

# The Academic Curriculum - A Quick Guide

## Who is this guide for?

This guide is for Practice Educators (PEs) and On-Site Supervisors (OSSs) supporting students on placement from Cardiff University's social work programme. It outlines what students will have studied before each placement — so you know what to expect, what to build on, and how to support their learning.

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## ◆ Key Principles

Our curriculum is:

- **Values-based:** rooted in person-centred, proportional, co-produced, purposeful, and professional practice.
  - **Practice-oriented:** designed to help students *do* social work, not just know about it.
  - **Structured for depth:** we emphasise foundational knowledge and adaptable core skills, not branded models or superficial coverage.
  - **Grounded in the Welsh context:** with specific focus on Welsh legislation, policy, and practice values.
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## ◆ What students will have studied

### By the start of Stage 1 placement (Year 1)

Students will have covered:

#### 🧠 Core theories and practice-skills

- Structural and systems theory
- Strengths-based practice
- Human rights
- Anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice, in relation to:
  - Gender, sexuality, disability, poverty, crime, race, ethnicity and religion
- Task-centred practice and crisis intervention
- Rogerian counselling skills
- Motivational Interviewing
- Working with children and adults with additional communication needs

#### 📖 Statutory and legal context

- The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014
- Mental Capacity Act 2005
- Mental health law
- Human rights and equality law

- Assessment and care planning
- Safeguarding (children and adults)
- Unpaid carers
- Data protection

## **Understanding people**

- Child development and attachment
- Adolescence, ageing, and bereavement
- The impact of stigma, poverty, and inequality

## **Research literacy**

- Research design and ethics
- Understanding qualitative and quantitative evidence

### **Stage 1 in practice:**

Stage 1 students are just beginning. They need close support, clear modelling, and time to build their confidence.

### **Stage 2 in practice:**

Stage 2 students are starting to take initiative, but still need structure, support, and regular feedback.

## **By the start of Stage 3 placement (Year 2)**

Students will have covered more advanced topics, including:

### **Practice knowledge and skills**

- Using good authority
- Talking about concerns and consequences clearly and respectfully
- Planning and reviewing interventions

### **Organisational knowledge**

- Bureaucracy and organisational culture
- Interdisciplinary working
- Hospital social work
- Co-production and family group meetings

### **Critical perspectives**

- How organisations reflect and reinforce inequality
- Taking a human-rights approach to practice

## **In practice:**

Stage 3 students should demonstrate increasing independence, professional curiosity, and ethical awareness. They should be capable of contributing meaningfully to the work of the team, multi-agency meetings, and service planning, while receiving regular supervision and guidance.

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## **What students won't have studied**

- Specific and branded models of practice (e.g. Signs of Safety, trauma-informed practice).
- Specialist tools or procedures unique to your team or service.
- Every detail of the law and policy, particularly as it applies to more specialist areas of practice.

**So...**

Your expertise is essential — placement is where students apply and expand what they've learned in university.

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## **Linking back to values, theory and law**

Encourage students to think ahead as well as reflect afterwards. For example, by asking:

- “How will your understanding of theory and evidence mean your practice looks different here?”
- “When planning this visit or conversation, how can you show person-centred practice, proportionality, or purposefulness in action?”
- “Where is co-production visible in your approach?”
- “How will you make sure your work aligns with the Code of Professional Practice and the BASW Code of Ethics?”

Students should be able to explain how their practice is congruent with what they have learned on the course. That includes:

- **Theory** — e.g. “How does your practice reflect an anti-discriminatory perspective?” or “How could you adapt your work with this person based on your understanding of human development?”
- **Law** — e.g. “Where do our legal duties come from here?” or “What does the SSWB Act expect in this kind of situation?”
- **Values** — e.g. “How is this approach person-centred?”, “What does proportionality look like in this context?”, “Where's the co-production here?”
- These prompts help students connect action to the programme's core values:

These prompts can help students connect action to the programme's core values:

- **Person-centred** – seeing the person, not just the issue or system
- **Proportional** – using authority with care and balance; thinking carefully about the nature and limits of the assessment or intervention.
- **Purposeful** – planning and intervening with clear intent; working towards person-centred goals and outcomes.
- **Co-produced** – working *with* people, not doing *to* them.
- **Professional** – practising in line with the Code of Professional Practice and the BASW Code of Ethics

Encouraging this type of reflection will support our students to demonstrate more critical thinking and to develop as ethical, rights-based practitioners.

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## ◆ Key tips for helping students link our curriculum with practice

### ✓ Help them reflect:

- On what person-centred practice looks like in their placement context and setting — and how systems, policies and procedures can help and hinder it.
- On how their practice relates to what they've learned about ethics, diversity, power, and human rights.

### ✓ Encourage use of evidence:

- Ask them *how* they know what they know, with reference to theory, research, law, policy and their own experiences of social care.
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## Need help?

- Speak to the student's university tutor
- Find more resources at: <https://cascadewales.org/masw>
- Contact your LA Training and Development Team
- Attend our free PE/OSS workshops and briefing sessions