full involvement of people who use services in module development and delivery had a negative impact on both contributors and student learning. The importance of ensuring an ethically-informed and fully participative approach to contributors' involvement throughout the ASM will be returned to in the Discussion and Recommendations (see Chapters 8 and 9).

## Monitoring student attendance

'I understood , like we were told from the beginning, this is your placement and, if you were on a placement, you'd be here Monday to Friday, nine to five, basically. So that's how you should see this learning opportunity - which is what I did …and I think I would say I got frustrated at times because quite a lot of [the other students in my bubble] were doing their night shift or doing shifts through the week.'

(Interview, student)

GCU and UWS have mechanisms in place to monitor students' online attendance, recording agreed absences when students are, for example, unwell, and raising alerts in instances of non-attendance. However, several IPEs and students raised concerns about students who were not fully participating in bubble activities. It was said that students were unlikely to 'report' their fellow students, and there were several examples provided of how students found 'workarounds' to ensure that their own learning was not compromised by other students' absences. Low student attendance was also reported at some whole group learning events. This evaluation cannot put any figures on student absences, but this qualitative evidence does suggest a contrast with a direct 40-day placement which requires more easily verifiable evidence of students' full attendance and engagement with practice learning. As the quote above suggests, other factors, related to students' financial and employment situation in pandemic conditions, may have played a role in limiting their engagement with the module.

# 4. Process findings: Learning enablers and barriers

**Key enablers**

- Shared learning in the student bubble.

- Group supervision in student bubbles with the IPE, supported by opportunities for reflective discussion and writing.

- Direct observations of simulated case studies and the IPE's assessment feedback.

- The safe environment for learning provided by the VLE, especially for less confident students / those without prior social care experience.

- The use of authentic learning resources, including current documentation and simulated case studies based on anonymised practice examples, and a structure that mirrored a workplace practice learning opportunity.

- The diversity of learning experiences offered, including learning about different social work specialisms, anti-racist practice and intersectionality (although some participants would have favoured the greater depth achievable through following a single case study).

**Key barriers – and some remedies**

- Many students' sense of disappointment and frustration because direct practice learning opportunities were not available. IPEs and HEIs played a key role in 'absorbing anxiety' and motivating students.

- Challenges with home study for some students, related to inadequate study space, problems with connectivity and trying to juggle study with other responsibilities, including home schooling children during the pandemic.

- The late start for IPEs, nearly halfway through the module, making the final weeks rushed, giving students insufficient time for what they perceived to be the most valuable aspect of their learning on the module.

- Large class sizes and overuse of pre-recorded content, especially in the first half of the module, contrasted with insufficient time for students to process and reflect on learning during the second half.

- Challenges in meeting the needs of individual students, including a gap created by lack of clarity about responsibility for providing feedback to students on their learning activities. Some IPEs addressed this gap with additional student support but this added further to their workload for the module.

Students, IPEs and module providers provided a commentary on what supported and inhibited student learning in their survey and interview responses, also identifying a number of ways in which ASM participants sought to overcome barriers to learning as they emerged.

## 4.1 Enablers for student learning

### Shared learning in the student bubble

'I think the majority of the support has been from my bubble because we were able to create a safe space for ourselves to get rid of any frustrations – or if one of us was really struggling. We all felt really comfortable with it .′

(Interview, student)

Most surveyed students (62%) found that the student bubble was 'highly supportive' to their learning, only one of 21 students who answered this question finding it unsupportive. IPEs perceived the value of student bubbles even more positively, either as 'highly supportive' (83%) or 'somewhat supportive' (17%). Interviews with students provided a more nuanced view of group development, with accounts of the ways in which student bubbles had had to work at developing the cohesive, collaborative working relationships that frequently seemed to have been achieved by the end of the module. The data also suggests the important role of IPEs in supporting an effective group dynamic during the second half of the module. UWS introduced a rotating bubble leadership role for students, the benefits of which were commented on positively by two interviewed students, especially in relation to developing confidence and use of authority. As well as reducing the isolation from their peers experienced by many students during the pandemic, the bubbles were perceived to have had an important role in preparing students for team working in the workplace. Working online alongside other students also, according to surveyed students and IPEs, played a more vital role in developing digital skills and confidence than any other aspect of the module, over three quarters of both groups finding this to be 'highly supportive'.

## Group supervision with the IPE

'I got most out of my bubble group, they were my life saver... and if we didn't understand anything, I would be like, "OK, what's going on here?" And so we would talk about it and then we would do our supervision meeting with with our practice educator and then we would talk it out, which was wonderful.'

(Interview, student)

Surveyed students had a mostly very positive view of the value of group supervision, two thirds finding it 'very supportive', assessing it as having similar value to bubble group support. Opportunities for reflection and reflective writing were especially valued by students (see also Chapter 5). Other aspects of group supervision identified by students included the IPEs' use of their own practice experience to inform learning, and opportunities to check out understanding of what students had been learning in large group events:

'There has been no way to check understanding with lecturers, mainly due to the size of the classes. All our engagement has come from our practice educator.'

(Survey, student response)

Surveyed IPEs were almost uniformly positive (96%) about the value of group supervision to student learning. Interestingly, less than a quarter of the IPEs had previous experience of group student supervision, although some had experience of groupwork with users of services and in social work management roles. This was an aspect of the module that came as a surprise to several IPEs:

'…just seeing it with students and just watching their confidence grow, especially with the case studies. What I keep coming back to is the way they had the opportunity to talk through things in real time and use each other… that was amazing…. and really, there's only so much you can get in a one to one session – so that just made that process so significant.'

(Interview, IPE)

## Simulated learning through the direct observations

'I feel like [the direct observations] were the only opportunities we had to really make sure we were actually doing the work . And we were having to prove ourselves, that we were understanding what was going on . But I

The third key element of ASM highlighted by students and practice educators as crucial to student learning was the process of direct observation using videos that simulated live practice situations. Nearly all IPEs and three quarters of the surveyed students found these learning opportunities 'very supportive' to learning.  However, students also commented that they could be somewhat nerve racking and 'not quite real'.

The positive ratings given to working within the student bubble, and engagement with the practice educator through supervision and direct observation assessments contrast markedly with assessment of some other aspects of the module. So, less than a quarter of students perceived module lectures, reading and research activities as highly supportive to their learning, with 43% of students finding the lectures as 'not supportive' to learning. Although IPEs generally had a slightly more positive view of these aspects of the module, this finding highlights the relatively high importance attached by students to aspects of the module that incorporated active involvement by IPEs. This perception is strengthened during interviews with many module providers:

'I think for a lot of students the start was really a bit too slow and frustrations and anxieties were building. And I think the minute they got into their bubbles with IPEs, and they started working on the simulated case studies, and to do direct observations and getting feedback from their practice, that all changed.'

**A safe environment for learning**

'They did [their learning] in a safe space where they had the scaffolding around them to develop their potential. When they are on placement…it's more of a baptism of fire at times for students. And I think that this is a good learning opportunity for them - to develop their confidence and practice.'

(Interview, IPE)

The role of the ASM in providing a safe space for practice was mentioned many times in interviews by students and IPEs. An HEI module provider also suggested that this type of module has particular utility for students 'that need a little bit more preparation before they're thrown into the world of practice'. This observation was seen as especially important with a perceived shift towards a younger student cohort with limited or no

experience of social care practice, and with a greater need for support to develop confidence and resilience before entering the workplace.

**A commitment to authenticity**

'I think it's actually been really good to get cases and just grasp what a day in a social worker's life was essentially like - what you can be presented with and the challenges and things like that, that has been really good.'

(Interview, student)

Several student responses to the survey and interview questions made it evident the importance they attached to a learning design that aimed to help 'replicate placement experience' (UoS, UWS and GCU, 2021b). A sense of authenticity was identified in relation to the three simulated case studies and the practices and documentation they were based on, as well as opportunities to hear the perspectives of people who use services and current social work practitioners, as well as those of their IPEs. The other significant aspect of authenticity highlighted was the mirroring of placement processes through the structure of the second half of the module once the IPEs came on board.

'My students have also provided positive feedback re: group supervision and the feedback and support offered via the practice teaching role and how this has helped make the module come alive a little and feel more like practice.'

(Written response, LNW IPE forum)

**Diversity of learning**

'I do think it has given students an opportunity to be exposed to areas of practice with which they may not ever encounter, either as a student on placement or in professional practice,  particularly along the lines of self-directed support and working with intersectionality and anti-racist social work issues.'

(Interview, module provider)

One of the key differences between ASM and most workplace practice learning opportunities lies in its encouragement to students to gain a broad understanding of the diversity of the social work role rather than focus on a single social work specialism. There were divergent views about the value of this, some students and IPEs having a preference for exploring a single case study example in greater depth in ways that are more similar to direct learning practice opportunities. However, four IPEs

and three module providers emphasised the positive benefits of a broader based foundation in social work practice. An IPE also found that these diverse experiences prompted students to review sometimes previously quite fixed assumptions about their future career paths. Two IPEs suggested that the module might have broadened its scope yet further to ensure that students gaining some understanding of criminal justice social work practice.

## 4.2 Barriers to students' learning

Participants identified a number of barriers to student learning, discussed below, as well as the ways in which students, IPEs and module providers sought to address them (see 4.3).

**Students' initial disappointment and uncertainty**

'I don't think we can underplay the impact of that disappointment, of the sense of loss of placement...'

(Interview, module provider)

Most interviews with IPEs and module providers emphasised the impact of students' initial emotions of disappointment, anxiety, uncertainty and, sometimes, anger, with which many students embarked on the ASM. Very understandable causes lay behind these observations, including the impact of the pandemic on students' personal circumstances, finances and employment, frequently in emotionally challenging frontline social care settings, such as care homes. Frustration about suspension of placements and concern about the impact of the pandemic on their journey to qualification and future employment loomed large. Despite HEI tutors' often repeated message that ASM should not be seen as the exact equivalent to a placement in the workplace, students tended to 'make huge and constant comparisons' between them. It was thought by several module providers that some students, especially those without previous social care experience, had quite a 'rose-tinted' view of the demanding nature of most social work practice placements. In addition, GCU module providers shared feedback from a number of their Masters students who believed that they should not have been asked to study alongside undergraduates. This view was also expressed by a minority of surveyed Masters students, one of whom stressed that, 'the [degree] requirements are entirely different, the level of study is entirely different'. These views were not expressed by UWS Masters students; it is unclear why there should have been such discrepant responses from postgraduates at the two HEIs, though it was suggested that UWS's preparatory sessions before the module start may have assisted in encouraging a more positive attitude towards module learning. Alternatively, it may simply be that

different dynamics were at play in these two small postgraduate student groups.

These feelings mostly dissipated for all students as the module progressed, ameliorated by students' bubble support in separate undergraduate and postgraduate learning bubbles and, nearly halfway through, the start of their work with IPEs. Nevertheless, these very prevalent emotions were thought to have impacted on some students' motivation to engage with early module content, and there was evidence of some of this negativity spilling over into later weeks of the module.

**Students' personal and home challenges**

'I think certainly one student functioned at very high anxiety levels throughout … I've got another student who has several children in the house and works nights, so it's hugely challenging . Another student is also a mum of two. So, again, she is juggling family and having space to study.'

(Interview, IPE)

Interacting with, and probably inseparable from, students' educational anxieties were, inevitably, many challenges related to the impact of COVID-19 and the difficulties of working from home. There were practical barriers to learning due to inadequate space for study, for example, 'sitting on beds with no desk' and sharing a broadband connection with other family members. Connectivity issues were identified as the greatest barrier to learning from home in student survey responses (50% of respondents). It was also noted by several module providers that the same kinds of challenges would have made it very difficult for some students to undertake direct practice placements at all at the time the ASM was offered.

**Late IPE start**

'And if only the practice teachers had started the same time as the module, because there was a little bit of a gap…it's like we were just like a ship without a direction. So, as soon as the placement teacher came in, everything just changed.'

(Interview, student)

The later start for IPEs was identified as a very significant barrier to student learning by nearly all module providers, IPEs and students. As noted earlier (3.2), it impacted on IPEs' ability to familiarise themselves with module objectives and content and left insufficient time for IPEs to build a relationship with students before launching into a packed schedule

of case studies, direct observations, student assessment and report-writing.

## Module pace, delivery and workload

'The pace went from being very slow and dry and then you're full on with your first case study: "Here's your first observation and you need to pass it". And I was like, "Oh my gosh".'

(Interview, student)

'Pre-recorded videos for a whole day's lectures are very exhausting for the brain to engage with.  Learning in this manner was difficult and made the day long, and I found that I had a tendency to switch off and would have to come back and revisit the learning which was very time consuming.'

(Survey response, student)

The ASM was perceived by students as very much a learning programme of two halves, the predominance of group learning in large online classes in the first weeks giving way to the highly valued involvement of IPEs and the group supervision process. Whilst some students were quite dismissive about the value of early module content, relating to, for example, ethical case recording and digital social work practices, several module providers stressed the importance of this learning to meet perceived gaps in student skills. It was difficult, however, for the evaluation to separate the value of the learning content to students from their concerns about delivery method.

The use of pre-recorded videos was highlighted by many surveyed and interviewed students as tiring and not conducive to their learning. Half the surveyed students identified limiting the use of pre-recorded videos as their priority improvement for the ASM, many in strong terms. Linked with use of recordings, students also found that the large class sizes inhibited learning, an aspect of learning design also negatively perceived by some contributors (see 3.2: Barriers to fully involving people who use services). Students described limited opportunities to ask questions or to engage with the lecturer, an issue exacerbated when a lot of pre-recorded content was used. Some module providers linked the issues raised by students about the slow pace at the module start to the implementation time pressures discussed earlier, there being a need to 'buy some time' whilst the more complex case study learning resources were developed.

GCU students, unlike their UWS peers, were studying two modules alongside ASM, a workload found to be 'overwhelming' by a high proportion of the HEI's students. The pace of study in the final weeks of

the module, with little space for reflection and embedding of learning was also frequently noted by all students in interviews and survey responses.

**Meeting individual students' learning needs**

> 'The Advanced Skills Module doesn't lend itself to individual support - or it does, but that racks up the hours and the time that IPEs spend on the project, which wasn't set out from the first.'
>
> (Interview, module provider)

Another potential barrier identified by many participants with different roles related to the tension between a learning approach that focuses on group learning and meeting the individual needs of students. Counterbalancing the many identified benefits accruing from student bubbles were a number of questions about how best to support struggling and potentially failing students. HEI tutors were quick to respond to IPEs' concerns and offer additional support when requested. However, half of the interviewed IPEs would have wished to provide more individual student support than the module pedagogy provided for, and, in some cases, elected to provide this support themselves. More individual support would, it was suggested, make for a more reliable assessment process than was possible when solely interacting with the students in a group setting. A related issue, highlighted in 3.2, was the absence of an agreed means of providing feedback to students on learning activities. As one student said,

'…we still didn't know what was right or what was wrong or if we were missing something.'

(Interview, student)

Module providers acknowledged this as a gap, but one that the small number of HEI course tutors had been unable to fulfil themselves because of the high number of students on the module. IPEs consequently experienced some dissatisfaction from students when they were unable to fulfil this learning need, but pointed out that, even if this requirement had been built into their contracts, it would have been difficult to offer meaningful feedback since they had not been involved in developing the learning activities. Here, it seemed, several key implementation challenges collided: insufficient time and HEI resources, lack of initial clarity about the IPE role and the late IPE start that made it more difficult for IPEs to get to know individual students in their bubble and familiarise themselves with module content and expectations.

## 4.3 Overcoming barriers to students' learning

The development and delivery of the ASM was an iterative, dynamic process, with continuing adjustments in response to ongoing feedback and negotiation between module providers, students and IPEs. The evaluation identified a number of key contributions to this developmental process, summarised briefly below.

**Students** played an important role in terms of mutual support and peer motivation within their bubbles and were active in providing feedback to HEIs about what was working well and what was not.

**HEI module providers** met regularly with students, UWS, for example, facilitating twice weekly 'check-ins'. Student feedback at these meetings resulted in some changes to delivery, for example the incorporation of short breaks – 'room to breathe' – between lectures and presentations, and, for GCU students, a reduction in the amount of assessment documentation required. HEI tutors were also responsive to requests for IPE support, stepping in, for example, to offer support with assessment or assist in resolving problematic group dynamics in some student bubbles.

**LNW** fulfilled a vital role in supporting IPEs and identifying aspects of their role that required clarification or additional support to be put in place. IPEs appreciated this support and those already familiar with the network stressed the welcome familiarity of LNW support in an otherwise unfamiliar learning environment.

**HEI module providers and IPEs** collectively took on some emotional support functions for their students, one module tutor describing his goal during the first week of the ASM as one of absorbing 'anxiety, frustration and disappointment about not being on placement'. Another example of how student fears and anxieties were held by both groups learning facilitators came from an interviewed IPE:

'I did very much take a strength-based approach to try to keep their confidence up and try and keep the motivation up. They recognised that and it worked for them…just a really positive attitude when everything was so tough for them.'

**IPEs** also described a range of additional learning opportunities that they offered students, including scheduling support for individual students (see 4.2). Other examples included bringing in colleagues as 'guests' to supervision to talk about their social work practice and setting up role plays and simulated shadowing opportunities during group supervision. Inevitably this work did, however, add to IPEs' workload (see 3.2).

# 5. Outcome findings: Students' learning and preparation for placement

**Key findings**

- Students made most apparent progress in their confidence, sense of professional identity, reflective thinking and writing, recording and report writing, theory/practice integration, understanding social work role and process, assessment and analysis/critical thinking skills during the ASM.

- Students made least apparent progress in developing skills in rapport- and relationship-building with people who use services, managing conflict, using professional authority and managing personal boundaries.

- Students' digital and remote working practice skills were found to have increased markedly during the module.

- IPEs tended to rate students' practice skill acquisition considerably more positively than students, who found it difficult to judge how readily these skills would transfer into direct practice.

- Nearly all IPEs found that the module content and approach had enabled them to gather sufficient evidence of students' ability to meet the SiSWE and the ethical principles on which the standards are based, although, again, students were less confident of their achievements.

- Based on their observations of students' progress and personal and professional growth, most IPEs and module providers thought that the ASM had provided sufficient preparation for students' upcoming 120-day direct placements. However, they also acknowledged a degree of uncertainty about the outcomes of this untested approach to social work education.

## 5.1 Skill development

Surveys and interviews provided evidence about students' development of social work practice skills, their growing confidence in digital and remote

working and their understanding and application of social work values and ethical principles.

**Practice skills**

'It had the disadvantage of not allowing students to work directly with service users but, other than that, I think it was an excellent preparation for practice. The group I worked with developed enormously and said that they really benefitted from the experience and feel ready to go on placement, having grown in confidence and competence.'

(Written response, IPE)

Surveyed IPEs were asked to rate students' developmental progress in a range of practice skills drawn from the SiSWE (see Table 2). They assessed the greatest progress being made in relation to:

- information gathering and analysis for assessment
- presenting assessments
- digital and remote working skills
- planning and writing action plans
- reflecting on practice.

The IPEs were consistently more confident of progress made in skill development than the students, across all skill areas. Overall, the IPEs considered that their students had made good progress in most of the listed social work practice skills. However, skill development was perceived to be more limited in respect of developing relationships with people who use services, managing conflict, using professional authority and managing personal boundaries.

Broadly speaking, surveyed students prioritised their practice skill progress similarly to IPEs, but, even in the areas of greatest self-assessed development, students perceived themselves as having only made 'some progress'. The interviews provided a more nuanced perspective of practice development, and IPE and student assessments of learning were more closely aligned. Combined with module provider perspective, most frequently referred to areas of practice development were:

- professional confidence and identity
- reflective thinking and writing
- recording and report writing skills

- theory/practice integration

- understanding social work role and process

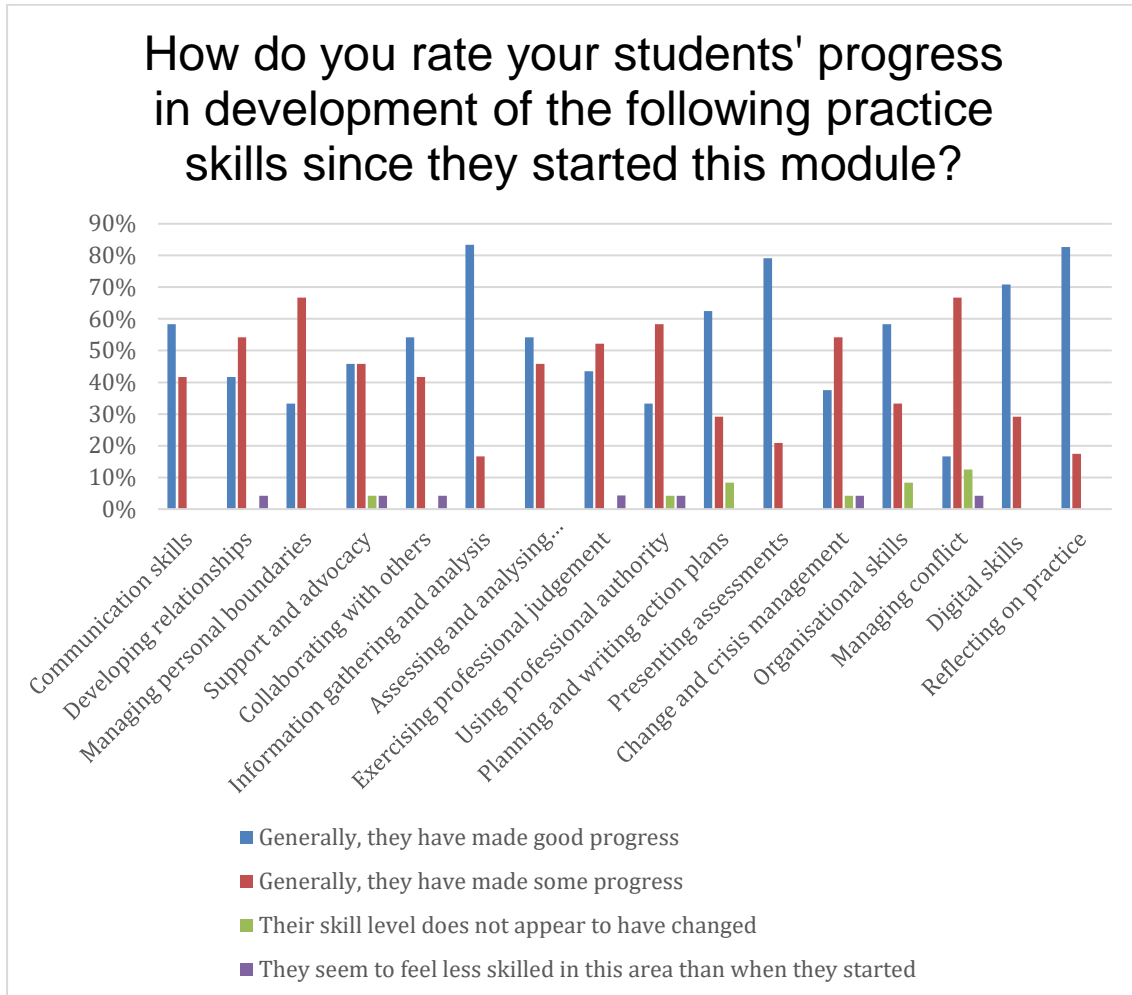- analysis and critical thinking

- assessment skills.



How do you rate your students' progress in development of the following practice skills since they started this module?

Legend:
- ■ Generally, they have made good progress
- ■ Generally, they have made some progress
- ■ Their skill level does not appear to have changed
- ■ They seem to feel less skilled in this area than when they started

**Table 2: Students' practice skill development, rated by IPEs**

Some students also shared some examples of 'light bulb moments' offered by the module:

'…it's just it's almost like you have all these dots in your head before this module and then all of a sudden they get connected…'

 (Interview, student)

The particular value of direct observations and associated assessment feedback to students was also stressed by many students:

'The direct observations have been a good experience as they have supported me to be organised, write assessments and exercise my professional judgement.'

(Survey, student response)

However, both surveyed and interviewed students were mostly quite unconfident about their acquisition of practice skills. Understandably, since they had never experienced a practice placement, they could not be sure whether their learning on the ASM was readily transferable to a direct practice setting:

'It has been really challenging as I can't say for sure yet if I am confident enough to carry out any of the aspects we've learnt so far on this module in a real life setting. I suppose that is the tricky thing with such a placement like this being simulated, we still have zero experience.'

(Survey, student response)


## Digital and remote working skills

'My students have informed [me] that in the beginning they didn't know how to use a video camera, put their hands up, or share documents. They can all do this now. They have taken it in turns to be bubble leader, share agendas, minutes etc. whilst on a conference call.'

(Survey response, UWS IPE)

The first half of the module offered opportunities for students to learn about the impact of COVID-19 on social work practice and to hear from practitioners about working in a pandemic. There was general agreement from all evaluation participants that students' digital skills in use of technology had markedly improved. This view is echoed in some student comments, with evidence of a good deal of peer to peer learning within student bubbles, and some examples of technologically able students using their skills to enable IPEs to improve their digital skills. It was also evident that the IPEs, who had been developing their own remote practice and practice education skills during the pandemic, were actively engaged in coaching and modelling good practice in virtual engagement, as this surveyed IPE illustrated:

"The students have learned they still need to look smart - not wear hoodies / PJs (honestly a thing) whilst engaging in an online conference call.  They have learned to read other's body language, as well as how to portray themselves online as being calm and confident (microphones off whilst they are not speaking and not fidgeting, chewing lips etc)."

**Social work ethics and values**

'And I feel like this module has really highlighted our values and our codes and why we're really doing social work…'

(Interview, student)

Almost all IPEs considered that they had been able to gather sufficient evidence of the students' understanding of the ethical principles on which the SiSWE are based. Again, students were less sure, although over half considered that they had made 'some progress' , with over a quarter feeling that they had made 'good progress'. Students tended to struggle with finding words to discuss their understanding of social work values in interviews, although it was evident that some had experienced the contributions from, for example, SDS contributors and care-experienced young people, as powerful and thought-provoking, enhancing their understanding of partnership working and ethical practice. Again, it will have been difficult for students to gauge their progress in relation to a value base and ethical framework that they had not had any previous opportunity to articulate and engage with in a practice.

## 5.2 ASM learning outcomes

'I am very familiar with the standards and the level a student should be at the end of a first placement . So I'm quite comfortable in that. And I think the materials have generated enough learning opportunities to be able to make an assessment on that. But there are lots of other things that aren't there, and it is that sense of beginning your professional identity, being part of a team, getting a sense of of what it means to work in an organization, policy, procedures…'

(Interview, IPE)

The HEIs' broadly similar learning outcomes required students to demonstrate that they had met the SiSWE by developing practice skills through simulation, the identification and analysis of ethical issues, practice/theory integration and critical reflection. Masters students were required to meet similar learning outcomes, but to demonstrate a more advanced level of critical understanding and analysis (see Appendix 4). Feedback from the universities evidences high levels of module completion and success, with nearly all students who completed the module passing it (see Table 3). We did not collect data from the small number of students who withdrew during the module (our data suggests that seven GCU students did so). However, IPEs provided several

accounts of students who had decided to withdraw due to mental health and other issues that were impacting on their studies.

| | UWS | GCU |
|---|---|---|
| Undergraduates (BA) | 98% | 95% |
| Postgraduates (MSc.) | 86% | 90% |

**Table 3: % of UWS and GCU students that passed the module**

Surveyed IPEs and students were asked whether the module content and approach had enabled them to gather sufficient evidence that students had met the SiSWE. Most IPEs (88%) thought that they would be able to gather the relevant evidence by the end of the module. Three IPEs were 'unsure', but this may have been because most survey responses were received before the final assessment took place. Additional learning opportunities that would have assisted IPEs' assessment of students included 1:1 sessions with students (two responses) and feedback from HEI tutors about students' response to ASM learning activities. These suggestions serve as further reminders of the inherent tension that can lie between group and individual learning needs, this time in relation to assessment processes.

Once again, surveyed students exhibited less confidence in their achievements than IPEs, only 37% of students believing that they had had been offered sufficient learning opportunities to meet the SiSWE. A third of students were unsure and a further third did not identify sufficiency. A particular concern for students related to the gap in feedback on work completed referred to earlier (see 3.2), leaving students unsure whether or not they were on track to meet the standards. The student interviews revealed a more complex picture, with three of the five interviewed students apparently having limited understanding of the relevance of the standards to their practice assessment and, conversely, two with a very confident grasp. This difference in understanding seemed, at least partly, related to a different emphasis placed on the SiSWE by different IPEs, and possibly different HEIs, within the student bubbles. Although few concerns about meeting the SiSWE by more virtual means were raised by IPEs, other than some unsureness about HEI requirements, one IPE did not find a good fit between the ASM and student assessment:

'It was very difficult to assess using the SiSWE standards which are really only useful for real life placements. Carrying out core tasks will be very different in the real world, and so this felt somewhat contrived.'

(Written IPE response)

## 5.3 Preparedness for workplace practice learning

Students who have successfully completed the ASM will, it is expected, go on to undertake a 120-day social work placement. IPEs were asked whether they thought that their students were sufficiently prepared for their placements. Two thirds of surveyed IPEs thought that their students were ready, and one third thought that they were prepared 'in part'. Overall, no real concern was reported in terms of preparedness for practice learning opportunities in live settings. Summing up the most commonly expressed view of IPEs, a survey respondent wrote,

'The students told me almost unanimously that they have gained confidence during this module, and they are now feeling ready for a practice placement whereas at the beginning they did not.'

Once again, and understandably, given their lack of experience of being 'on placement', students were more cautious, about a third believing themselves to be prepared, a third unprepared, and the remainder unsure or partly prepared. Interviewed students, though a very small sample, were rather more positive about their readiness for practice,

'It has definitely this module has definitely made me grow, I feel, as a social worker or a future social worker…'

(Interview, student)

All module providers, on balance, thought that most students were ready to move on to the 120-day placement, commenting positively on their progress during the module:

'I've seen when we have our check-ins now, there's a real change in the way that they're thinking. I said to them, "You're thinking more like social workers now" … Whereas before, when they first started doing some of the case studies where there was a little bit of rabbit in the headlights, really just kind of how to make sense of it all…so I've seen a real shift in their thinking.'

(Interview, module provider)

However, it is also important to note that these optimistic accounts of student's preparedness for practice were often tinged with a note of anxiety about whether students' progress would indeed translate into readiness for practice. A core concern for module providers was that so much rested on students' ability to demonstrate their preparedness for qualified practice over the course of one, rather than two incremental workplace practice learning opportunities.

'If I were going to be brutally honest, if they were going to their first placement with the normal 70 days, followed by 120 days, I would think our students were more prepared than they've ever been to go on placement. When you think about it in terms of them having all their eggs in one basket, that makes them anxious, that makes us anxious.'

(Interview, module provider)

# 6: Findings: Equivalence and sustainability

**Key findings**

- Participants had mixed views about whether the module offers students learning opportunities equivalent to 40 days of practice learning. On balance, the module was thought to provide partial equivalence, although a substantial number of IPEs (40-50%) did find substantial equivalence between the ASM and direct practice learning.

- Over half of surveyed IPEs thought that the ASM's approach had long term potential as an element of social work practice learning, whilst others saw it purely as a contingency measure, and a minority did not find the approach sustainable in any circumstances.

- There was broad agreement that many of the resources and learning objects developed for the ASM were highly transferable locally and nationally, both to improve the quality of placement preparation and to enhance student learning across the curriculum.

- The value of the IPE role in the ASM was emphasised, along with concerns about the future resourcing of IPE involvement should the module's approach be adopted more widely.

- It was acknowledged that assessing equivalence, or determining future sustainability was problematic due to the variable nature and quality of current workplace placements and pandemic-related uncertainties.

## 6.1 Is the module equivalent to 40 days of 'direct' practice learning?

'I think it's a really tricky one, because there are some things that are really, really difficult to replicate so that rapport-building, that relationship-building over a longer period of time, actually doing kind of intervention *with* people rather than just assessing and planning and thinking about how you would intervene. So there are inevitably going to be bits that that are missed out on in contrast to a traditional placement. And then there are benefits that you get from it that you don't get from a

traditional placement as well, like being exposed to different service user groups. And, actually, placements can be really hit and miss in terms of the quality of learning opportunities that are offered to students.'

(Interview, module provider)

IPEs and module providers were asked to what extent the ASM has provided student learning opportunities equivalent to 40 days of direct practice learning. As the quote above indicates, this was not an easy question to answer; as one IPE said, straightforward comparison of the ASM with a practice learning opportunity in the workplace was like 'comparing apples with pears'. These two written IPE responses help to elucidate the extent of divergence in answers to this question:

'… In many ways yes it is … because I think the experience they have and the knowledge they gained over the course of this module in some ways is much, much deeper than some of my other students have had on placement - for example, at [third sector organisation]. There is no way they are getting the experience of presenting at a meeting on SDS or undertaking a children and families assessment…'

'I strongly believe that the ASM should not be viewed as a replacement for a real world placement. However, with a more robust theoretical foundation, there could be much to commend the module. On its own it does not provide a rounded learning experience for students, nor does it equip them fully for practice.'

| Answer choices | IPEs (survey) | IPEs (interview/ written response) | Module providers |
|---|---|---|---|
| Yes | 10 | 7 | 3 |
| No | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| In part | 9 | 4 | 10 |
| I am unsure | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Total respondents | 24 | 14 | 13 |

**Table 4: To what extent are the ASM's learning opportunities equivalent to 40 days of practice learning?**

Module providers had a more unanimous view that there was partial equivalence between the ASM's learning opportunities and those offered by a direct practice placement. The main reasons given by all respondents for not finding complete equivalence were the lack of learning opportunities provided by ASM to:

- build dynamic relationships with individuals and families

- experience and respond to real world consequences of social workers' actions and decision-making

- experience being a team member within a live organisational context.

However, many respondents also acknowledged the complexity of assessing equivalence at a time when student placements, where they have gone ahead, are generally being conducted remotely. Interview discussions raised questions about what the ASM's learning opportunities should be compared to: pandemic practice or pre-pandemic practice? A high quality or low quality placement? A statutory or third sector placement? Many participants also saw the potential for a higher degree of equivalence conditional on improvements to the module, such as early involvement of IPEs (see also 7.2).

## 6.2 Sustainability of the module's approach

'After Covid I don't think that we're going to go back - the role of tech won't decrease after this  So I think having tech-savvy, tech-critical, tech-aware social workers is going to become a key feature of what we do…I think that there's huge challenges in that, and I think this module has been a chance to actually create a module that's within the scope of this …and it's made us think very critically about the preparatory modules needed before students go on placement…'

(Interview, module provider)

Building on this inquiry into equivalence, survey and interviews also asked respondents to what extent they believed the ASM should be considered as a future direct replacement for assessed and supervised practice learning days. Just over half the surveyed IPEs saw the ASM as having value as a long term measure in social work education in Scotland, whilst a quarter saw it as useful solely as a contingency measure during the COVID-19 pandemic, and a further quarter were either unsure or did not think the ASM was a suitable replacement (see Table 5).

| Answer choices | IPEs (survey) |
|---|---|
| Yes, as a long term measure in social work education in Scotland | 13 |
| Yes, but only as a contingency during the pandemic | 6 |
| No | 2 |
| I am unsure | 3 |
| Total respondents | 24 |

**Table 5: IPEs' views on sustainability of the ASM**

Interviewed IPEs who saw a longer term future for the module supported their view with reference to both the module's strengths in facilitating development of practice skills and its potential to address the perennial

shortage of direct practice placements. Those who did not view the approach as sustainable were doubtful that a virtual learning programme could ever replace learning through face to face engagement with individuals and families. The interviews provided a more nuanced opportunity for consideration of sustainability, ongoing uncertainties about the pandemic, and its longer term impact on social work practice. The main points raised in interviews by IPEs, students and module providers are listed below.

- The module content was perceived as a valuable resource, generating many potential opportunities to improve current approaches to preparing students for practice, including forms of remote and virtual practice. Aspects of the module could also be usefully incorporated into degree programmes to inform students' learning about, for example, recording practices, assessment and SDS.

- Much of the module content could, with some further 'packaging', be shared more widely as a resource for student learning in Scotland and further afield.

- Although students were not directly asked a question about sustainability, several undergraduates who were surveyed and interviewed thought that they would have benefited from a similar module earlier in their degree programme. This view was also echoed by some GCU and UWS module providers who reflected on the late stage in their degrees that many undergraduates gain their first practice experience.

- The value of IPE involvement in the module was emphasised, raising questions about how IPEs could play a more significant role in partnership with HEIs in students' practice preparation. However, the future resourcing of IPE involvement was identified as a potential barrier to this approach, as was the potential for offering ASM in its current format without the additional funding provided by current pandemic contingency arrangements.

- The opportunity presented by learning from the ASM to take a step back and take another long, hard look at what several module providers described as the 'unsustainability' of current practice learning arrangements and their attendant placement and practice educator shortages.

# 7. Successes, lessons learned - and some surprises

In this chapter we draw together some of the findings of the evaluation, briefly highlighting what appear to be the main successes, lessons learned and unintended – and sometimes surprising – consequences of planning, developing and delivering the ASM.

## 7.1 Successes

'We now have 180+ students  who will, the majority of them, get through the module successfully ..[those] students are going to be able  to graduate on time, the same month as they intended to…That is absolutely monumental, given the difficulties and challenges that other professions have had with education, that has been a huge success.'

(Interview, module provider)

'We were able to carry on, which was good. And obviously, we don't know what a placement would have been like. We would have been working from home. We don't know what the difference would have been then.'

(Interview, student)

Key successes are listed below.

- Overwhelmingly, from nearly all module providers, and many students and IPEs, that student placements had not had to be delayed or suspended because of the combined effect of the serious shortfall in practice learning opportunities in the west of Scotland and the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, the great majority of these students will, in time, be able to enter the workforce as newly qualified social workers as originally planned.

- The successful recruitment of sufficient IPEs by LNW, and their highly valued support from LNW and the HEIs. For some IPEs, ASM involvement provided a continuing income during a difficult year economically, and an opportunity to develop their practice education skills in the context of online and group learning.

- The grouping of students in bubbles, and, for UWS students, the introduction of rotating student bubble leaders.

- The involvement of IPEs in the module, with their support and facilitation of learning through group supervision which was consistently viewed as a key element of students' skill development.

- The development of authentic simulated case studies, incorporating the opportunity for direct observation and live assessment of students' practice. For most students, these resources appear to have generated meaningful opportunities for students to rehearse and develop practice skills as well as facilitate IPEs' assessment of specific competencies. Their use is well supported by research demonstrating how systematically designed simulation based learning provides an effective approach to develop competence in students without risk to the individuals and families they work with (Asakura and Bogo, 2021).

- The opportunity for students to experience a wider range of practice circumstances that would be available in most direct practice placements, including experience of a range of social work specialisms and opportunities to develop their understanding and value base in respect of anti-racist practice and intersectionality.

- The great majority of students from both HEIs met the module learning outcomes, underpinned by the SiSWE, successfully.

- The ASM has generated a collection of learning resources which, with further opportunities for three HEIs in the west of Scotland to test them out, has potential to be shared more widely to enhance students' preparation for practice and support learning in social work degree programmes more generally.

## 7.2 Lessons learnt

'I would say that I think it's a great module that's been delivered in the worst of circumstances.'

(Interview, module provider)

Most interviewees and survey respondents acknowledged the considerable challenges associated with developing and delivering the module. Key learning derived from the experience is summarised below, although it is important to note that much of this evaluation took place while the module was in full swing and before participants had had the opportunity to reflect and take full stock of the experience.

- The huge amount of work involved in creating and delivering a new module with an innovative approach in such a short time scale. It seems evident now that the module was considerably under-resourced in terms of HEI capacity and costly in relation to use of

staff time, especially that of senior managers. In less fraught circumstances, the development of a complex new module of this nature would benefit from the involvement of a project manager to co-ordinate development and delivery, working closely with course tutors, IPEs, people who use services, employers and learning technology specialists.

- The need for adequate time to research existing, well-evaluated learning objects and simulated learning opportunities that might enhance students' learning experience while reducing the workload for HEIs.

- The need to harmonise the students' learning experience, ensuring that an explicit pedagogic thread runs throughout the module, with a well-signposted direction of travel for all participants from the beginning. Although the module had been mapped against the SiSWE, it was not always evident that this framework and its significance to student assessment was well understood by students, and module providers and IPEs appeared to have inconsistent views about the importance of this.

- The significance of the IPE role for student learning and associated need for IPE engagement with student bubbles from the start of the module, as well as sufficient time for induction and familiarisation with the pedagogy and content of the ASM.

- The benefits of using a single learning platform enabling more seamless movement between large and small group discussions.

- The importance of thinking through the involvement of people who use services and practice educators to ensure that they have full opportunity to be involved in the design of learning opportunities and receive adequate evaluation feedback on their involvement.

- The benefits of interactive and engaging approaches to student learning and the corresponding disadvantages of over-reliance on pre-recorded lectures and other content.

- The need for a strategy for responding to the needs of individual students within a predominantly group model of learning, including provision of feedback on HEI designed learning activities.

- The importance of establishing strategies for supporting the learning of both undergraduate and postgraduate students, making a clear distinction between the aspects of practice learning that are common to both groups, and those requiring a different approach in recognition of the differing learning outcomes to be achieved.

- A particular gap in student learning identified by several IPEs during the first rollout of the ASM was that many students had never seen a social worker in action. Some IPEs found ways to incorporate simulated observational opportunities into their group supervision sessions as a means of mirroring similar learning opportunities available to students in direct practice learning. However, it is important to note that not all practice placements (eg placements in some health or social care settings without a social worker on site) are able to offer this opportunity to students.

## 7.3 Unintended consequences

'I think what the module's done is that it's really brought to the fore the lack of strategic framework, the lack of infrastructure and the limited partnerships that we have within the sector to provide placements.'

(Interview, module provider)

The coinciding of the pandemic with a chronic shortage of placements in the west of Scotland created, in the words of one module provider, 'a perfect storm'. Whilst this storm led to many challenges, there have also been some unexpected, and sometimes surprising, outcomes generated by the ASM, key examples of which are identified below.

- The collaboration between the three HEIs generated important unprecedented outcomes, including increased familiarity with each other's degree programmes, opportunities to identify common issues and to share ideas and resources and the potential for new research partnerships. All module providers commented positively on the goodwill and mutual trust that grew out of their shared involvement in the project, and several anticipated lasting positive outcomes.

- The success of IPE recruitment surprised module providers, revealing what appeared to be an untapped resource of IPEs with an interest in engaging in virtual learning. This group included a substantial number of IPEs in current social work practice, some of whom could not, it was said, be freed up by their employers for practice education, but who were able to combine their employment with their work on an online module.

- Although virtual delivery was less a matter of choice than necessity, it was evident that this mode of delivery also brought a number of benefits. Firstly, its remote nature allowed for a wider reach in IPE recruitment, including an IPE based in England and several from outwith the west of Scotland. Similarly, students who otherwise

might have struggled to remain local to their HEI in pandemic conditions were able to participate from anywhere in the UK, and indeed, the world, several students undertaking the module from the US and other countries. Secondly, online delivery enabled students to develop skills in digital and remote working that will undoubtedly support their learning during their 120 day placements.

- Some positive, and unforeseen outcomes also accrued for module providers, contributors and IPEs. Some module providers, for example, developed digital skills in the design and development of video content to support students' direct observations. IPEs also enhanced their skills in supporting learning at a distance, and, perhaps most importantly, gained expertise in group supervision, and, for the most part, though often initially sceptical, were pleasantly surprised at how effective this approach could be. The module also offered some opportunities to contributors, for example, to drama students at Glasgow College who, as actors in some simulated learning objects, gained financial reward as well as opportunities to develop their acting skills.

# 8. Conclusions

The ASM was developed in response to a crisis situation when HEIs were under a great deal of pressure to find workable solutions to a 'perfect storm' of chronic placement shortages and the continuing damaging effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Short timescales and limited HEI staff resources placed limitations on the module's design and delivery, particularly during its first weeks before the IPEs were able to join the programme. Many of the students joined the programme with a sense of disappointment at not being on a 'real' practice placement, feelings often heightened by pandemic-related economic, professional and home pressures. Module providers and IPEs, who were themselves experiencing many of the same challenges, played a key role in 'holding' this difficult mix of anxiety, uncertainty and feelings of loss to support students to get the most out of the module.

Despite these many constraints, the findings of this evaluation suggest that the ASM has broadly achieved what it set out to do, to give students a substantial grounding in a range of fundamental social work practice skills to support their move to their upcoming 120-day placements. The module appears to have been most effective in supporting the development of skills in assessment, recording, report writing, theory/practice integration, critical thinking, analysis and reflective thinking. By the end of the module most students, though still anxious about the transferability of their learning to the 'real' world, seemed to have grown in confidence, with the beginnings of a sense of professional identity, supported by an enhanced understanding of the social work role. Opportunities to develop skills in building rapport and dynamic relationships with people who use services were, however, more limited, as were skills in responding to crisis and unexpected situations. These gaps are perhaps inevitable in any online learning programme, although it is worth noting that it is not beyond the scope of virtual learning, given sufficient time and resources, to work towards meeting these kinds of outcomes (see, for example, Asakura and Bogo, 2015).

Given the continuing pandemic, it is likely that most of students' forthcoming placements will involve a relatively high level of remote, and possibly, home working. Students' digital competence and ability to negotiate the challenges of remote practice improved markedly during the ASM, providing important preparation for this move. Although there was a tendency for some evaluation respondents to anticipate a certain return to the status quo of predominantly face to face practice, it is already evident that the experience of social work in a pandemic is shifting our thinking about the potential for creative hybrid approaches to social work practice (Ferguson et al., 2021). The digital skills students have learnt during the ASM will almost certainly be as relevant in the future as they

are currently in the pandemic. The thinking behind and learning resources developed by the ASM have potential to make an important contribution to the profession's response to preparing social workers to meet the challenges inherent in these changing work practices.

Contributors to this evaluation have suggested quite a raft of improvements to enhance the quality of the ASM (see 9.1's recommendations). However, it is important that these adaptations do not obscure some of the innovations introduced by the module, outlined in 7.1. Crucial to the module's successes has been the ethos of partnership working that underpinned the collaboration of HEIs, LNW and IPEs to deliver the module. Contributing to Scotland's Review of Social Work Education, Kettle et al. (2016, pp. i-ii) have previously argued for a substantial shift towards 'shared professional learning', moving beyond the kinds of 'old dualities' that partition learning in the workplace from students' experiences in the academy. The incorporation of IPEs in module delivery, though not without its glitches, offers an encouraging example of how HEIs and practice educators can, with sufficient resourcing, work more collaboratively with a common set of goals to share their mutual responsibilities for student learning. The involvement of users of social work services has also been a positive move in this regard, though there is still work to do to ensure that these ASM partnerships are truly collaborative. This caveat is also relevant to less evident partnership working with employers who require a full understanding of the ASM's approach and outcomes if they are to provide confident support to students on placement, and, ultimately, offer them employment as qualified workers.

This evaluation has not been asked to make any assessment of the financial and time costs of planning and delivering the ASM. However, it was very evident that, in addition to the measurable financial investment made by the Scottish Government and SSSC, there were substantial hidden costs that should be considered when planning any future learning programmes of this kind. These included backfill to free up HEI staff from other duties to work on the module, and the greatly increased workload and pressure for many university staff at all levels, with the assumption for some of roles that would normally have been filled, at least in part, by learning technology specialists. It will therefore be important for any future development of this kind to be fully costed, supported by a breakdown of the financial and time resources required, including expertise in learning technology, project management and in the facilitation of interactive online learning. Where the effort is a collaborative one, it will be important to have a collaborative agreement in place between all partners to facilitate the sharing of the learning resources and approaches developed. It is understood that this agreement is in the process of formulation for the ASM.

The involvement of IPEs stood out as an absolutely key element of the module in respect of student learning. The combination of grouping students in small bubbles, and group supervision with an IPE was, without exception, perceived as fundamental to achievement of the ASM's learning outcomes. Group supervision, usually in combination with individual student sessions, has regularly, along with many other alternative models to the traditional dyad of practice educator and student, been proposed as an effective and efficient way of supporting student learning on placement, but has never really taken root (Bruce et al., 2005; Learning Network West, 2017). More broadly, the ASM's experience adds more weight to the pressing need to find creative ways to reform the current approach to practice learning, with its continuing shortages, variability in quality and perennial reliance on the goodwill of practice educators and their employing organisations (Fitzpatrick et al., 2016; Gordon et al., 2019).

One of the aims of the evaluation was to assess the extent of equivalence between the module and 40 days of direct practice learning. This question proved a complex one to answer, not only because practice during the pandemic differs substantially from the pre-COVID-19 era but, because of considerable existing variability in placement quality, it was unclear just what the ASM should be compared to. Moreover, depending on what aspect of the ASM is considered, its learning opportunities simultaneously exceed, in the diversity of practice encountered, and are inferior to, in respect of dynamic, relational practice, those offered by a 40-day direct placement. It is not, therefore, surprising that IPEs and module providers expressed a wide range of views about equivalence. Perhaps the most definitive answer possible is that the ASM enabled its students to meet the majority of the learning outcomes expected of a student after 40 days of their first practice learning experience. Arguably, however, perhaps we are asking the wrong question – no-one we spoke to thought that the module was 'the same as' a practice placement but most thought that, given the particular circumstances of its development and delivery, it was a valuable learning experience in itself and sufficient preparation for the practice placement to come. Whether that is the case will not, however, become fully evident until students complete their 120-day placements – and, realistically, perhaps not until they move into qualified practice as newly qualified social workers.

# 9. Recommendations

Any attempt to look ahead and predict how practice learning, and, indeed, social work education and practice, will look in even six months or a year is fraught with difficulty during pandemic times. The same applies to the recommendations below, which are, first structured around the specifics of the ASM, to be offered by all three participating HEIs within the next year, and, secondly, address the wider implications of the module's delivery.

## 9.1 Short term: delivery of the ASM

Key recommendations are listed below; some will have already been implemented by UoS which is due to offer the module in early autumn, whilst others will be more relevant to GCU and UWS which will be presenting it again in early 2022.

**Module design**

- The ASM's pedagogy, its articulation with the SiSWE and key assessment points require to be made explicit throughout the module so that providers, IPEs and students have a clear and consistent learning path from start to finish.

- IPEs should be recruited and ready to start to engage with students in their bubbles from the module start.

- The module should be regarded as a full-time learning programme, and not be offered alongside other HEI modules.

- Module planning and design would benefit from the involvement of a wider range of partners from the start, including individuals who use services, and their organisations, LNW, former students, employers and IPEs.

- Greater attention is required to the pace of student learning, finding ways to better integrate learning content currently offered in the first half of the current module with students' later work on case studies. An early IPE start will enable more time to be given to the case studies, to enable students to reflect and consolidate their learning and relieve the pressure caused by a 'logjam' of direct observations and midpoint reviews.

**Module preparation**

- IPEs require a full induction to the module, gaining familiarity with its content and approach and HEIs' expectations in relation to role,

timetabling and a realistic estimate of workload before the ASM begins.

- Although some IPEs with two bubbles managed this workload effectively, this was not the case for all IPEs, suggesting that it may be wise to limit the number of bubbles for each IPE to one unless an IPE is able to demonstrate that they have sufficient capacity.

- Responsibilities for individual feedback to students about their learning activities should be established from the start of the module, and mechanisms put in place to ensure that individual support can be provided when students require it.

- Students will be likely to benefit from preparatory sessions to familiarise themselves with the ASM's approach and the differences and similarities of the module from direct practice learning opportunities. These sessions could usefully be supported by input from students who completed the first presentation of the ASM.

- Key employers and placement providers will need to be brought up to speed with the aims, approach and content of the module.

**Module delivery**

- Postgraduate and undergraduate students should continue to be grouped in separate bubbles to take account of the differing expectations at SCQF Levels 9 and 10. Implementation of UWS's successful model of rotating student bubble leadership should also be considered.

- Every attempt should be made to minimise use of pre-recorded videos as standalone learning resources and to maximise opportunities for student interaction and feedback, with regular breaks to reduce screen fatigue and consolidate learning.

- Lecture class sizes should be reviewed with every effort made to deliver material in a context where student interaction is possible and encouraged.

- As far as possible, a single VLE should be used, enabling streamlined movement between small and large group activities.

- All midpoint reviews should involve HEI tutors as well as IPEs and students (this did not always appear to be the case for GCU students for this presentation).

- The potential for enabling students from the recent ASM intake to take on a mentoring role should be explored.

- Additional opportunities for learning based on virtual shadowing opportunities should be investigated, learning from the creativity of ASM IPEs who provided this additional learning opportunity.

- Methods of monitoring module attendance (beyond basic collection of student login data) are reviewed to ensure that all students are sufficiently engaged in practice learning throughout the module.

- Students' feedback should be shared with all module contributors, including people who use services and IPEs.

## 9.2 Looking ahead

The ASM has generated important thinking about the benefits and challenges of online learning delivery as well as raising more fundamental questions about the purpose of, and current approaches to, practice learning. The recommendations below identify a number of ways in which this valuable learning may be used to inform future developments in social work education in Scotland.

### Sharing the learning

The ASM has, from the start, been seen as a national resource for Scotland. It will be important to find effective ways to share the resources developed that go beyond simply creating a shared learning repository. Additional resources will be necessary to 'package' the ASM in a form that makes explicit its underlying pedagogy and the delivery approaches employed by module providers, contributors and IPEs.

### Evaluating the learning

The outcomes of the ASM for this year's students will not become evident until they embark on their 120-day placements. Given the untested nature of the approach, it will be essential for their experiences, and those of employers and practice educators, to be evaluated. The evidence base for the effectiveness of the ASM as a preparation for qualified practice would be further strengthened by continuing this evaluation into the students' newly qualified social work practice. Further evaluation of the ASM approach should incorporate inquiry into the extent to which the module meets the needs of students with disabilities and evaluate the experiences of students from different ethnic groups and those students who struggle or fail to meet the module's learning outcomes.

### Preparation for practice learning

Although there were mixed views about the viability of the ASM as a replacement for practice learning days in the field, there was broad agreement from evaluation participants of the usefulness of the approach as preparation for practice learning. Its quality, especially opportunities

for simulated learning and assessment, was believed to far exceed many current HEI preparation for practice programmes. Its resources could be widely used in social work education in Scotland and further afield, not only immediately before students start their placements, but to introduce practice learning experiences early on in undergraduate social work degrees. However, it is important to note that the ASM's substantial IPE involvement in could only be replicated if supported by substantial additional resources.

## Enhancing students' digital and remote practice skills

Social work practice has necessarily been going through something of a technological revolution during the pandemic. The ASM resources, including practitioners' accounts of contemporary opportunities and challenges, could usefully enhance social work education's response to student's learning needs in respect of remote and digital practice.

## Re-thinking practice learning

It is beyond the scope of this evaluation to make recommendations about wholesale change in practice learning arrangements. However, it would not be possible to end this report without recalling the severe placement shortages, 'the monster coming over the hill', in the words of one module provider, that prompted the decision to develop the ASM. The module's delivery has eased those pressures for a relatively small number of students for now, but it does not solve the considerable strategic and infrastructural difficulties that continue to impact on the sufficiency and quality of student practice learning in Scotland. Nevertheless, out of disruption has come learning that, we suggest, should be regarded as having an important contribution to make to continuing debates about practice learning. In particular, this evaluation has found evidence for:

- The potential for group supervision to play a more significant role in practice education than it presently does.

- The benefits of a more collaborative relationship and sharing of expertise between social work educators in the academy and the workplace.

- The potential that online delivery presents to draw on the skills and experience of a wider pool of practice educators, including those who are currently in practice and/or geographically remote from learning sites.

- More generally, the future potential for creative use of hybrid opportunities for learning that enable students to rehearse safely advanced practice skills alongside their developing capabilities in direct practice.

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# Glossary of terms

**Advanced Skills Module (ASM)**: Undergraduate and Masters student practice skills module, developed by Glasgow Caledonian University, and the Universities of Strathclyde and the West of Scotland in response to the challenges presented by the Covid 19 pandemic to practice learning opportunities in the west of Scotland.

**Bubble/student bubble**: A small group four to five students with an allocated practice educator and course tutor who work and learn together during the module.

**General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)**: European Union directive, enforced in May 2018 that has replaced previous data protection legislation, harmonising data privacy laws across Europe.

**Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU)**: University provider of social work education in the west of Scotland.

**Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)**: Organisations providing higher, post-secondary, tertiary, and/or third-level education.

**Learning Network West (LNW)**: A learning partnership funded by 13 local authorities and five higher education institutes to support the practice learning and development of social and health care professionals across the west of Scotland.

**Independent Practice Educator (IPE)**: A suitably qualified educator, responsible for supporting the learning and undertaking assessment of a bubble of four to five students during the second half of the Advanced Skills Module.

**Postgraduate (PG)**: In this report, students undertaking a Masters qualification in social work.

**Practice Learning Qualification (Social Services)**: Qualification that enables social workers to assess and support the learning of others, and is also required by supervisors and assessors of social work students on practice learning placements.

**Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)**: Scotland's national qualifications framework.

**Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC)**: Governmental organisation based in Scotland that registers, regulates and promotes the learning of the social services workforce in Scotland.

**Self-Directed Support Scotland (SDSS)**: Campaigning organisation that advocates for true implementation of SDS and champions local Independent Support organisations that provide advice and support on SDS in Scotland.

**Social Work Education Partnership (SWEP**): a national strategic partnership group established in 2019 by the Scottish Government and key stakeholders to ensure the continued improvement in the quality of social work education in Scotland.

**Social Work Services Strategic Forum**: A partnership forum of key stakeholders from across the social services sector in Scotland, chaired by the Scottish Government https://www.gov.scot/groups/social-work-services-strategic-forum/.

**Standards in Social Work Education (SiSWE)**: Learning requirements that each programme of qualifying social work education in Scotland must meet.

**Undergraduate (UG)**: In this report, students undertaking a BA qualification in social work.

**University of Strathclyde**: University provider of social work education in the west of Scotland.

**University of the West of Scotland (UWS)**: University provider of social work education in the west of Scotland.

**Virtual learning environment (VLE)**: An online platform used to deliver and support learning.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Advanced Skills Module curriculum week by week

| Week | Curriculum content |
|---|---|
| 1 | Introduction to the Advanced Skills Module |
| 2 | Social work in a global pandemic |
| 3 | Digital social work skills (1) |
| 4 | Digital social work skills (2) |
| 5 | Communication skills |
| 6 | Case Study 1: Children and families (1)<br>Midpoint review |
| 7 | Case Study 1: Children and families (2) |
| 8 | Reflective social work practice |
| 9 | Case Study 2: Self-directed support - older adults and disability (1) |
| 10 | Case Study 2: Self-directed support - older adults and disability (2) |
| 11 | Case Study 3: Working with Black and Minority Ethnic Clients (1) |
| 12 | Case Study 3: Working with Black and Minority Ethnic Clients (2) |
| 13 | Writing up |

From: Glasgow Caledonian University (2021) *Module Handbook: Advanced Social Work Skills, BA Social Work. Academic Session 2020/1*.

# Appendix 2: Survey topics

## Independent Practice Educators' survey

- Current employment, location, experience and qualifications.

- Experience of group supervision, online learning and use of revised SiSWE.

- Motivation for application and experience of recruitment, selection and preparation for the IPE role on the ASM, allocation of student bubbles.

- What has enabled/ been a barrier to supporting students' practice learning on the module?

- What has enabled/ been a barrier to students' development of digital skills and confidence?

- What has supported/ been a barrier to students' development of skills for social work practice during a pandemic?

- How would you rate your students' progress in relation to a range of specific practice skills (derived from the SiSWE)?

- Overall, has the ASM's content and approach enabled you to gather sufficient evidence of students' capabilities to meet the SiSWE, and the ethical principles on which these are based?

- In your view, does the ASM provide students with learning opportunities that are equivalent to 40 days of practice learning? And are they sufficiently prepared for their 120 practice placement that is to follow?

- Should the module be considered as a direct replacement for practice learning – and in what circumstances (as a contingency/in the long term)?

- IPEs' assessment of support, communication, workload and remuneration.

- What has worked well? Less well? During the module. Can you suggest any improvements to the module? What would be your priority improvement?

## Students' survey

- University, social work programme, experience of health and social care.

- What has supported/ been difficult about learning practice skills on the module?

- What aspects of the module have been supportive to development of your digital skills and confidence?

- What aspects of the module have been supportive to development of your skills for working in a pandemic?

- How would you rate progress in relation to a range of specific practice skills (derived from the SiSWE)? And what skills do you think you've made most progress with?

- To what extent has the module's content and approach helped you to improve your understanding of how to put social work values into practice?

- Have the module's learning opportunities been sufficient to enable you to meet the SiSWE?

- Has the module provided sufficient preparation for your 120-day placement?

- What has worked well? Less well? During the module. Can you suggest any improvements to the module? What would be your priority improvement?

# Appendix 3: Interview questions

Interviews were semi-structured, with a similar framework of questions guiding each interview.

## Independent Practice Educators' interview questions

- Your involvement as IPE with the module: what worked well? Is there anything that worked less well?
- What enabled student learning on the module: were there any barriers to learning that require(d) to be addressed?
- To what extent has the module enabled your students to meet the SiSWE / HEI learning outcomes?
- Your views about potential improvements to, and sustainability of, the module.

## Students' interview questions

- Your experience of progressing through the module: what worked well? Is there anything that worked less well?
- What did you learn from studying the module? What has changed for you since the beginning? Were there any barriers to your learning, and (how) were these resolved?
- To what extent the module has enabled you to meet the SiSWE  and your university's assessment requirements and learning outcomes? How well prepared do you feel for your 120-day placement?
- Your views about how the module could be further improved or developed.

## Module contributors' interview questions

- How were you involved in planning and developing learning materials for students on the module?
- What worked well from your perspective?
- Is there anything that worked less well? Why was this?
- What advice would you give the module providers about improving this aspect of module delivery further?
- Would you want to be involved in a similar kind of project again? Why (not)?
- Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience of being involved in module development?

## Module providers' interview questions

- What is/was your role in initiating, quality assuring, developing and/or delivering the module?
- What worked well? Is there anything that worked less well? Why was this?
- What has enabled student learning on the module? Have there been any barriers to learning that require(d) to be addressed?
- To what extent the module has enabled students to meet the SiSWE / university learning outcomes? Any aspects less well met?
- Your views about potential improvements to, and sustainability of, the module.
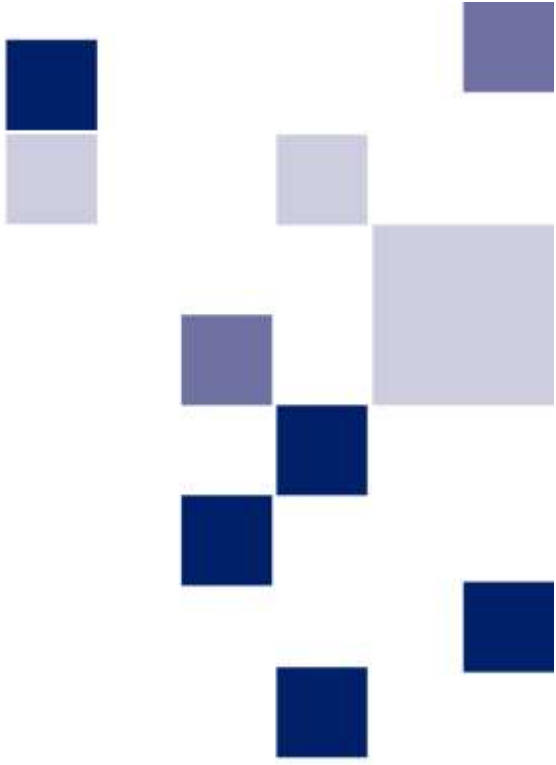
# Appendix 4: ASM Learning outcomes: GCU and UWS

**BA Social Work learning outcomes**

1. Produce a portfolio of evidence to demonstrate that they have met the relevant Standards in Social Work Education at SCQF Level 9.

2. Undertake simulated social work tasks of assessment, intervention and professional development via digital / virtual means.

3. Identify and analyse ethical issues in respect of a range of case scenarios

4. Apply a wide range of relevant theory, legislation, social policy, and research to inform social work assessments and decision-making in a simulated workplace environment.

5. In a supervisory relationship with a practice educator be able to critically reflect upon the social work process using both written and verbal communication


**MSc Social Work learning outcomes**

1. Produce a portfolio of evidence to demonstrate that they have met the relevant Standards in Social Work Education at SCQF Level 10.

2. Undertake simulated social work tasks of assessment, intervention and professional development via digital / virtual means.

3. Identify and provide a critical analysis of ethical issues, taking account of anti-oppressive / and antiracist practice in respect of a range of case scenarios.

4. Apply a critical understanding to a wide range of relevant theory, legislation, policies, and research to inform social work assessments and decision-making in a simulated workplace environment.

5.  In a supervisory relationship with a practice educator be able to critically reflect upon the social work process using both written and verbal communication.

UWS students were also specifically asked to take account of anti-oppressive/antiracist practice in respect of a range of case scenarios (see 3. For both qualifications).