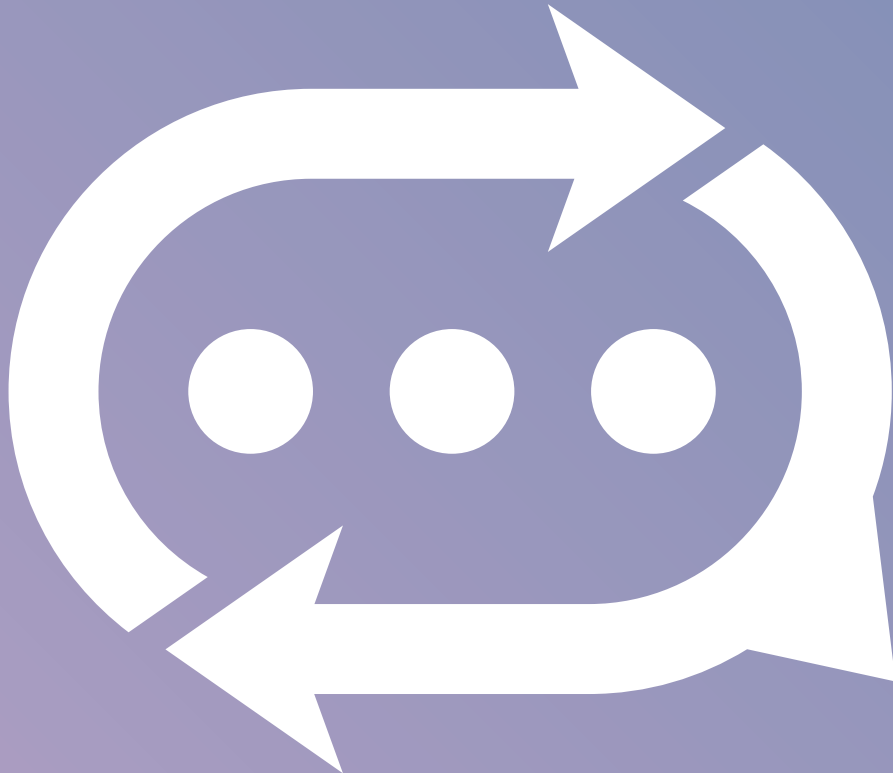


Report on the Student Placement Feedback Questionnaire

January 2021 – May 2021

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December 2021



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Foreward

I am delighted to welcome these two student and practice teacher reports as they underline our commitment in Tusla to the ongoing training and education of social workers and social care workers. In order for Tusla to achieve its vision of empowering families to keep children safe we need workers who want to help others and undergo the training necessary to work with respect and kindness. We want to support the universities in their training by providing high quality placements for students and committed practice educators who can guide this experiential learning.

These reports show that students value their placements in Tusla and highlight a number of important elements including the supervision they receive, the challenging experiences we provided, the team support and the discipline of recording. Practice teachers in their report showed overwhelmingly that they would offer future placements, they valued the preparation and the ICT equipment provided. The report highlights the positives for the practice teachers saying 'the student energises the team' and it provided an 'opportunity to slow down my thinking and interrogate why we intervene the way we do'. This is part of what helps Tusla in becoming a learning organisation.

We are learning from this feedback and will continue to build on these initiatives over the next years as we work to grow the numbers of social workers and social care workers to respond to the needs of children and families in Ireland.



Bernard Gloster
Chief Executive

Introduction to the Practice Development and Improvement Project (PDIP)

The Practice Development and Improvement Project (PDIP), located in the Office of the Chief Social Worker in Tusla - the Child and Family Agency, has been established as part of the response to the recommendations in the HIQA inspection report of June 2018¹ and the subsequent DCYA Expert Assurance Group recommendations produced in their September 2019 report².

The overall aim of the five year planning Framework developed for the PDIP is to train, recruit and retain a skilled, competent and quality social work and social care staff equipped to practice effectively in delivering services to and improving outcomes for children and families.

The PDIP aims to:

- Provide co-ordinated, consistent and quality student practice placements
- Develop practice teacher/educator competence
- Provide comprehensive supports to early career social workers
- Develop a post qualifying framework

In order to deliver on the associated logic model and project plan an Implementation Team has been established including senior internal (Operations, HR, WLD) and external (DCEDIY, 3rd level) staff. (See Appendix One for members of the Implementation Team).

¹ HIQA Report 2018

² EAG Report 2019

Student placements in Tusla

Tusla has a long tradition of and commitment to providing quality and consistent practice placements to student social workers and social care workers. Practice placement learning enables students to acquire the standards of proficiency for their profession and become safe, competent practitioners willing to accept personal and professional accountability for their work (CORU)³.

Practice placement involves a partnership between Tusla, the student and the university. Good practices that exist are concerned with enhancing the learning outcomes for students and with the efficient management and delivery of practices to promote quality outcomes for all partners throughout the practice education process.

Tusla's Student Placement Co-ordination System

In an effort to standardise the student experience that we offer and to ensure that students have a rewarding, challenging and quality learning experience which adequately prepares them to practice as social workers and social care workers, we have developed a co-ordinated and coherent student placement co-ordination system, in collaboration with the Higher Education Institutes (HEIs). The system has been operational in the Agency since January 2020. 520 placements are required for students in the six colleges, UCC, UCD, TCD, Maynooth, NUIG, IT Sligo, providing social work education and training. Students can only do one statutory placement of the two completed so Tusla is providing almost half, 260, of the required student placements annually. In 2021 the student placement co-ordinated system was extended to all social care education providers who are operating under the Tusla model.

The standards developed as part of the co-ordination system reflect Tusla's commitment to the provision of student placements and are designed to promote quality and consistency in practice placement provision, yet are flexible enough to allow for continued innovation, improvement and development in practice placements within the Agency. Key features of the co-ordination system include:

- 20 student placement co-ordinators are in place, one in each of the 17 Areas, 2 covering adoption services and 1 covering residential placements nationally. Additional co-ordinators are in place for social care placements in some Areas. These social work/social care practitioners (Senior Social Work Practitioners, Team Leaders, PSWs, Professional Support Managers, Social Care Leaders) are co-ordinating practice teachers and student placements in liaison with their equivalents in the colleges.
- A 'Student Placement Guidance' aligned to CORU proficiency domains and practice teacher educator competencies is guiding the facilitation of placements. The guidance forms part of Tusla's long term strategic objective of recruiting and retaining a high quality, competent workforce. The document provides a structured and supportive approach for line managers which raises the standard and quality of placements, facilitates the professional development of practice staff and promotes the Agency as an employer of choice.

The Guidance includes:

- Tusla standards
- CORU standards
- Eligibility criteria for Practice Teachers/Educators
- Practice Teachers/Practice educators' competencies based on experience, knowledge and skills
- Pre-placement requirements for both students and Tusla around practical issues relating to Garda vetting, pre-placement online training (Children First, GDPR)
- Email/NCCIS set up, Travel & Subsistence, access to desks, laptops, phones etc.
- Placement activity including induction and distinction between 1st and 2nd placement activity
- Practical student pack centred around location, team, professional conduct, performance requirements etc.
- Tusla ICT is providing all social work and social care students with IT equipment (laptop and phone) to enable them to complete their placements effectively and to enable remote working.
- All students are being set up on MS Teams to facilitate remote working.
- All colleges are receiving an online Signs of Safety briefing from practice leads prior to commencement of placement.
- All students receive NCCIS training (locally or nationally)

³CORU

It is worth noting that although Tusla and other placement providing organisations have been supporting students for decades, support for students is currently taking place in the context of a dearth of social work graduates and an expansion of social work positions across all social services providers. Tusla at this time is also seeking to recruit significant numbers of social workers to work in child protection services and increase its ability to provide a quality service to children and families. This means that we need to ensure that we train students to the highest levels and that we retain them in the Agency building their resilience and capacity, including in their early experiences.

The Student Placement Feedback Questionnaire

To measure impact and inform and ensure continuous practice improvement both student and practice teacher feedback questionnaires are being disseminated post placements. The Student Placement Feedback Questionnaire is designed to collect data and information in relation to the overall experience of students on placement in Tusla. This is the first formal standardised feedback questionnaire to be sent to a cohort of students on placement in Tusla and commenced with the student cohort who completed placements between January and May 2021.

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gain insight into the experience of students on placement in Tusla and what their experience has been in relation to preparation for their placement, induction, placement activities, learning opportunities, their overall experience and recommendations for future placements. The data will be used to help inform Tusla on how to continue to provide good quality placement experiences for students.

The questionnaire includes a series of demographic questions, quantitative questions and qualitative open ended questions, to facilitate additional comments to either elaborate on selections made throughout the survey or provide more details. (See Appendix Two for the full questionnaire).

Method

The Student Placement Feedback Questionnaire was disseminated to students on 29th of March 2021. Only students from the January 2021 cohort of placements were included. It was sent to a total of 161 students. The large number of students on placement during the Spring of 2021 includes many students whose placements were disrupted in 2020 at the onset of the pandemic and who needed to complete their remaining placement weeks. Some of these students had already completed their placement by the time the questionnaire was sent out.

The questionnaire remained open for a period of four weeks and closed on 30th April 2021.

Findings from the Questionnaire

A total of 139 responses were collected by the Tusla LimeSurvey system, representing an 86% response rate.

Only 88 of these had complete responses to the questionnaire. 51 of these were partial responses where respondents had started the questionnaire to some degree but did not complete and submit the whole questionnaire.

There were also 9 duplicates of respondents who had started the questionnaire at one point and then restarted it and completed it in full at a later date. There was also one duplicate of a respondent who started the questionnaire two separate times to varying degrees but did not complete the full questionnaire either time.

Therefore, in addition to the 88 fully completed responses, there was also a total of 11 partial responses with data that will be reported on. These 11 respondents completed the questionnaire to some degree but did not complete the full questionnaire and answer every single question. These respondents stopped completing the questionnaire at different times. Taking account of complete, incomplete or partial responses to the survey, 61% of students who received the questionnaire completed the survey.

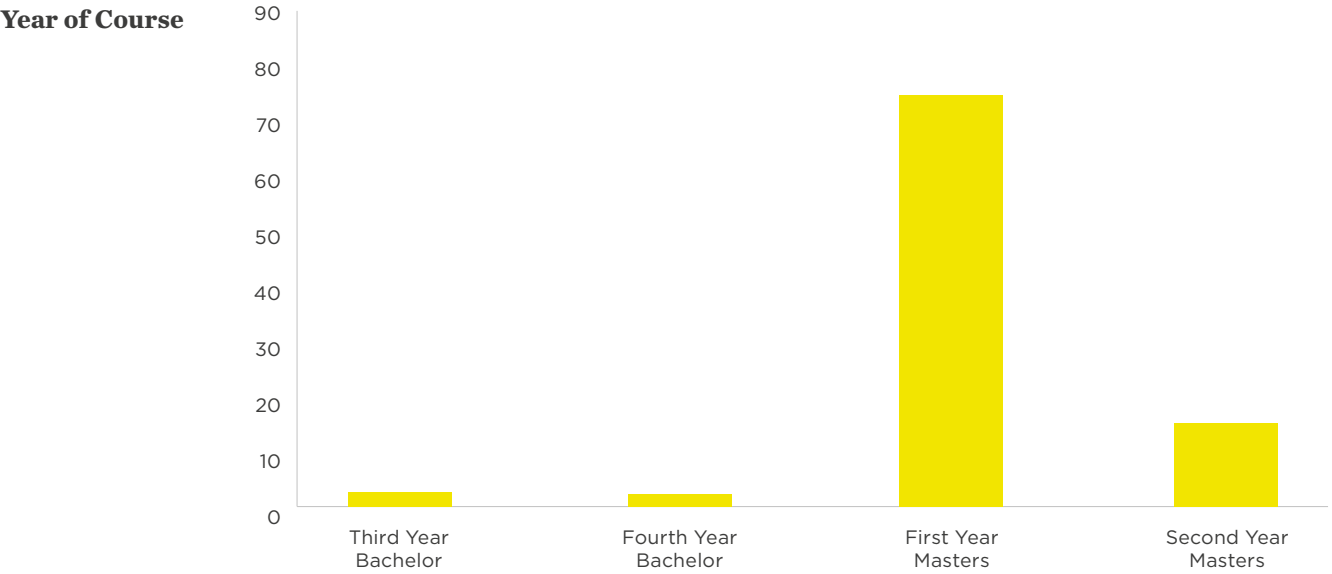
It is important to note that during 2020 and 2021 student placements, Ireland was under a level 5 lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Tusla, as the dedicated state agency for child protection and welfare, is considered an essential service and work continued, however, it did so in a limited capacity with priority given to three areas: frontline child protection services, supporting children in care and supporting domestic, sexual and gender based violence response services. This is a crucial context to consider when analysing this data and creating and reading this report because it did impact the placement experience for many of the respondents as evident in the qualitative data.

A complementary feedback questionnaire for Practice Teachers regarding their placement experience hosting students was also developed and disseminated. A separate report has been created for this questionnaire data.

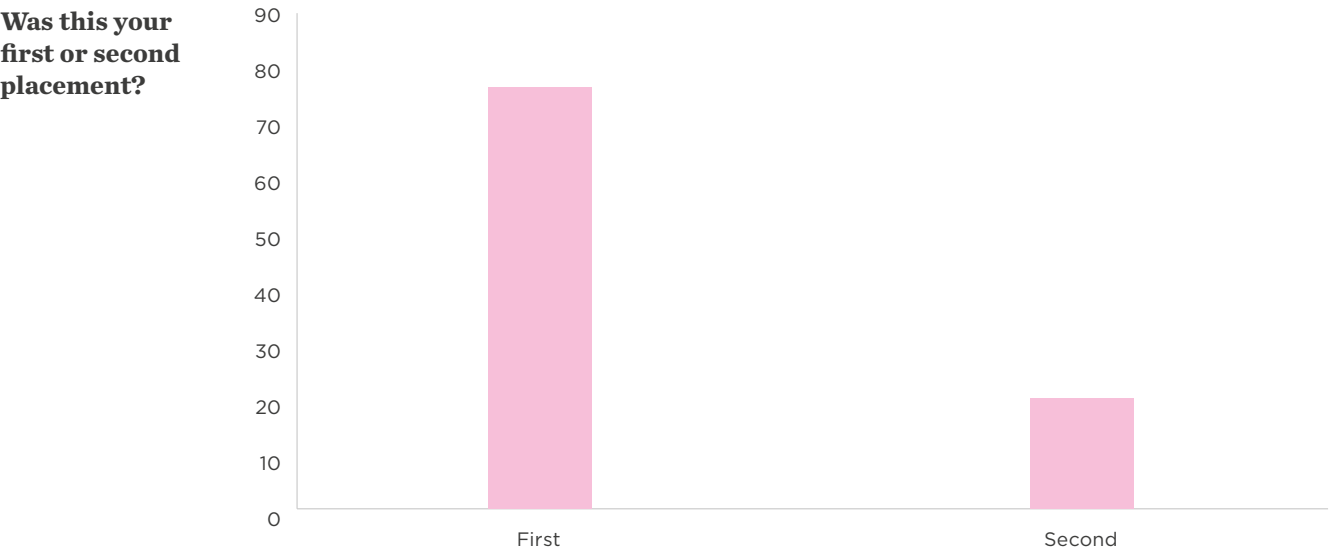
Respondent roles and location

Respondents were asked demographic questions including their name, course, year of course, whether this was their first or second placement, and the Area where their placement was undertaken.

99 students responded to these questions. This included 3 students in their third year of Bachelor of Social Work, 2 in their fourth year of Bachelor of Social Work, 76 in their first year of Masters, and 18 in their second year of Masters.



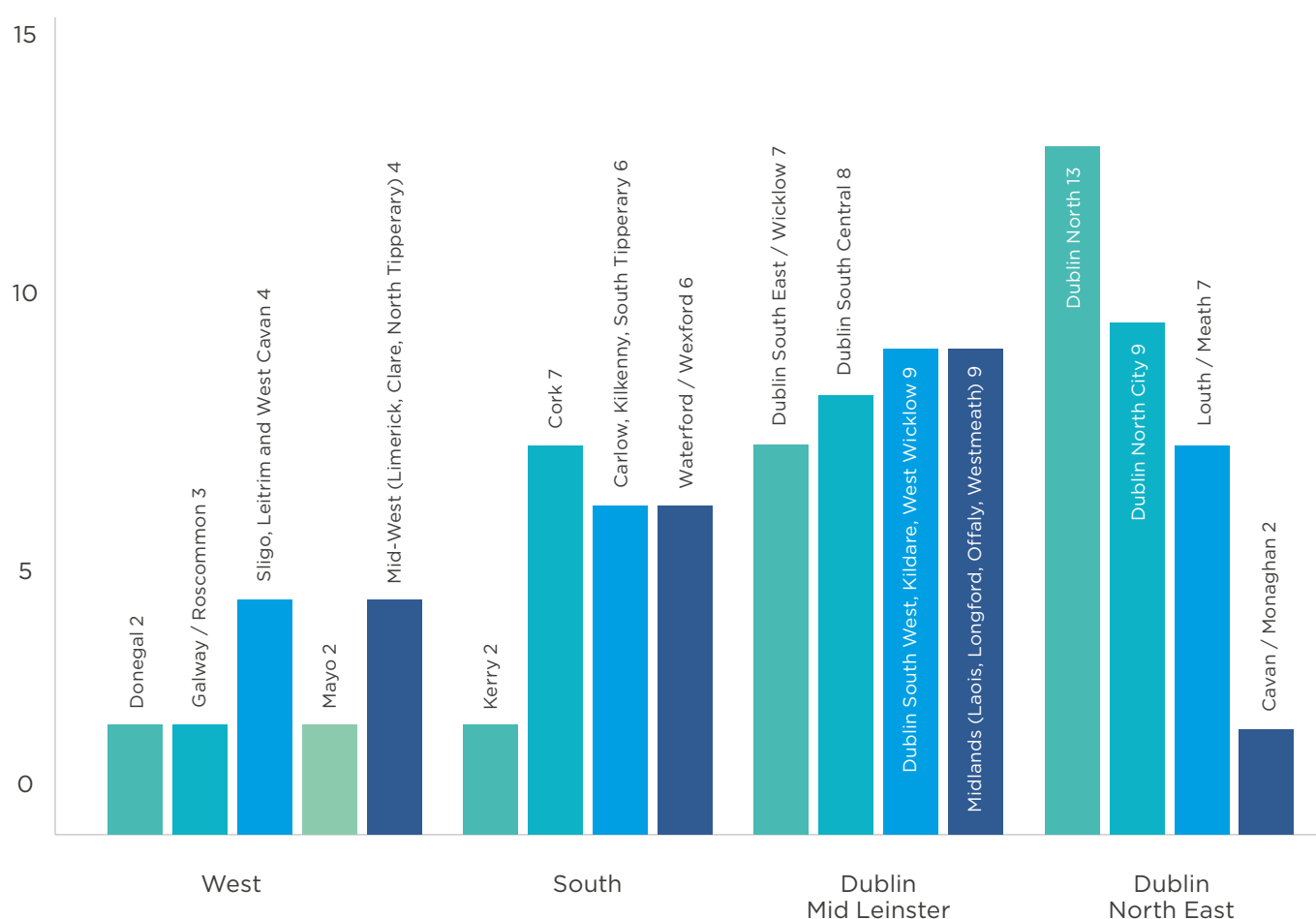
Students on placement in Tusla in January 2020 were 1st Year Masters from NUIG, 1st Year Masters and 3rd and 4th Year Batchelor from UCC and 1st and 2nd Year Masters from UCD, TCD, Maynooth and IT Sligo.



Area where placement undertaken?

All regions and areas were represented. The largest response rate came from Dublin North East and Dublin Mid Leinster, with smaller but sizeable responses from the South and West.

We did not ask practice teachers in which Team they provided their placement as in some cases this was too easily identifiable, however the majority of placements were in Screening, Duty and Intake, Child Protection and Welfare, Children in Care and Fostering teams. A small number of students were provided with the opportunity to complete their placements in more specialist or national teams in the Agency, for example, the Adoption Service.



Placement Experience

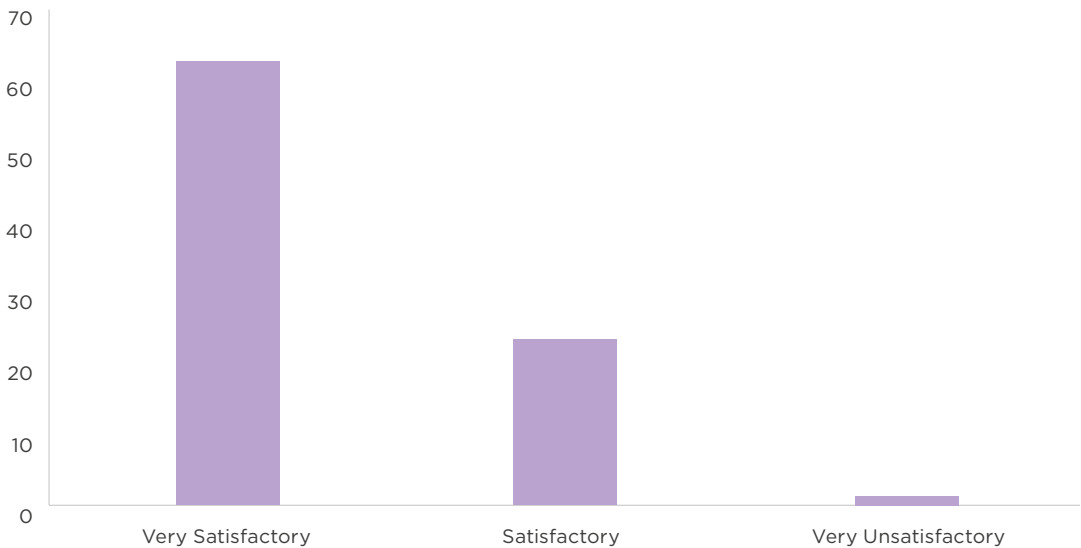
Respondents to the Student Placement Feedback Questionnaire were asked questions in the following areas: pre-placement; induction; placement activities and learning opportunities. They were asked whether or not they received certain information or experiences or engaged in certain activities throughout their placement experience and to provide comments regarding their answers.

Of the 93 respondents, 66 (71%) of the students marked 'Very Satisfactory' and 25 (27%) marked 'Satisfactory'. 2 (2%) respondents marked 'Very Unsatisfactory' however this answer did not correspond with their comments when asked to expand on their answer, which described a positive placement experience.

Overall Placement Experience

The first question respondents were asked was 'How would you rate your overall placement experience?' on a scale from 'Very Satisfactory' to 'Very Unsatisfactory'. Respondents were also asked and given space to provide reasons for their answer or provide additional comments.

How would you rate your overall placement experience?



When asked to elaborate on the why they chose the option they did about overall placement experience, a majority of students left comments relating to having a supportive practice teacher and team.

Several respondents also provided comments detailing the different learning experiences and range of opportunities provided to them throughout their placement.

I thought the placement was brilliant and a great learning experience. My practice teacher was absolutely brilliant, always available when help was needed and a great guide. I thoroughly enjoyed the office I worked in and the actual long term work I was doing on the pre allocation team. I have learned so much in the last few weeks and my confidence has grown immensely.

I found my practice teacher was brilliant, he was extremely patient, allowed me to shadow him and ask questions about everything, explore and discuss topics and issues at length. All the staff on my team were friendly helpful and encouraging. I got hands on practical experience as well as plenty of theory information and knowledge. I was able to avail of some training, many agency visits were organised and I was able to swap with other students for a few days to see how other teams sections worked. It was a very holistic placement and makes me feel very confident for future practice.

My placement experience was beyond very satisfactory. I was continuously presented with significant valuable learning opportunities and was supported by my PT and team members throughout.

I have really enjoyed my placement in Tusla...X.. The team have been incredible in making me feel welcome and at ease. The team have been a great support system and have been sure to answer any questions I had to the best of their ability. My practise teacher/ team leader made sure I got experience in both children in care and the screening teams. I feel I learnt so much and was given the opportunity to practice as a qualified social worker. I am looking forward to qualifying and hopefully working for Tusla in due course.

"I thoroughly enjoyed my practice placement and found that it was rich learning experience for me. My practice teacher was such a great mentor to me and supported me throughout my placement. She offered me a variety of different learning opportunities to help me achieve my learning goals and to support my overall professional development as a social work student. She offered me constructive feedback on any workplace duties that I carried out which helped me to improve my practice. I also had a good balance between placement duties and carrying out research. I feel that this made a huge difference to my learning as I was able to apply relevant research to my placement experiences. I would recommend Tusla to any social work student going on practice placement."

I thought I would not get a lot of learning due to the current situation. However, TUSLA really provided me with a lot of learning through programmes, observation from other social workers and the best practice teacher by my side always reassuring me that I am occupied with my cases. My practice teacher would allow me to talk through my cases referring to the theories and methods I have used.



Despite the current circumstances regarding COVID-19, I feel like I learned so much and to the best of my ability. I think that this is mainly due to the guidance and flexibility of my placement Practice Teacher. This allowed me to implement theories in which I have learned so far in my Masters programme, have a chance to manage multiple and differentiating cases, along with taking in what working on a Child in Care Team for TUSLA entails.



I have really enjoyed my first placement experience. Despite the restrictions of covid-19, every effort has been made by the Tusla team and my practice teacher to include me in as much as possible and give me opportunities to learn. I can see a huge improvement in my skills and confidence as a social worker from my first week on placement to the end. I have really enjoyed the opportunities to go out into the community and meet the people that we work with.



“Initially I expected to receive a somewhat restricted experience due to Covid 19, however that was not the case. I felt this placement provided me with essential learning to support me through the transition from student to professional.”



Through-out my placement, I gained knowledge and experience transferable to other settings, I gained and had exposure to the diversity within the setting along with valuable guidance offered of supervisor. Given the current level 5 restrictions in place, I found I had a good insight and was able to secure a lot of learning through direct client work.



Although the majority of comments left in this section highlighted the positive experiences respondents had during their placements and what they liked or found valuable, some respondents did leave comments here about challenges they had and/or aspects of the placement experience they did not enjoy or that impacted their overall experience.

I enjoyed the placement and gained a good understanding of the operations of TUSLA, and the role of the social worker within Tusla. However, at times I felt unsupported in this role and found the busy caseload meant that other opportunities for learning were missed, such as trainings, opportunities to work with other departments within Tusla etc.

I really enjoyed my placement and felt like I learned a lot. I would have liked to have been in the office everyday but Covid restrictions would not allow. This is the only reason why I have not rated my experience as very satisfactory.

I have really enjoyed my placement, but at times I found it difficult working from home.

Feel like the word satisfactory isn't a suitable response to this question. A scaling question may be more suitable. I found my learning from the placement to be satisfactory however I found the placement extremely difficult, challenging and stressful.

Pre-placement Preparation

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they had been provided with the following activities as part of their student's pre-placement experience. Respondents could choose between 'Yes', 'Partially', and 'No' for an answer and were asked and given space to provide any additional comments regarding any of their answers and their overall pre-placement experience.

PRE-PLACEMENT	YES	PARTIALLY	NO
Covid-19 information and advice for staff	84 (90%)	9 (10%)	
Return to work / Remote working process	81 (87%)	7 (8%)	5 (5%)
Children First / GDPR training	86 (92%)	4 (4%)	3 (3%)
Phone and laptop set up	82 (88%)	6 (6%)	5 (5%)
Communication with college and Tusla	87 (94%)	5 (5%)	1 (1%)

When asked to expand on any of their answers or provide additional comments regarding pre-placement preparation, there were mixed responses relating to how prepared students felt going into their placements, especially regarding phone and laptop set up.

Several students provided commentary stating that they felt very well prepared for their placement. Their phone and laptop were ready either on the day or within the first two weeks. They were given instructions prior to their first day and on the first day, of trainings to be completed. A handful of students said they met with their practice teacher prior to their first day.

Prior to starting my placement I got the chance to go up to my placement to meet my practice teacher. They gave me an overview of their role and what I would be doing and answered any questions I had. I was inducted over my first two weeks on my placement. I read policies and procedures, carried out online training and carried out agency phone calls to get an overview of the services in... (X Town). The team had a laptop and a mobile phone ready for me on my first day. I carried out training round Covid 19.

I received the majority of this information before beginning my placement, apart from setting up the laptop and phone which was done on the first day.

My pre placement experience was fantastic. I was provided with a vast amount of information and given appropriate time to review it. Laptop and phone set up was very efficient and ensured there was no delays to the start of my placement.

Yes all mandatory training and information was provided in the first week of placement. I had a laptop and phone following the first induction day which was really helpful in getting started straight away. There was also regular contact with the college and Tusla.



“My Practice Teacher within Tusla was brilliant and provided me with all the information I needed at the beginning of placement and during placement. I received my phone and laptop on the first day of my placement and the relevant training that needed to be completed.”

Although several students provided positive feedback about their pre-placement experience, there was also several students who did not feel as prepared as they would have liked. These comments were largely surrounding phone and laptop set up. Several comments were left saying phone and laptop set up happened after the first two weeks and one student stated that they were 6 weeks into their placement and had still not received their phone and laptop and were not expecting to get it. There were also comments left regarding Covid-19 / remote working information. Some respondents said they did not receive a lot of information about this before or in the beginning of their placement.



For the questions where I put partially or no, I did not receive any of this information until I started placement and it would have been great to receive this prior. I also feel that setting up the email, laptop and phone took up valuable time on the placement where if a student received this stuff a week earlier and got set up prior to placement commencing then they could focus on the placement learning.



Induction

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they had received the following activities as part of their induction. Respondents could choose between 'Yes', 'Partially' and 'No' for an answer and were asked and given space to provide any additional comments regarding any of their answers and their overall induction experience.

INDUCTION	YES	PARTIALLY	NO
My induction helped me understand my role, responsibilities, Tusla Area services and structure e.g. child protection, fostering, TESS, DSGBV, PPFS.	90 (97%)	3 (3%)	
Getting to know allied services and agencies Tusla works with (virtually)	81 (87%)	12 (13%)	
Tusla online training/courses	89 (96%)	3 (3%)	1 (1%)
Tusla HUB – EPPI, Signs of Safety, Health and Wellbeing	76 (82%)	14 (15%)	3 (3%)
Training on the National Child Care Information System (NCCIS)	82 (88%)	7 (8%)	4 (4%)
MS Teams, ICT Support	84 (90%)	9 (10%)	
Covid-19 guidance on delivery of frontline services	82 (88%)	10 (11%)	1 (1%)
Policies e.g. Health and Safety, Code of Conduct	87 (94%)	6 (6%)	
National business processes	71 (76%)	17 (18%)	5 (5%)
Legislation	85 (91%)	8 (9%)	

Respondents were asked and given space to expand on any of their answers or provide additional comments regarding their induction process. A large portion of the comments from respondents detailed what they received as part of their induction and what was most helpful about it. The commentary in this section also included a lot of positive feedback about the induction experience from several respondents.

I felt I received all of the above within my induction period. As stated previously, I found the NCCIS training extremely beneficial as working on NCCIS (case notes etc) became an instrumental part within my placement.

My induction went very well and I suppose the induction stood out as a base line for the entire placement.

Induction was very thorough I was able to shadow for the first part of the placement, I think this was very important to build up my knowledge and confidence before taking on any duties. Due to covid I was working from home for two days a week so I was able to get up to date on the HSEland courses like GDPR and the three for Children's first. The agency visits were great for getting to know more about where to refer to and what agency's offer what supports/services. I sat in on SOS with my PT as it was not being offered to students this was great and helped a lot with analyses and IA, IR's etc. There was in house training for IR'S, Safety planning and domestic violence which was very useful.

My student induction really prepared me for starting placement. I gained a better understanding of the various different roles and responsibilities within Tusla and about the different external services that Tusla work with. I learned about the systems Tusla use such as NCCIS, MS Teams and the Tusla hub. I also improved my knowledge on the different policies and procedures in place within Tusla.

The induction pack I received included most of the above in great detail. The training for NCCIS was great and the support offered by X throughout my placement is very much appreciated, being able to ring and for him to give directions while on the phone at the time has been extremely useful. MS Teams training very clear and simple which was also provided multiple times.

My induction despite COVID -19 was very informative and my team have been very helpful with navigating the TUSLA Hub. I engaged in all training provided and more which was fantastic. HSEland was pretty straightforward and any question re NCCIS my team answered but I also had the help from the NCCIS User Liaison at all times. I have found TULSA staff to be amazing.

Although a majority of respondents did say they received the specific activities listed for their induction, and a majority of comments where respondents could expand on their induction experience were positive, there were comments from respondents stating that their induction was missing information or that they would have liked to receive the information sooner.

I was waiting quite a while for NCCIS training and would have liked signs of safety training.

It would have worked a lot better to receive training on NCCIS at the very beginning of the placement. It was challenging working on my allocated cases for 6 weeks before having access to NCCIS. I feel like this should really be a priority at the beginning of placement for students. I also think it would be a good idea to provide an outline of all of the acronyms used within Tusla. This was difficult to navigate at the beginning. Also an outline of relevant services like Jigsaw, Dublin Safer Families etc.

I feel I would have benefited from more information regarding Tusla Area services and structure.

NCCIS did not happen until midway through placement.

I feel receiving an induction pack with these resources in it would be helpful.

I feel that I could have received a better induction before starting

Placement Activities

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they were provided with the following activities as part of their Placement Activities. Respondents could choose between 'Yes', 'Partially', and 'No' for an answer and were asked and given space to provide any additional comments regarding any of their answers and their overall placement activities. There was a note in the questionnaire directions in this section stating that Tusla placements are varied and that

not all of placement activities would have been offered for every placement depending on what team / department a student was placed in.

There was also a space to mark 'other placement activities not listed' and to specify the additional placement activity.

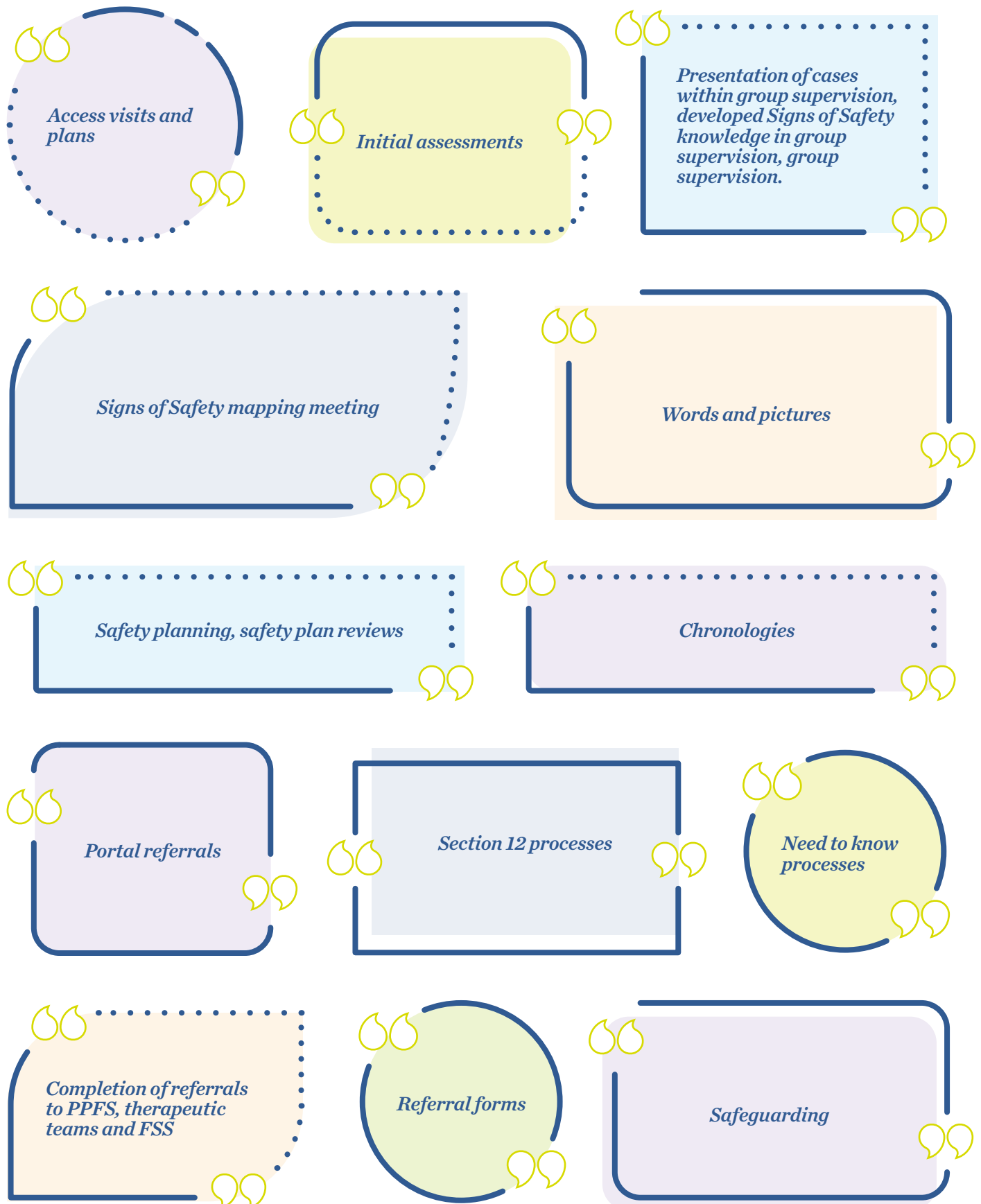
PLACEMENT ACTIVITY	YES	PARTIALLY	NO
Weekly supervision	84 (92%)	6 (7%)	1 (1%)
Completion of Intake Records	58 (64%)	11 (12%)	22 (24%)
Completion of network checks and interviews	79 (87%)	7 (8%)	5 (5%)
Preliminary enquiries	52 (58%)	15 (16%)	23 (26%)
Case work and management	85 (93%)	4 (4%)	2 (2%)
Co-working cases with practice teacher	85 (94%)	4 (4%)	1 (1%)
Development of assessment/analytical skills	83 (91%)	4 (4%)	3 (3%)
Direct work with children	78 (86%)	6 (7%)	7 (8%)
Office/home visits	74 (81%)	9 (10%)	8 (9%)
Standardised National Business Processes	64 (70%)	14 (15%)	13 (14%)
Your own independent case work	77 (85%)	13 (14%)	1 (1%)
Report / letter writing	87 (96%)	3 (3%)	1 (1%)
Shadowing / observing	87 (96%)	2 (2%)	2 (2%)
Observation of Court	87 (96%)	3 (3%)	1 (1%)

PLACEMENT ACTIVITY	YES	PARTIALLY	NO
Child Protection Conferences	53 (59%)	2 (2%)	35 (39%)
Family Welfare Conferences	43 (48%)	8 (9%)	39 (43%)
Child in Care Reviews	26 (29%)	7 (8%)	58 (64%)
Fostering committees/reviews/link work	39 (43%)	10 (11%)	42 (46%)
Professionals' meetings	81 (90%)	1 (1%)	8 (9%)
Attendance at Team meetings	74 (81%)	2 (2%)	5 (5%)
Recording of case notes/minutes of meetings	85 (93%)	3 (3%)	3 (3%)
Reviewing files/file structure/filing	81 (90%)	6 (7%)	3 (3%)
Other	43 (48%)	5 (6%)	42 (47%)

Thirty six respondents left comments about additional placement activities they experienced. These additional activities included: Attendance at various meetings including - Safety planning process meetings, parental capacity meeting, strategy meetings, Meitheal and CFSN meetings, Inter-departmental meetings, RED meetings, supervision and support meetings, case transfer meeting.

Other activities included: getting to work on other teams within the department, student social work support group, linking in with other students to complete agency visits, weekly student and learning project training, workshops both in service and with external agencies, group work, being part of training courses; practice teacher provided reflective supervision weekly which lasted 1-2hrs every Friday.

The following is a list of other activities various respondents said they were able to participate in:



Section 36 assessment

Garda action and notification forms completed

Uploading attachments to NCCIS

Statutory Covid calls

Retrospective interviews/process, screen retrospective cases

Active on duty

Section 3 process

AAI hearing

Provide evidence in court for an interim care order

Liaising with An Garda Síochána and viewing statements at Garda station

Working with translator

Respondents were asked to expand on any of their answers or provide additional comments about their placement activities. There were 40 comments from respondents acknowledging that they had a wide range of learning opportunities and placement activities and that the majority of the placement activities listed they were able to participate in, despite the Covid-19 restrictions or particular team they were on. Many respondents left comments with details of specific activities they were able to participate in and the variety of work they were involved with.

My practice teacher made sure I got a full experience within Tusla. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, some aspects were difficult, but I do feel I got a full experience.

I have gained experience in most of the above throughout my placement. I feel I have received a hugely beneficial experience from my practice as my practice teacher has provided me with a variety of different challenges and experiences throughout my placement. I feel my practice has significantly developed throughout my placement.

During my placement I had supervision with my PT every Thursday morning and this was rescheduled if needed. I completed intake records for cases I was involved in on NCCIS. Co worked cases with my practice teacher, had the opportunity to develop assessment and analytical skills, directly worked with children and their families, observed two ICOs in court, shadowed my practice teacher and other social workers at meetings, worked independently on cases, attended a child protection conference, attended many child in care review and wrote minutes, attending teams meetings every two weeks, recorded case notes and uploaded them on NCCIS, reviewed files and filed information for cases.

✓ —
✓ —
✓ —

“My placement tasks and activities have been broad and varied and provided me with valuable and practical experience.”

I was able to complete most of the listed placement activities during my placement despite the limited physical interactions with clients.

I got the opportunity to gain lots of learning over my placement. I shadowed experienced team members, carried out an IA, worked with 8 children and families. I got to attend court, attend case conferences, child in care reviews, parent capacity assessments. I also got to carry out direct work with children. I facilitated network meetings and core meetings. I got weekly supervision and also took part in group supervision and team meetings.

I had the opportunity to complete a wide range of activities. It really was a fantastic working experience especially taking COVID into account. I feel like my practice teacher planned out a fantastic placement for me. My workload was really mixed so that I could get the most out of the experience. There was nothing that I felt I did not have the chance to experience.

Respondents also left comments about activities they were not able to experience or felt like were missing throughout their placement or would have liked to partake in. These activities included: observing or shadowing court; child protection or family welfare conferences, shadowing or visiting different teams / departments; limited or no direct face to face contact with clients / visitations; limited or no direct face to face contact with team; limited or no opportunities to go into or work in an office; shadowing in general.

Due to Covid-19 I feel there were a few things I did not get to experience but I inquired about this and received information on these processes.

did not experience some of these based on the team that I was on

I would have liked more opportunities to shadow different teams while on placement and attend court

As a result of Covid and national health guidelines fewer opportunities were provided for learning, however my PT was resourceful and I availed of any opportunity given to me to meet my learning objectives.

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, I was unable to attend such events as Court, Child Protection or Family Welfare Conferences. I'm hoping this would have been different if the world was not being effected by a pandemic.



I acknowledge that I wasn't able to have some of these experiences due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Again I received a huge insight into the role of different social workers on placement. I was able to address my own learning needs as well as being part of other activities while on placements such as screening, linking with multi-d, undertaking a number of trainings as well as all of the above.

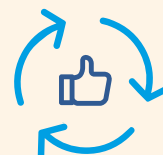
I have completed the activities above. I received excellent in dept observation but also direct work with the above activities. My practice teacher always ensured that the work I was partaking in/observing was of high quality to allow me to learn from the experiences.

I have engaged in regular supervision which has been very useful for my learning. I worked on my own cases with [my practice teacher's] supervision. I have been fortunate enough to engage in direct work with children considering the current circumstances. I have also been involved in Case management, Child protection conferences, network meetings, child in care reviews and team meetings. I have worked on cases with [my practice teacher], as well as doing my own work with [my practice teacher's] supervision.

I was provided with a well-rounded experience and any additional learning I required was provided on alternative teams if it could not be provided on the team I was allocated to.

A wide variety of experiences and new learning throughout the placement. My supervisor had different tasks for me weekly which balanced it out and made the experience better as I was always doing something different.

"I have received a well rounded placement and gained experience in all aspects of the duty/intake role. MS Teams inductions also provided insight into other teams in TUSLA. Additionally, I was given the opportunity to experience child protection safety planning case."



I was offered a wide range of rich learning opportunities on placement. I attended foster care committee meetings, placement committee meetings, child in care reviews and foster carer reviews. As well as observing reviews being carried out, I also carried out my own foster carer review with an allocated foster carer. I carried out research on recruitment and presented my findings to the fostering assessment team to help aid new recruitment campaigns. I also carried out interviews with a variety of different birth children to get their views on what Tusla could be doing better to support them in their role within the fostering family. I then compiled common themes within the feedback and presented my findings to the team to help improve the supports and training provided to birth children. I also carried out a supervisory visit with a foster carer and contributed to case notes.

I attended a variety of different training whilst on placement such as attachment training, BASICS training, caseload management training, trauma training etc.

Learning Opportunities

Respondents were asked to indicate which answer best describes their learning opportunities during their placement. They were also asked and given space to expand on any of their answers or provide additional comments regarding learning opportunities during their placement.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES	YES	PARTIALLY	NO
I was comfortable/content with the level of responsibility allocated to me	86 (98%)	2 (2%)	
I was satisfied with the variety of work exposure and experience	78 (88%)	10 (11%)	
I had a sufficient amount of onsite support (both formal and informal) during my placement	82 (93%)	6 (7%)	

These following comments were from respondents who answered partially to any of the above three questions about learning opportunities.

As stated previously, I would have liked to see the different teams work but covid restrictions limited this.

I would have liked more observing of the PT, to get a better understanding on how to ‘properly’ do something before I had to do it by myself or observe activities that I was not able to do myself due to my inexperience.

I think the level of responsibility I have required more supervision or more support, whether formal or informal. This was difficult to coordinate while working from home at times. I found at times I was expected to know something that I had not been trained up in, had shadow experience in, or had direct experience with. This is something that I found challenging, as this was my first TUSLA placement, and being expected to know how to complete certain tasks without direction was challenging at times. This was partially due to remote working.

Unfortunately, due to covid-19 my entire placement was spent working from home apart from home visits. Although this was a challenge and I recognise that this is not a typical placement experience, my practice teacher provided me with great support in the way of daily phone check ins and MS team meetings. I also felt supported by my screening team co-workers. I felt very supported despite being offsite.

It would be handy if regions had a list of all students within the same team so that we could communicate with each other. Some students are in the same position but from different colleges.

I wouldn't say I was satisfied with the onsite support because of the pandemic.

My work exposure is not satisfactory, I have not been able to experience visitations with carers or children also court hearing I suppose it has to do with the section I am placed and covid 19 restrictions.

onsite support was effected by unforeseen circumstances and the capacity of the team lead at the time.


I sometimes became overwhelmed with the level of responsibility allocated to me however I did receive sufficient support.

I was more online due to pandemic

The majority of comments left in this section about learning opportunities were positive and respondents detailed what they enjoyed or appreciated in their placement regarding learning opportunities.

I felt comfortable with my workload, at times it might have been a lot but I did feel comfortable. I had great support from my practice teacher and the team leader throughout my placement.

I felt very capable when handling my work and had no problem approaching my Practice Teacher if I needed help with anything. This was accessible when I was either working in the onsite office or working remotely from home.



"I was satisfied with the variety of work provided during placement and each case provided new learning opportunities. Support from my practice teachers and the overall team was excellent. I always felt I could ask for support and guidance when needed. My practice teachers would check in twice daily which was extremely helpful as I was working remotely."

I feel more confident in speaking, writing and engaging with other professionals. I love my TUSLA placement

I was provided with a rich amount of learning opportunities whilst on placement that helped me reach my learning goals. I was comfortable with the level of responsibility allocated to me and did not feel out of my depth at any point during my placement. I received weekly supervision and additional support from my practice teacher which supported me during my placement.

I was comfortable with the level of responsibility given to me, it was a great experience to have my own cases allocated to me but to have that support from my practice teacher was very reassuring as all my work was checked before it was finalised.



.....

I felt I was able to go at my own pace and my PT was very supportive. He didn't rush me with taking on more responsibility until got a chance to shadow. I was in the office 3 days a week with my PT and a few other SW so I was very lucky to get this one on one support and advice. When we worked from home there was a constant communication by phone or email.



"I feel that I got a lot of support from the whole team which made my placement experience more enjoyable and beneficial"



Qualitative feedback on placement:

Do you think there were any knowledge, information or potential learning areas missing from your placement?

49 respondents said no or no despite / acknowledging Covid-19 restrictions and limitations

No, I feel all relevant information and knowledge and training was provided during placement.

I feel the learning that I missed is due to the current pandemic and where possible the team have supported my learning as much as they could. I am getting the opportunity now to perform the tasks I was unable to do at the beginning which I am happy about

Not that I know of. I feel my practice teacher had linked me in with others and had me working on different parts throughout the placement I got as much knowledge from those parts as I could have within the time frame I had.

I do not think there is anything missing as regards learning areas. I am very happy with my placement. I am thankful to Tusla for giving me the opportunity to be part of their daily work for 14 weeks.

No. Perhaps direct contact with clients would of being beneficial. However I was satisfied that due to the global pandemic the safety of myself and the clients was maintained.

No I feel I got invaluable experience during my placement and found the experience for interesting and enjoyable

A significant proportion of respondents did leave comments specifying knowledge, information or potential learning areas they thought they missed out on during their placement. These included attending or observing court, office work life experience, face to face work with both team and children and families, working on or observing different teams / departments and home visits. There were also comments relating to wanting more information about certain topics or a review of topics such as Tusla Departments, Signs of Safety, etc again during their placement.

I would have liked to go to court more because it was a great learning experience, but I am grateful I went once.

Yes office interaction was limited and learning from other professionals in the office was limited as well. if not of the restrictions and social distancing, I suppose much learning would have been acquired through these mediums.

“As my placement was completely remote, I know I missed out on the typical office and experience and I would have loved to get to know and talk to members of the other teams. However, the weekly student workshops gave an insight into each of the different teams and allowed me to virtually meet other staff members.”

I think the covid 19 restrictions resulted in less direct work with children than what I had hoped for.

There was many areas that I did not get to learn yet however I do not think it was possible to learn absolutely everything within the 3 months of placement. I was happy with the amount of learning I had received.

More information should be provided about the different SW teams and how Tusla is structured.

The only main potential areas, such as Observing Court, that I feel were missing from my placement was mainly due to the fact that there is a current pandemic.

I was unable to carry out home visits whilst on placement due to Covid-19 however, this was unavoidable. Regardless of missing out on this opportunity whilst on placement, I was offered a variety of rich learning opportunities that helped in achieving all my learning goals that I set out prior to commencing my practice placement.

Do you think there were any practice areas missing from your placement?

49 respondents said no or no despite / acknowledging Covid-19 restrictions and limitations.

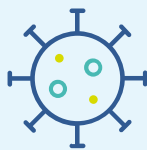
No even though there were a lot of people working from home due to Covid, I feel I got a good feel and understanding of each team.

No. Despite Covid, I was given every opportunity possible and more. Notably, all members of the team pulled together to ensure I received as much learning as possible.

No I think I got the opportunity to experience many areas of practice in child protection.

A significant portion of respondents did leave comments specifying practice areas they thought they missed out on during their placement and these were similar to those left in the previous question.

"For a placement that took place during a lockdown I feel my practice teacher availed of every possible learning opportunity, however, there was obviously minimal face to face contact with children and families"



Did not get to experience home visits and court due to restrictions. I would have liked to observe a family welfare conference.

If there was no pandemic it would be good to work more alongside other teams whilst on placement to see how each team differs.

I would have liked to have more in person interaction with clients, but this was not possible with Covid. I would have liked to have experience on other teams in Tusla.

Again, similar to the above I would have liked more guidance with specific areas of practice, which I had not encountered before working with TUSLA. Working with a section 12 and what processes must be completed, without an understanding of those processes was a challenge.

Yes I did not have the opportunity to conduct or be part of a family welfare conference and to do the intake records. But overall I must confess I had a fantastic placement.

Would like to have gained a day experience in other departments i.e. fostering and children in care

What did you enjoy most about your placement?

Respondents were asked what they enjoyed most about their placement. The comments in this section varied and were specific to each student. Some of the most common answers fell under these categories:

Home visits/direct work with clients

I enjoyed completing the direct work with children the most

Meeting families

I enjoyed working directly with service users. I also enjoyed doing direct work as my work placement has been mainly from home.

I enjoyed hearing about the clients and meeting them. It's great when you can hear their experiences and see how their cases are dealt with. Being paired with a great supervisor and team also helped make placement enjoyable.

Engaging with Foster Carers whom I was allocated as their Fostering link Worker. Completing a long term matching for a Foster Family.

Working with practice teacher and team

The level of support I received from the entire team and how easily I had access to my practice teacher and to other social workers who helped me out throughout the entire placement experience.

I enjoyed my supervision time with my practice teacher. He was so easily approachable and helped me overcome any difficult situations. I also enjoyed the support classes provided to students in X on a Monday morning. These classes were so helpful and helped me to interact with other students in similar teams.

I enjoyed the team morale. The team were so welcomingly. I got the opportunity to experience lots of learning in the Child Protection Team. I thoroughly enjoyed my time on placement, and anyone would be lucky to get to go and work on this team.

I was part of a supportive, friendly and knowledgeable team. This made my placement very enjoyable.

Variety of learning opportunities/work experience

learning new things, getting to interact with different staff member, being able to learn from others and being able to do things such as engage with the materials

There was not one bit of placement that I did not enjoy. I am so grateful for the level of experience and the opportunities I have been given.

The learning- I feel I have gained a huge amount of knowledge and learning in relation to child protection social work. This will stand by me in my next placement



"I enjoyed the variety of the work and co-working with experienced staff who had a vast knowledge bank which they happily shared"

The variety of the work and meeting with children and families in person

Having own case and workload responsibility

Doing my own case management, working in partnership with my practice teacher and getting to know the parents and children on my caseload.

I enjoyed getting to work my own case load and build relationships with all of the clients

Co-working case with practice teacher having my own independent casework and conducting an interview with the client.

Professional autonomy

Working on cases independently and making personal and informed decisions

Other comments about what respondents enjoyed included:

"I enjoyed seeing my skills and confidence develop over the course of the 14 weeks. I also really enjoyed conducting home visits as it gave me the opportunity to meet my clients and do some direct work with children using the Signs of Safety tools. I also enjoyed my weekly supervision sessions with my practice teacher."

I loved getting to talk to and work with foster carer's as I come from a family who fosters myself. I enjoyed seeing the other side of fostering from a link worker perspective.

I enjoyed the practical learning, the hands-on experiences I was exposed to helped me put my theory to practice.

I enjoyed becoming more comfortable with my learning throughout my placement and being confident about my practice.



I enjoyed gaining a broad understanding of the different roles and responsibilities within the fostering team. I also thoroughly enjoyed carrying out interviews with the birth children of foster carers as I learned so much about the important role that they play within the fostering family. Doing this also improved my interviewing and communication skills.



“Everything!! I don’t want to leave please hire me :)”



I enjoyed attending meetings, getting involved in care reviews, directly working with children and attending home visits, advocating for the clients I worked with, building relationships with clients and other staff members on my team, working independently with clients and receiving advice and feedback from my practice teacher to develop my practice.



“I thoroughly enjoyed my placement. It was a great mixture of practical skills, knowledge, analysis and theory work and reflection. My PT was brilliant and a great role model for future practice.”



What was most helpful during your placement?

The majority of comments under this section mentioned practice teacher and team support as well as supervision as being a component of their placement that helped them the most.

Practice teacher support, wider team support

Support from the team and other staff members.

My practice teacher - X - was absolutely amazing. He is so patient and would explain everything to me in so much detail and made sure I was comfortable with what I was doing.

What was most helpful was the understanding and direction of my Practice Teacher. I truly valued our Supervision time together as not only were we able to speak about my work placement but about our opinions on relevant areas of social work.

My practice teacher was very helpful in every aspect of my placement. From our daily phone check ins to providing me with general knowledge and advice for my practice, I was able to learn a lot from her. I was also able to observe her in practice both in person and over the phone which was very helpful. Her next student will be very lucky to have her!

Supervision and support from my practice teacher and other members of the team. Peer support from other students.

The support and guidance of my PT and the willingness of the team to include me in their work when possible

My practice teachers supported me 100% and this was always very reassuring.

Supervision

Supervision and peer support from other students on placement within the same agency.

I believe supervision was most helpful during my placement.

Supervision with my practice teacher fortnightly was so helpful to me.

The most helpful part of placement was supervision and feedback from my practice teachers as this provided an opportunity to discuss my learning.



“The weekly supervisions, workshops, field work (home visits) and completing initial assessments were huge part of my placement and they all had a positive impact on my professional development.”

Student workshops/student support group

“Having other students in the office to talk to when overwhelmed or worried, it was helpful that they were going through the same thing and could understand where I was coming from.”

Supervision and peer support from other students on placement within the same agency.

Student support group

Peer support and supervision

The student workshops were also a great idea to be able to see different areas within the organisation

Other comments about what respondents found helpful in addition to the above included:

working within each of the teams to get an understanding of how referrals come through from duty, child protection and into care

Getting opportunities to do home and office visits. I learned the most from these experiences.

Court observations.

What did you enjoy least about your placement?

Respondents were asked what they enjoyed least about their placement. The majority of these comments were about working from home, lack of face to face working with clients and co-workers, ICT issues, general lack of opportunities due to Covid-19.

Not having enough work to do. It stressed me out when I was not sure what to do next. I was aware of how busy my PT was and I tried not bothering them and waiting until supervision. IT problems were also very stressful- calls being cut in the middle of meetings where you are suppose to take minutes, poor internet connection, not being able to set up on the printer (still waiting in the queue), not being able to download email or whatsapp on the phone etc.

Not being in the office or getting as many opportunities to meet families

I didn't enjoy building relationships with people over the phone but this was necessary during my time here as we were in a national lockdown. This was most prevalent at the beginning of placement. As time went on I had many opportunities to work with people in person.

What I enjoyed least about this placement was the fact that I don't think I was fully exposed to what the daily life of a Child in Care social worker was like. However, once again, I feel that this was down to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Not having much shadowing opportunities and limited physical interaction with clients due to the restrictions put in place because of the Covid pandemic

A times I found it difficult working from home, although I had support from my practice teacher there were limited opportunities to meet other social workers in different teams.

The imbalance between writing reports and seeing children and families as a result of the pandemic

Some other aspects of the placement respondents said they did not like included: Paperwork, time consuming work, filling out forms, writing up minutes, long commutes and balancing placement with college or other jobs



I didn't enjoy elaborating report writing but I realised that it is unavoidable especially with fostering team



The thing I enjoyed least about placement was the constant documentation that needs to occur but again given the severity of the job and what it entails I understand why documentation is so important.



My placement was a considerable distance away from my home which was challenging at times.



I enjoyed every aspect of placement. If I had to choose something, I would just say it was difficult doing placement full time whilst also working, however this was not so much of an issue.



I found myself getting ran down due to working five days in Tusla and weekends in my job. This made me struggle finding enthusiasm and drive near the end of my placement.



Balancing placement with completing portfolio for college



It is important to note that even under this question, respondents said they enjoyed their overall placement or could not think of something they did not enjoy.



“Making the first phone call is always a challenge! But honestly leaving will be the least enjoyable aspect”

There was nothing I did not enjoy about my placement.

I enjoyed everything about this placement and cannot identify an area that I did not enjoy. I do note however, that having NCCIS training during the induction period beneficial.

I enjoyed all aspects of placement

I enjoyed all aspects of my practice placement as I was able to learn from every task that I carried out which will benefit me in my development as a social work student. I was not able to engage in home visits or meet clients in person however, this was unavoidable due to Covid-19 restrictions.

What did you find most challenging during your placement?

Respondents were asked to provide commentary about what they thought was most challenging about their placement in Tusla. The majority of comments come under five main categories: working remotely / Covid-19 restrictions, communication with families and co-workers, ICT set up, and specific challenges relating to the social work profession.

Working remotely/Covid-19 restrictions

working from home not being able to sit in the office with the social workers all the time because of covid and limited numbers

Working from home as it is more difficult to build a relationship with colleagues and foster carers over the video calls or phone calls.

What I found most challenging was the Covid-19 restrictions and having to do part of my placement remotely.

Communication with families and co-workers not in person or with masks

The most challenging aspect during my placement was not related to the work itself, it was the wearing of masks while trying to conduct conversations with people I found very challenging.

not getting to be in the office everyday so you can build a relationship with staff and gain knowledge from each individual.

I found it difficult to build rapport with families over the phone. I also found families were more reluctant to meet in person due to covid19.

“Due to COVID 19 I have found video calls and phone calls with some children challenging due to age and development. Whilst teens I found engaged quite well it is hard to fully assess over the phone or video as we are only partially seeing the picture. This is a challenge for all Social Workers however, it is something I will need to get used to.”



ICT set up

Waiting and setting up laptops, work phones and connections to the new system also training of NCCIS was so challenging for me. I waited for almost 3 weeks before laptops, work phone, setting up and connections was put in place.

Setting up my computer and phone.

Understanding the NCCIS and getting set up on the laptop and phone.

Technology especially IT help desk. They were so hard to reach and sometimes i found them very unhelpful.

Setting me up on NCCIS and have to call ICT for system set up.

Specific social work profession challenges

I found it tough when having to talk to carers who had a placement end etc. and were upset about it

What I found the most challenging was report writing as it took me some time to get my head around the writing style and format. This has since subsided as I have progressed with my placement.

I think I found the report writing the most challenging. At the beginning I found it difficult but it was great to see myself developing this skill as my placement went on. Looking back I think it was actually a fantastic opportunity to build my confidence.

The most challenging part of placement was having them difficult conversations with parents.

Facilitating access-I found this challenging but as time went on I felt more confident.



“Working with perpetrators of abuse in a professional and non-judgemental way”



Discovering that these children have been exposed to trauma and neglect and abuse



I found it most challenging to close off my cases and plan saying goodbye to the young people I worked with.



when families were not happy with the decisions being implemented



“Witnessing the challenges families are experiencing and the inequalities and family dynamics. Additionally, everything was challenging at the start of my placement, however, things began to normalize when I started having my supervision and gaining more knowledge.”



Again, I found working with certain scenarios when I have no experience in those processes quite challenging, as I was unsure of how to proceed and what needed to be done/completed.



Other miscellaneous challenges included:

Unwinding and being confident in my actions. It was hard to unwind and switch off work mode. Confidence was also low which made me anxious at times when completing work tasks. I think more observing at the start could have helped with that.

Probably getting the hang of NCCIS that was a challenge. Confidence to take on responsibility. First time I interviewed service user was pretty nerve wrecking, but a great experience and great learning.

remembering everything for the different cases

Placement itself was fine. I had a good balance on my work and working from home and office. Challenging as it was not paid and full time hours which put a lot of pressure on not being able to take time of work as money was needed and having to work every weekend was tiring at times.

I found accessing the tusla hub challenging, I googled searched 'Tusla Hub' and nothing came up relating to the hub. There was a few issues with accessing MS Teams for meetings.

Prioritising different pieces of work.

Long drives from home to placement

Making sure I was implementing GDPR

Managing workload and being organised

Further developing my knowledge of legislation

As I am a student, some families did not want to converse with me which due to my status as a student.

Additional comments and/or Suggestions for future placements

Respondents were provided space to leave any additional comments about their placement experience and to provide suggestions for improvement.

For comments left regarding suggestions for improvement, the majority of them related to having access to laptop and phone earlier and also having induction packet earlier. Another suggestion from several respondents was being able to link in with or visit other teams / departments.

Early tech set up and induction set up

It would be helpful before commencing placement to provide students specific details about the team they are going to be working with. For example, outlining their role within the organisation.

Student equipment must be ordered in advance to avoid delay. would have liked student pack earlier.

Assurance of quick access to ICT and NCCIS Training.

I found the induction programme I got to be a part of to be very helpful and I think will help future students understand the different pathways within Tusla.

Explain structure of Tusla teams/processes better at beginning of placement



"I suggest going forward if covid 19 permits for every necessary equipment, set ups and connections needed for placement be put in place before student is allocated a place for work placement. It will minimize a lot of stress and fear from students."

Have laptops and phones already set up including Teams set up, access to HSE land, Outlook etc, already have emails linked to phones. This wasted a lot of time initially.

Linking with other teams

Offering student induction trainings on the various different areas within the social work team is very helpful. Perhaps offering students an opportunity to work shadow a social worker from a different area within Tusla would be a good learning opportunity for students.

For future placements, if restrictions are lifted it would be great to have more opportunities within the office and working alongside other social workers on the team.

More face to face

The only suggestion is that more face to face trainings and meetings but due to COVID restrictions it is not possible.

Other suggestions for improvement included:



For practice teachers- Try and give a variety of cases or different task each week so there's different learning. For students- If you are feeling overwhelmed make sure you share that with your PT. You are not getting paid for the placement and you are meant to enjoy it not feel stressed throughout.



Workshop in the first week or two explaining the safety planning road map (in detail). IT help at the beginning of placement (maybe an IT workshop), it was difficult for me as I never worked from home before as I am a social care worker, so being at home for the first week of placement was new to me. Maybe a group or WhatsApp group for students? I have it really helpful to talk to students in the course. Maybe an interactive workshop where students talk to other students? I found the workshops and presentations every week really, really helpful, however, it would be good to have maybe a session or two where students can talk about their experiences together.



"A student peer support group/ coffee morning"



Additional comments:

Many respondents also left additional comments re-iterating what they enjoyed or were able to do during their placement. In this space, several respondents also praised and thanked their practice teacher and the support they received from them and the impact it had on their placement experience.



“Covid aside, I feel a child protection and welfare placement for students is invaluable, I would go so far as to say essential toward learning. It gives immeasurable grounding and insight to social work practice. I am delighted to have been given this opportunity as my first placement and I feel confident going forward. Thank you.”

I love my TUSLA placement and I am hoping to work with the agency before I graduate. I am keen to learn more and offer what I have learned.

Overall, it has been a really enjoyable placement with multiple learning opportunities. I feel this placement as a first-year placement has been a great basis for learning and developing my skills as a student social worker which will benefit me as I progress in the college course.

Having a PT that is patient and understanding was very helpful. Time to reflect and process new knowledge was important for me before taking on too much.



“Overall, I had a brilliant experience, the social workers around me have a wealth of knowledge and I learned so much. I would happily say that I would come back to work in Tusla when qualified.”



“I found the placement experience excellent. The support from my practice teacher, the team leader, and the rest of the team really helped my experience as a student. I liked being allocated my own cases, as it gives students the push that they need to become more confident in their ability. After completing this placement, I hope to work in Tusla once I qualify, as I have had such a great placement experience.”

My placement was perfect and my practice teacher at X in my opinion is the best. I wish to someday be exactly the social worker and leader she is.

Having a supportive practice teacher who wants to actually teach you is essential to a successful placement, from what I have heard from other students I got very lucky with mine.

Summary and Analysis

The national student placement co-ordination system has been operational in Tusla since January 2020, which co-incided with the onset of the global Covid -19 pandemic and which severely impacted and disrupted student placements in the Agency and in other placement providing statutory and non-statutory agencies in Ireland. Tusla responded very proactively to this at the request of the HEIs by facilitating students, primarily final year students, to complete placements remotely with the provision of ICT equipment which enabled them to graduate on time.

Placement provision in Tusla continued and in fact increased substantially with the September 2020 and January 2021 cohorts of social work students and a small number of social care students.

The dissemination of the Student Placement Feedback Questionnaire in 2021 is an important step in the Agency's efforts to measure and assess the impact and quality of practice placements and towards ensuring that all students are receiving the same high-quality information and support they need to succeed in their placement within the Agency and in their journey towards becoming confident, skilled social work and social care practitioners.

The Questionnaire has provided valuable feedback and an extensive insight into the placement experience for students. Students had a lot to say in their responses which has resulted in a rich and detailed qualitative data and commentary.

The information presents a strong case that placements are going well, and students are gaining valuable experience and learning.



It's important to note that despite Level 5 restrictions and lockdown in Ireland during the course of student placements, students felt that overall, they had positive placements as evidenced by 98% reporting either a very satisfactory or satisfactory experience.

Students were placed in a variety of community based social work teams including Screening, Duty and Intake, Child Protection and Welfare, Children in Care and Fostering. A number of students were placed in specialist or national teams in the Agency.

Students reported that pre-placement activities and induction were helpful in easing into the placement, through meeting with the practice teacher and attending the office in advance of the placement or through training, agency visits (where possible within the restrictions) and learning workshops. In the early stages of placement respondents gained a better understanding of the various different roles and responsibilities within Tusla and about the different external services that Tusla work with. They also learned about Tusla's policies and procedures and internal systems such as NCCIS, MS Teams and the Tusla Hub, Tusla's intranet.

The ICT team have been instrumental in supporting and enabling placements during the pandemic and for the most part students had access to laptops and phones either prior to or at the beginning of placements.

However, there were a number of students where this was not the case or when technical issues were present and persistent and equipment was not available or NCCIS training provided until a number of weeks into the placement. This had a detrimental effect on these student's placement experience. In terms of placement location, students were generally combining working from home and utilising MS Teams, with working in the office. For some students unfortunately their entire placement consisted of working remotely from home.

Student respondents acknowledged that they had a wide range of learning opportunities and placement activities to achieve learning goals and that the majority of the placement activities listed in the questionnaire they were able to participate in, despite the Covid-19 restrictions or particular team they were on. Students also described a considerable amount of additional activities – meetings, assessments, research etc. they engaged in to support their overall professional development as a social work or social care student. Respondents repeatedly referenced how every effort was made by their practice teachers, team leaders and team members to provide as many opportunities as they could to increase skills and confidence in social work practice and apply theory and research to inform their practice learning. They were also aware that some of the limitations of their placement were due to Covid-19 restrictions and under less demanding conditions they would most likely have been able to partake in more placement activities, particularly direct work with children and families.

Not surprisingly therefore the activity enjoyed most by students was when they got the opportunity to do direct, face to face work with children and families where this could be facilitated – sometimes through a home visit or on occasion meeting family members outdoors. Many respondents referenced enjoying working with and being supported and guided by knowledgeable, skilled practice teachers and team members.

In fact, the support of practice teachers was consistently reported as one of the largest contributions to why students enjoyed and excelled in their practice placements.



Being allocated their own cases and having to manage their own caseload with increasing responsibility as the placement progressed was helpful towards developing professional autonomy and increasing confidence in working with children and families. Students had positive experiences of weekly supervision and noted how student support and learning groups enabled a positive placement experience.

Under the circumstances it is not surprising to learn that students did not enjoy the fact that they had limited interaction with their colleagues in the office and in many cases limited or no face to face or direct contact with children and families. Further to this, students described how challenging it was to develop a rapport/relationship with children and families over the phone or via a video call. **Students described missing out on a typical office environment and the knowledge and support that can be gained through discussing with and bouncing ideas off more experienced social work and social care practitioners.** Frequent references were also made to not getting the opportunity to learn about the work of other social work teams and shadow other social workers in those teams in the Agency.

Other activities students were not able to experience or felt like were missing throughout their placement or would have liked to partake in included: observing or shadowing court; child protection or family welfare conferences, shadowing or visiting different teams / departments and shadowing in general.

What proved challenging for many respondents was working remotely from home and not being in an office with supportive colleagues. This was particularly difficult when students were having difficult conversations with families about social work department intervention or when they were working with children who had been subject to abuse, trauma and neglect. Managing caseloads and prioritising work was challenging. Documenting their work and report writing was also cited by many students as a difficult task of the placement.

Recommendations/Suggestions for Improvement

Respondents when asked to recommend improvements to placements suggested that ICT should be set up before or within the first two weeks of placement and that NCCIS training should be facilitated in this early time frame also.

It was also recommended that induction for students should be standardised and that students in each Area would benefit from having a student support group where they could share and learn from each other's experiences throughout the placement process. **Notwithstanding the ongoing restrictions imposed by the pandemic, students really value opportunities to complete direct face to face work with children and families**

and hoped that this could be facilitated where possible, **as it forms the basis of the fundamental relationship based practice in social work and social care.** Finally, students suggested that on placement they would get the opportunity to learn about and experience the work of other social work teams in the department or Area.

In response to the recommendations made by students in the questionnaire a more streamlined ICT system has been introduced in the Agency from the beginning of the September 2021 academic year and for the cohorts of students on placement in Tusla. This is resulting in a more efficient and timely distribution of laptops and phones. In addition to this a working group has been established to develop a standardised Student Induction Programme.

Conclusion

The findings from the questionnaire and this report are evidence of the positive impact practice placements have on students in becoming confident, competent and skilled social work and social care professionals. The significant role that practice teachers play in a student's placement experience and development cannot be overstated and practice teachers and their efforts are the biggest contribution to students experiencing positive placements within Tusla.

Appendix 1

MEMBERS OF THE PRACTICE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVEMENT PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

Stella Owens - EPPI and PDIP Project Manager, Office of the Chief Social Worker (Chair)

Avril Connolly – Professional Support Manager, DN

Maria Mac Innes – Service Improvement Manager, Office of the Chief Social Worker

Tom Mervyn – General Manager, Chief Operations Office

Clare Murphy – Regional Chief Officer, CKST

Joanne Cullen - Area Manager, DSE/W

Frances Haigney – Head of Recruitment and Talent Management, HR

Anna Deneher – PSW, International Social Service Ireland

Claire Shanley – Senior Social Work Practitioner, SLWC

Kate Gillen - Child Care Performance and Social Work Unit, DCEDIY

Stephanie Holt - Head of School, School of Social Work & Social Policy, TCD

Marie MacSweeney – Manager, Workforce Learning and Development

Kenneth Burns – Director of Practice, School of Applied Social Studies, UCC

Claire O'Brien – EPPI Implementation Officer (October 2020 to October 2021)

Appendix 2

Student Placement Feedback Questionnaire

Introduction

Tusla – the Child and Family Agency is committed to providing quality and consistent student practice placements. We are anxious to standardise the student experience that we offer and to ensure that students have a rewarding, challenging and quality learning experience which adequately prepares you to practice as a social worker. In this regard Tusla is requesting each student to complete a feedback questionnaire at the end of their placement. Please be as honest and constructive in your feedback as possible. Your feedback is important

and appreciated and will help inform Tusla of how to continue to provide good quality placement experiences for students. Your responses are confidential and all responses will be collated, analysed and an overall report on the questionnaire findings will be produced.

Placement details:

Name:

Course:

What year of course:

Was this your first or second placement?

First ☐ Second ☐

Area where placement undertaken e.g. Cork, Dublin
North City, Louth/Meath:

OVERALL PLACEMENT EXPERIENCE	VERY UNSATISFACTORY	UNSATISFACTORY	NEITHER UNSATISFACTORY OR SATISFACTORY	SATISFACTORY	VERY SATISFACTORY
How would you rate your overall placement experience?					

Please provide reasons for your answer:

Please indicate whether you received the following as part of your pre-placement preparation.

PRE-PLACEMENT PREPARATION	YES	PARTIALLY	NO
Covid-19 information and advice for staff			
Return to work / Remote working process			
Children First/GDPR training			
Phone, laptop set up			
Communication with college and Tusla			
Other			

Please expand on any of your answers from above or provide any additional comments regarding pre-placement preparation.

Please indicate whether you provided the following as part of your induction.

INDUCTION	YES	PARTIALLY	NO
My induction helped me understand my role, responsibilities, Tusla Area services and structure e.g. child protection, fostering, TESS, DSGBV, PPFS.			
Getting to know allied services and agencies Tusla works with (virtually)			
Tusla online training/courses			
Tusla HUB – EPPI, Signs of Safety, Health and Wellbeing			
Training on the National Child Care Information System (NCCIS)			
Personal office space/Desk			
MS Teams, ICT Support			
Covid-19 guidance on delivery of frontline services			
Policies e.g. Health and Safety, Code of Conduct			
National business processes			
Legislation			
Other			

Please expand on any of your answers from above or provide any additional comments regarding your induction.

We understand that there are many different services within Tusla where students can develop valuable experience. Please note the list of placement activities outlined below is not exhaustive. We also appreciate that some of the activities may not be a feature for your placement setting.

Please indicate whether you experienced the following activities during your placement.

PLACEMENT ACTIVITY	YES	PARTIALLY	NO
Weekly supervision			
Completion of Intake Records			
Completion of network checks and interviews			
Preliminary enquiries			
Case work and management			
Co-working cases with practice teacher			
Development of assessment/analytical skills			
Direct work with children			
Office/home visits			
Standardised National Business Processes			
Your own independent case work			
Report / letter writing			
Shadowing / observing			
Observation of Court			

PLACEMENT ACTIVITY	YES	PARTIALLY	NO
Child Protection Conferences			
Family Welfare Conferences			
Child in Care Reviews			
Fostering committees/reviews/link work			
Professionals' meetings			
Attendance at Team meetings			
Recording of case notes/minutes of meetings			
Reviewing files/file structure/filing			
Other			

Please expand on any of your answers from above or provide any additional comments regarding your placement activities.

Please indicate which answer best describes your learning opportunities during your placement

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES	YES	PARTIALLY	NO
I was comfortable/content with the level of responsibility allocated to me			
I was satisfied with the variety of work exposure and experience			
I had a sufficient amount of onsite support (both formal and informal) during my placement			

Please expand on any of your answers from above or provide any additional comments regarding learning opportunities during your placement.

Do you think there were any knowledge, information or potential learning areas missing from your placement?

What was most helpful during your placement?

Do you think there were any practice areas missing from your placement?

What did you enjoy least about your placement?

What did you enjoy most about your placement?

What was most challenging during your placement?

Any other additional comments and/or suggestions for future placements:

