

Social Work_____All five of the tools have already been mapped to the National Occupational Standards and have had a contextual introductory statement added.



Social Work

At the University of Leeds, the ALPS assessment tools have been integrated within the National Occupational Standards (NOS) required for Social Work undergraduate and post graduate students.

Alan Murphy, Social Work Lead at the Leeds Institute of Health and Social Work, is leading the project which aims to improve student learning and assessment, and enhance students' experience on placements by providing more useful evidence of achieved skills and competences.

Alan has been involved in ALPS since its inception and was a member of the Common Competency Mapping Working Group, whose task it was to agree common competences across all ALPS partners and professions.

'This was a huge undertaking, involving colleagues from five universities and 16 health and social care professions. While agreeing and creating the Maps and the tools was a massive achievement, it became clear early on that in order to encourage implementation and embedding, it was going to be essential to make the tools more relevant to specific professions.'

The ALPS tools are in competition with other tools and types of assessment, and both students and practice educators need to see examples of how they work and how using the tools will help them. By integrating the ALPS assessment tools within the current Social Work requirements, it is hoped that they will be more readily accepted by tutors, practice educators and students.

Students are required to complete three observations during their practice placements, and have six key roles and 21 units of practice requirements to demonstrate. This is where Alan saw potential to utilise the ALPS tools:

'I always had in mind that this is where the tools would be useful and where they would have the greatest influence and impact.'

All five of the tools have already been mapped to the National Occupational Standards and have had a contextual introductory statement added, and Alan piloted two of these with his first and second year students in 2008/09.

Social Work students at the University of Leeds use the paper version of the ALPS tools and Alan divided all the answer boxes into two parts, allowing students to write how they had hit their NOS roles in one section. Alan filled in a sample and gave this to students along with the blank assessment to fill out. These were then worked through in placement preparation workshops.

By providing them with a completed assessment as an example, students were able to see how they could potentially evidence their competences in an analytical and reflective way. During a focus group, one student said: *'... looking at the examples that we were given... it then made me think "ah right that does meet that role" when I would have thought my work actually wasn't meeting as many roles as it was. It helped me to reflect and actually I'm doing a lot more than I think I am.'*

The students completed the blank versions and discussed what they had written with their practice educator during supervision. The practice educator then had the opportunity to offer feedback and make additional suggestions of further NOS requirements the students may have demonstrated; bearing in mind students can claim several NOS units from just one experience.

Students have responded positively to the assessment tools, finding them a detailed way to gather evidence of their competences: *'...it just gives you that extra evidence rather than just writing it down in your journal... It's more focused evidence as well.'* Another student said: *'The structure was very good... it made you hit your role well, enabled you to hit your (NOS) roles.'*

Students also recognised the need to move away from descriptive writing and be more analytical;

'There's an increased emphasis on our reflective practice so it's very good for that.'

As well as students from Leeds, the tools have also been piloted with Social Work students at the University of Huddersfield. The work to map the ALPS tools to the National Occupational Standards, providing detailed example assessments was undertaken by a practice educator, which helped the embedding process across Social Work. Alan comments, *'Getting practice educators on board is essential. We can't expect adoption overnight. We need to continue promoting the ALPS tools to these key people at student placement preparation workshops and placement practice educator training events.'*



The message is that students and their practice educators don't have to complete five ALPS assessments, gathering feedback from peers and service users for each one during every observation. Instead they can pick and choose from the tools and who they ask for feedback from as appropriate.

Students agree that the tools are more readily accepted if practice educators are fully informed of their purpose and benefits; *'I think the best way for it to work, I think on days when we go to placement we have to introduce this to our practice teachers from the start so that they will know that this is what we're going to use.'*

The intention is to make the tools available electronically, allowing students to complete the assessments on a PC and upload them directly to their e-portfolio as well as on CD format for practice educators.

Getting practice educators on board is essential. We can't expect adoption overnight. We need to continue promoting the ALPS tools to these key people at student placement preparation workshops and placement practice educator training events

Alan Murphy
Social Work Lead
Leeds Institute of Health & Social Work

