

Irish College of Humanities and Applied Sciences

CASE STUDY 1

Title: Ensuring the quality assurance and enhancement of work placements. An examination of the lessons learned and challenges ahead.

Theme: Change of Title in the Placement Department from Clinical Director to Practice Placement Director.

Key Words: Practice Placement , roles and Responsibilities, Practice Placement Director.

Context

This Case relates to issues of Ensuring Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement in the area of Placements at the College, and it will specifically focus on the experiences of the college based on title changes in the Placement Department to accurately reflect the roles of Key members of the placement Team. The case study outlines the future direction of the college in relation to placements arising from the challenges that arose, and the experience gained over the reporting period.

Case Description

In line with the Policy on Work Based Learning at ICHAS, there is a requirement for students to engage in Professional Placement and this is an integral part of some of the undergraduate and post-graduate degree programmes offered by the College. The core purpose of professional placement is to facilitate the translation of theory to practice by offering students the opportunity to acquire quality experiential learning in a professionally mentored environment. There is a strong tradition of practice-based training in third level studies and this has been evidenced as an essential component of academic training both at undergraduate and postgraduate level (Lee et al 2013). This requirement for Work Based Learning has also required that the necessary supports in relation to this type of learning are in place at the College for support prior to , during and on completion of the practice placement.

Quality assurance for placement is designed around a system of inter-locking checks designed to ensure consistency of learning opportunities and requirements on students and ensure equitable standards for student learning in practice. Outcomes of Learning are assessed through a combination of assessment of core competencies by the key member of the placement department supported by direct consultation with the Clinical Supervisor and assessed within the completion of the continuous Assignments.

Practice Placement Office

The Practice Placement Office is the key organisational Unit within the College, which manages Practice or Work Based Learning. There are two key office holders attached to this Unit who collectively manage work related learning under the supervision of the Vice President (Academic Affairs). The Placement Office works collaboratively with students, host placements, external clinical supervisors as well as relevant members of Faculty and Programme Directors.

Previously one of these key office holders attached to the Placement Office was known as the Clinical Director and was referred to as such in the QAE. During a review of the QAE policies and procedures it was felt by the academic team that the title of Clinical Director did not effectively describe the role that was being carried out. While this title effectively distinguished the administrative function of the Placement Officer from the more educational and professional competencies remit of the Clinical Director, It was considered inappropriate in the context of Counselling and Psychotherapy. It was felt that this title was derived from specific healthcare contexts and therefore did not accurately capture the role as it existed in the College. The Vice President of Academic Affairs championed a change in title in the form of a proposal to Academic Council. After detailed discussions, the suitability of a series of alternative titles emerged. These were Director of Practice Education and Practice Placement Director. It was decided that the more appropriate title for this key role in the Practice Placement Office was to be changed to Practice Placement Director. This was discussed at Programme Board and brought to Academic Council for approval prior to changing in the QAE documentation. An overview of the contractual role and responsibility of the Clinical Director did not require alteration.

Case Outcome

The title Practice Placement Director was agreed and the following role and responsibilities were reconfirmed:

- Possess an In-depth knowledge of Placement requirements from an educational, practice and professional accreditation perspective.
- Work with the Work Placement Officer in the organisation and co-ordination of appropriate caseloads for students on work placements.
- Liaise with lecturers who teach on Professional Placement / Practicum modules to ensure forward planning of clinical placements.
- Assist in learning activities so that students are prepared for their placements.
- Monitor student progress during their placement.
- Monitor the quality of external Clinical Supervision.
- Establish and maintain effective working relationships with placement providers.
- Provide informed leadership to the learner support team.
- Monitor the risk management policy and notify the Vice President for Academic Affairs of any identified risk in relation to placements.

- Monitoring of Clinical Supervisory Arrangements of students engaging in practice placement.