

Student Number:

Care Purchasing and Brokerage Assignment Template

Please fill in your details here:

Student name:	
Student number: <i>(also enter in header)</i>	
Date assignment due:	
Date submitted on VLE:	
Student word count:	
Important Note:	Your submission, excluding the reference list and appendices, must be between 1,800 and 2,300 words. No tolerance is given. This is a mandatory criterion i.e. your assignment will not be passed if it does not adhere to the word count.

Assessor to complete:

Word count:	
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Instructions to Students

Write a reflective commentary that describes a placement you have made and how you managed the process. You should show how you applied the best practice you learnt on the course and what the challenges and barriers were.

The assessment criteria are:

- a) Demonstrate knowledge and awareness of the national context for care purchasing and brokerage including relevant statutory duties and regulatory arrangements.
- b) Demonstrate appropriate brokerage and purchasing practice.
- c) Evaluate the effectiveness of the brokerage and purchasing activities undertaken.
- d) Provide a reflective commentary that demonstrates personal development and learning.

The criteria will be assessed using the assessment scheme below. You must submit your assignment by the deadline given. Submit your assignment as a WORD document using the blank pages of this template.

The assignment must be between 1,800 and 2,300 as no tolerance is given. The word count refers to the main body of your assignment and does not include the assignment title or appendices.

Ensure that you complete the front sheet details above and the statement of originality below.

Please include your full name within the filename when you save this template.

Details of the relevant regulations are in the Student Handbook.

Ensure that you keep both an electronic and a hard copy of your assignment.

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Assignment Statement of Originality

Except for those parts in which it is explicitly stated to the contrary, this work is my own. It has not been previously submitted for assessment at this or any other higher education institution.

Checklist

Please check the following statements are true. Tick each box (or write YES):

I completed this work without any unauthorised help	YES
I have included a reference list, using the Harvard system of referencing	YES
I have included examples of my work as appendices	YES

Extract from the [Student Conduct Regulations](#)

Students shall not cheat (obtain, or attempt to obtain, an unfair academic advantage) in any assessment. In particular, they shall not commit collusion, plagiarism, falsification, or duplication, submit other people's work as their own, use a custom writing service or assist others to cheat.

Explanation of terms used in the Student Conduct Regulations

- *Collusion* means producing assessed work by working with another person who you have not been authorised to work with. This includes, but is not limited to, allowing another student to copy your work.
- *Falsification* means presenting invented data, for example claiming that you have conducted interviews or sent out questionnaires when you have not, or altering or making up your results.
- *Plagiarism* means submitting the work of someone else as if it were your own. When you include someone else's ideas in your assignment, you must provide a reference in the text. If you copy someone else's words (a quotation), you must show clearly in the text how much was copied by using speech marks.
- *Duplication* means submitting work for assessment which has been assessed before, either in this University or elsewhere, without acknowledging the extent of the previous submission.

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Assessment Scheme

Guidance for students/Assessor's Feedback:

Assessment scheme	D	M	P	R	F	Feedback from assessor	Weighting
a) Demonstrate knowledge and awareness of the national context for care purchasing and brokerage including relevant statutory duties and regulatory arrangements							20%
b) Demonstrate appropriate brokerage and purchasing practice.							30%
c) Evaluate the effectiveness of the brokerage and purchasing activities undertaken.							25%
d) Provide a reflective commentary that demonstrates personal development and learning.							25%

D = Distinction, M = Merit, P= Pass, R = Refer, F = Fail

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Assessor's comments:

Summarise the strengths and possible improvements of the submission, including any suggested action such as proof read more carefully.

Clearly state which assessment criteria have been met and the provisional grade awarded.

Assessed by		Date	
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The marking and moderation process

Your work will be assessed in accordance with the university's regulations that seek to ensure fairness, accuracy and clarity of feedback. In judging the quality of your work, assessors follow the assessment criteria outlined above. They also follow IPC's [Marking and Moderation](#) policy and abide by the University's assessment regulations. When your work is submitted it will go through the following process:

1. It will be initially assessed and given a provisional grade by a member of the IPC assessment team.
2. It may then be subject to moderation i.e. an internal examiner will mark it and, in discussion with the first assessor, confirm the provisional grade. A sample of assessments are moderated by an internal examiner.
3. We strive to give you feedback within three weeks. You will receive this feedback via the Virtual Learning Environment (Moodle).
4. Once a provisional grade has been agreed upon it will be finalised at the next Examination Committee meeting.
5. Your work may also be selected to be in the sample sent to our External Examiner – an academic from another university – who comments on the fairness, quality and consistency of the internal assessment of our programmes as a whole.

If you are concerned about your feedback, arrange to speak to your Academic Adviser to help you better understand the reasons for the assessment judgement and our feedback. If you think that there was a flaw in the assessment process, you can submit an Academic Appeal. More information about the appeals process can be found at [Student Disputes](#). However, please be advised that the University does not "re-mark" work and you cannot request an appeal on the grounds that you disagree with the academic judgement of the Examination Committee.

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Assignment Title Page

Write a reflective commentary that describes a placement you have made and how you managed the process. You should show how you applied the best practice you learnt on the course and what the challenges and barriers were.

Introduction

I am a placement officer for X Council Children's Services. I work within a small Access to Resources team where I am responsible for 16+ semi-independent placement searches. My role is diverse, and I contribute to all areas of the commissioning cycle from managing the referral to contract management and monitoring. I always work towards best practise and applying the corporate parenting principles as set out in section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

16+ largely refers to semi-independent placements which offer accommodation and support for looked after young people aged sixteen or above. However, unlike independent fostering agencies or residential children's homes, the semi-independent market remains unregulated and is described as a placement made through *other arrangements* as per Section 22c (6) (d) of the Children's Act 1989.

Due to shortages of fostering and residential placements, unregulated placements are increasing, and this is a particular challenge for placements teams nationwide (National Audit Office, 2019). In response, X Council procure placements via the Commissioning Alliance Dynamic Purchasing Vehicle (DPV) also known as Care Place. Suppliers who are members of this regional DPV undergo an accreditation process and are monitored by the Commissioning Alliance. This provides a level of security when identifying suitable placements to support vulnerable young people (Longfield, A. 2020).

In this reflective commentary I will describe a 16+ placement search I recently completed and reflect on the key activities I undertook, some of the challenges I faced, the theory applied and what new brokerage and purchasing practises I will implement in the future having completed this course. I will argue the importance of a placement officers' role and how they can influence social work practise and how further collaboration with service users can benefit the commissioning process. I shall conclude by reflecting on some of the challenges I faced and how my own practise will develop into the future having completed the course.

Managing the Referral

Referrals have been identified as 'the weakest area of commissioning' by the Nationwide Association of Fostering Providers report (NAFP, 2019). Placement Officers can however play an important role in influencing social work practise to improve the quality of referrals before they are shared with placement suppliers.

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For example, I recently undertook a semi-independent placement search for a 16-year-old male named L whose placement had served a seven-day termination notice after it had broken down. L's referral however lacked any soft information and gave little context around his needs and behaviours. Similar issues have been highlighted in the IPC's report where referrals were found to be largely deficit focused.

I therefore contacted the social worker by email requesting various amendments (Appendix 1). As this was not a same day emergency, I was also able to contact the social worker to discuss the reasons L's placement had broken down. One of which being poor matching alongside another young person placed there recently by another LA. As a result, the social worker was able to outline this in the referral to avoid a similar situation happening again.

Furthermore I suggested working collaboratively with L when writing the referral as the social worker was newly allocated. This is something that is lacking in referrals but can increase accuracy and soft information. This theory of co-production between service provider and service user has proven successful with some agencies now even involving service users in staff training and quality assurance (Susan Hunter, Pete Ritchie 2007).

As a result of contacting the social worker, the referral now included more soft information including L's strengths and gave context around his current behaviours. Moreover, the referral now included specific desired outcomes, one of which was for L to be supported in joining a local gym as suggested by L (Appendix 2). Specific outcomes-based commissioning is an area that commissioners are under increasing pressure to demonstrate as it can help prove the impact of services on the beneficiary (Social Finance, 2013).

On reflection, by challenging the information presented in referrals, placement officers can improve the overall commissioning process and outcomes for young people. However, there are limitations to this method and is not always realistic due to the emergency nature of many placements search requests.

Therefore, one way to respond could be additional mandatory referrals training offered to social work teams. Having completed the course, I now feel that placement officers are well-placed to contribute to referrals training and will endeavour to explore this further in the future.

Procuring the placement

Once the referral had been amended, I began the procurement process by sending the referral to semi-independent placement providers via the Care Place DPV. Once providers had submitted their responses, I began to assess each of the proposed options.

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As semi-independent placements are unregulated, I ensured each of the placements offered were all fully accredited by the Commissioning Alliance. I also made sure providers had each submitted the adequate documents including a completed placement proposal (Appendix 3) which lays out various details such as cost breakdown, synopsis of other residents and what support is offered. The proposal form is later sent in an email to the social work team and senior management as part of the placement search results (Appendix 4).

I then made further contact with each placement to negotiate the cost. I did so by framing their proposed costs as an annual fee rather than weekly so that when requesting for a £100's reduction per week, it appeared to be a more reasonable request. One of the providers agreed to this reduction however others were unable to negotiate on this occasion (Appendix 5). Once placement costs had been finalised I sent the placement offers in an email to the social work team and Head of Service for them to consider.

As mentioned, although L's placement had broken down, there was still a contractual seven-day termination notice which allowed enough time to arrange a selection meeting to help determine which placement option was most suitable based on criteria such as location, level of support, matching with the other young people currently in each of the placements and cost to care ratio.

The placement selection meeting took place and involved several professionals including the Independent Reviewing Officer and Head of Service. Attendees took it in turns to offer their opinions and I was also able to feedback my own experiences with each supplier and any historic placements we have made with them. A decision was made based on the location and past experiences with the chosen placement who had worked closely with another child looked after with similar needs to L and had made significant progress whilst there. After the meeting, arrangements were made for L to move.

From this meeting I gained a better understanding of expectations from various professionals. For example, one placement identified for L was immediately ruled out due to the location being a high-risk area for L by L's youth offending team worker. I was unaware of this information prior to the meeting but is useful for placement officers to be aware of.

On reflection, I felt it was important for me to instigate the placement selection meeting and was not something I've necessarily carried out before. However, reflecting on what I have learnt on the course, it would be helpful for me to do so more often where possible and to work more collaboratively with other professionals to gain further understanding of others expectations and views.

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Contract Management and Monitoring

Once L had been placed, the contract, or Individual Child Agreement (ICA), was issued to the provider via Care Place with the request for it to be signed and returned (Appendix 6). Providers are made aware that a signed copy of the ICA is required before any payments can be issued therefore incentivising them to complete this as soon as possible.

The ICA also includes a section for desired outcomes for the young person. Historically, this section was sent to the social worker to complete however, this would usually cause delays and social workers had fed back that any desired outcomes had already been discussed and agreed at the placement agreement meeting which takes place once the young person has moved in. During this meeting outcomes are agreed jointly between the young person, social worker, and placement staff and actions are noted. Therefore, in response the ICA is now sent immediately with a note asking the supplier to refer to the placement agreement meeting minutes (Appendix 7).

In hindsight, this could be problematic as the outcomes agreed in the placement agreement meeting may not necessarily be seen by the suppliers' contract management team who may have not had sight of the placement agreement meeting minutes and could lead to potential disagreements in the future. Therefore, reflecting on the importance of my role in contract monitoring I will now ask for a copy of the placement agreement meeting minutes and copy and paste this into the ICA before sending it in the future.

With the ICA now in place, L's placement would need to be monitored on a regular basis to ensure the placement are delivering appropriate care and are compliant with the contract. Therefore, as part of our post placement tasks, an invite is sent to the social worker to attend the monthly Access to Resources panel. This is an effective way to monitor the desired outcomes of each placement and allows social workers to provide feedback to senior managers/budget holders as well as the placements team. Various actions will be agreed from these meetings, such as for placement officers to negotiate costs if a young person is not utilising the support, or to send a termination notice to a placement that is due to end (Appendix 8).

However, although L's placement was purchased via a DPV and checks had been carried out on the placement by the Commissioning Alliance, the semi-independent market remains unregulated, and homes are not registered with Ofsted. And as outlined in the Children's Commissioners Report 2020 children in unregulated accommodation are some of the most forgotten, side-lined, and vulnerable children within the entire care system. Therefore, I agree that further regulation of semi-independent placements is crucial in tackling these concerns.

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Another responsibility I hold is to conduct monitoring visits to any placements purchased outside of the care place DPV (Appendix 9). However, this is only on an annual basis and on reflection social workers, who visit placements regularly may be in a better position to monitor placements. This is not always realistic nor within a social workers remit therefore, it may be useful for social workers to incorporate a placement outcomes-based monitoring template into their statutory visits and then provide feedback to placements teams who can evaluate this and take action.

Social workers may also be in a better position to provide holistic feedback incorporating not only an assessment of the placement itself and whether desired outcomes had been met, but also a young persons' emotional wellbeing or school attendance which could also be an indicator of any progress made whilst at placement. Using an assessment tool such as the Berri assessment may be one way collecting this information and a good way of informing commissioners on how well a placement is performing.

Reflective Commentary and Personal Development and Learning

Having completed the course I now have a better understanding of the importance of my role as a placement officer and how I can positively influence the commissioning process and social work practise.

Reflecting on the placement search for L, I feel that in the first stage of managing the referral, I was able to give advice and as a result amendment were made which undoubtedly had a significant effect on the entire commissioning process. However, this is not always possible due to timescales, therefore, I would like to take a pre-emptive step in the future and help organise and develop additional training for social workers so that referrals are consistently of a high standard. I will also aim to be more proactive in instigating placement selection meetings where suitable to incorporate different views to help determine the suitability of each placement.

Additionally, I could play a better role in contract monitoring by arranging regular contract management meetings as well working more closely with social workers who are the ones undertaking regular visits to the homes as well as receiving weekly reports from placement staff and speaking with the young person. Therefore, it is important for placement officers to work collaboratively as we rely on them for feedback. I will also aim to improve this process by suggesting an agreed monitoring process template which social workers can use during their visits and could also be shared with commissioning teams. One example could be the Berri assessment.

In conclusion, following this course I now see the importance of my role and how I can provide guidance and advice. I will therefore work more collaboratively with professionals and ensure best commissioning and brokerage processes are practised to improve the outcomes for young people especially in the 16+ market placed which remains unregulated.

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Appendices

*Insert supporting evidence as appendices here, they are not included in the word count. **You will only be able to upload one file to the assignment drop box in the VLE (Moodle).** Therefore EITHER copy and paste appendices here OR embed the file(s) here (recommended).*

Appendix 1 – Email requesting referral amendment	 Appendix%201.docx
Appendix 2 – Social worker confirms referral has been amended	 Appendix%202.docx
Appendix 3 – Example of a Placement Proposal form	 Placement%20Propo sal%20-%2016%20plu
Appendix 4 – Placement Offer Email	 Appendix%204.docx
Appendix 5 – Negotiated cost confirmation	 Appendix%205.docx
Appendix 6 – Request for signed copy of the ICA	 Appendix%206.docx
Appendix 7 – Example of ICA	 ICA.doc
Appendix 8 – Access to Resources actions example	 Appendix%208.docx
Appendix 9 – 16+ Monitoring Template	 16+%20Placement% 20Monitoring.doc

Please note the Institute of Public Care's [Confidentiality Policy](#): do not submit as appendices material that includes confidential information, such as the names of people who use services.

Click on the icon below for instructions on how to embed a file:



How to embed a file
in a Word document -

Note that you must include evidence of your work as an appendix