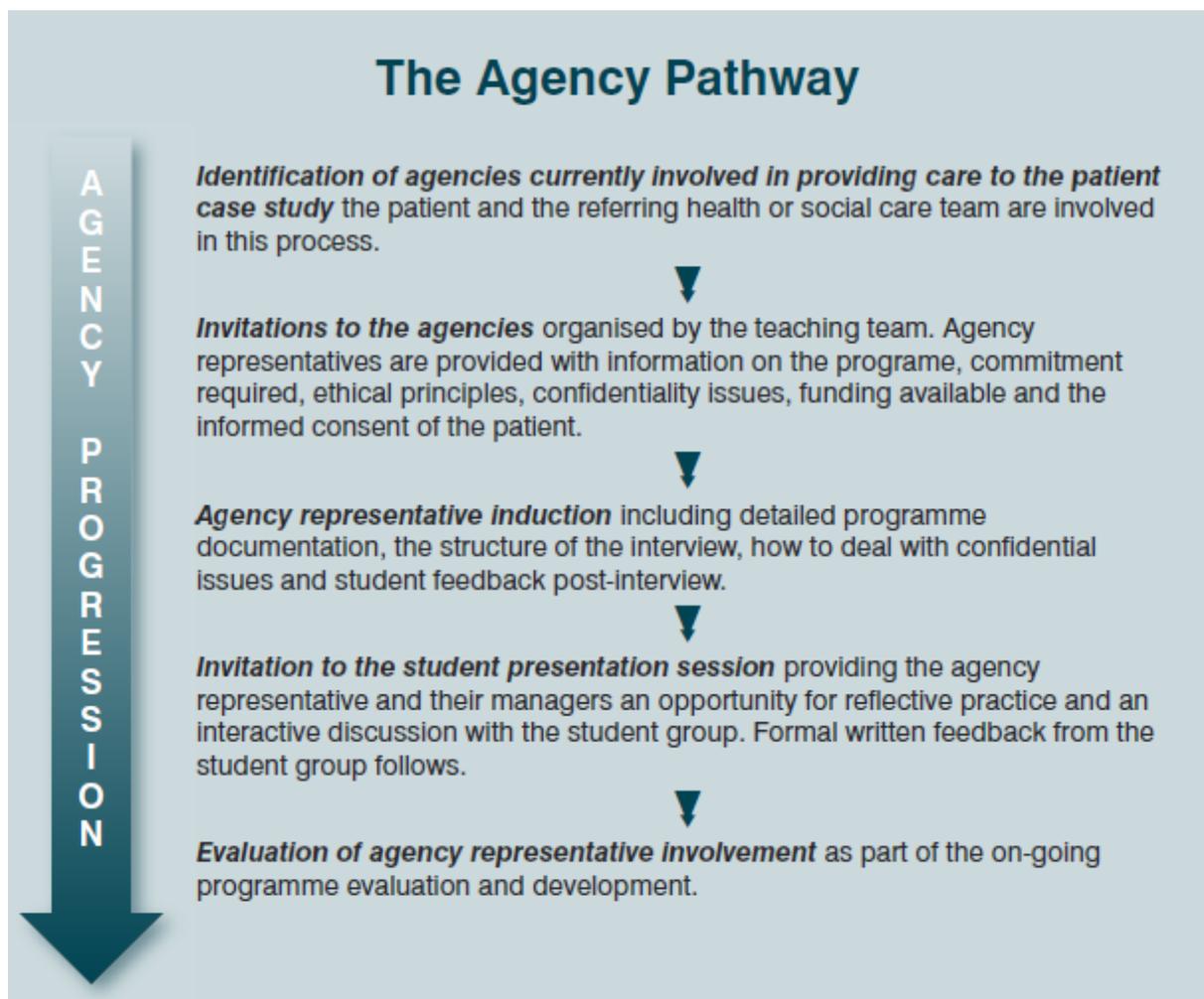


The Agency Pathway

Introduction

Interviews with a wide range of organisations provide students with a realistic, up-to-date critique of current issues in the service sector. These agencies and their representatives provide a first hand opportunity for students to see how the service is organised, quality assured and delivered. The agency pathway is summarised in Figure 8.

Figure 8: The agency pathway.



Agency Identification and Invitation

Agency involvement is identified by the patient. The tutor or academic co-ordinator will encourage the patient to choose a broad range of agencies across the statutory and voluntary sectors.

Discussions between the academic team and senior managers of agencies have ensured that individual representatives are fully supported throughout their involvement.

The aim of involvement of agency representatives is to facilitate students to explore the range, roles and responsibilities of agencies working to meet the needs of their patient as well as in the wider care setting. Students are expected to examine the quality and impact of

their service provision and to appreciate the importance of effective multi-disciplinary, collaborative care.

Agency Induction

Following identification, agency representatives are visited by the academic co-ordinator or locality tutor to provide a detailed account of the programme aims and objectives. They are informed on the nature of patient selection and induction, the ethical principles applied and the safeguards in place to uphold patient confidentiality. Information is also provided on their commitment to a 30-minute interview and the timing of this interview within the programme. They are advised that students will have identified the lines of questioning they wish to pursue, formulated by discussions with their patient. Tutors and agencies do not set the subject content of the interviews.

After initial contact, the agency representative receives a standard letter¹. Details include the venue, date and time of the interview, as well as providing basic information on the case study and contact details of tutor and university staff. Tutors and administrators plan interviews to accommodate work patterns. Where possible interviews take place in the agency setting to minimise the disruption to daily commitments and to provide students with experience of their working environment. Representatives involved in the programmes are reimbursed to cover the loss of activity to the organisation or individual.

Interview Strategies

Agency representatives are instructed that they should only respond to information presented by the students i.e. information students have directly gathered from the patient. They are informed that it is not appropriate to divulge information about their case away from the context of the students' line of questioning. Information held by the agency but not declared by the patient to the student group must therefore be held in the strictest confidence at all times. If the agency representative feels uncomfortable about releasing information it is appropriate for the representative to state that the information cannot be divulged. If the student group has misinterpreted information gained in the patient interview, the agency representative may feel it appropriate to correct the student views. On the rare occasion when the representative has concerns about the interview they are instructed to inform the tutor as soon as possible.

Case Study Presentations and Feedback

Agency representatives and their managers are invited to the interactive case study presentations. This supports student learning but also provides an opportunity for reflective practice and networking. Agency representatives are also provided with written student feedback which summarises their perceptions of the strengths and limitations of current care and their recommendations for future care².

Agency Evaluation

With ethical approval, the involvement of agencies is recorded in formal and informal evaluation studies. Informal feedback is sought from the agency representative after each interview; formal evaluation is carried out during the development of new programmes. This information feeds into the education steering group.

¹ See *Templates of Forms and Letters* (Template Nine: Agency Confirmation Letter).

² See *Templates of Forms and Letters* (Template Nine: Agency Confirmation Letter).

Extended Roles of Agency Representatives

Representatives may additionally be involved in the programme as locality tutors or through the hosting of student induction visits.