

Worcestershire/Herefordshire ASYE partnership case study

Case studies and resources to illustrate the implementation of continuing professional development in social work



This case study illustrates how a regional partnership approach including a voluntary sector partner with the local universities can deliver academic awards that meet the needs of the workforce cost effectively. This is achieved by the support of an external university offering a shell module. The CPD approach is a hybrid one with assessment of capability in practice and an optional academic award. The development of the module has influenced and supported the dissemination and integration of the PCF in supervision and appraisal, and supported the development of reflective supervision and practice across the organisation.

The partnership

The partnership covers employers Worcestershire and Herefordshire county councils and academic partners NEW College and Worcester University. Worcestershire and Herefordshire have a long history of working together dating back to 1998 when it was one local authority. The academic partners have, until this point, delivered qualifying programmes but have not delivered post-qualifying training. To support this development the partnership has also included Bournemouth University. The partnership has further extended its membership to include a voluntary sector partner, St Richards's hospice. The benefits of this have been:

- NQSWs employed by the hospice have been able to access elements of the Worcestershire ASYE programme. This has given the opportunity to extend a consistent approach to ASYE across the sector.
- the Hospice has a proven record in training delivery and we have been able to incorporate this within our own training programme as well as offering the hospice access to our training, such as 'Enabling Others'

- the hospice is taking on increasingly complex work and as a result will be recruiting greater numbers of social work staff who will need to access CPD opportunities.

The partnership was developed to support the implementation of ASYE and has built upon the framework adopted for this. The content for the CPD module was recognised by senior managers within the local authorities to be a key skills gap. A module was developed to support community capacity building, incorporating the interpersonal skills necessary to develop practice in this area. The initial aim was for this to be set at the social worker level of the PCF and for this to be the first module undertaken post-ASYE. The project offered the opportunity to build upon the ASYE model and test it in relation to post-qualifying learning, development and CPD.

CPD approach

Both authorities have developed an approach where the key principle is the assessment of capability in practice. This is underpinned by an academic assessment of the ability of the social worker to critically reflect on their practice.

This assessment strategy is therefore a partnership approach between the employer and the HEI. The partnership was able to work with Bournemouth University by using a “shell” module—that is, the content and delivery were agreed with Bournemouth University and they continued to hold the assessment and accreditation of the module. In practice this has meant that local HEI partners and employers have been able to deliver awards under the umbrella of Bournemouth University at reduced cost and with increased flexibility. Importantly, this has also meant that the development of the awards is tailored to local need.

In this instance a hybrid approach was developed that gave the employer and the social worker the choice of assessment in practice alone, or to add the academic element. Using a hybrid model of CPD recognised that not all social workers would be able or want to complete an academic award.

There was general agreement that in order for there to be a holistic assessment there had to be a focus upon the feedback from social workers’ supervisors. They were the only people able to provide a holistic view of the social workers’ practice.

The assessment of the academic module has therefore taken two forms:

- a portfolio that focuses on work products, observation and feedback that is verified by the supervisor
- an academic piece focusing on a critical reflection of practice.

In order for the assessment to be holistic the following are included:

- feedback from people being supported
- [direct observations](#) including an observation by someone other than the line manager
- a [testimonial](#) that is completed by a person being supported, carer or other professional.

To assist the holistic assessment of practice and to encourage a personalised approach to learning and development, social workers on the module undertook a self-assessment of their capability against the PCF.

They were encouraged to use this as a basis of discussion with their line manager.

This was also used to identify areas of development for which they sought feedback from the direct observation or the testimonial, and for an action plan linked to project learning outcomes.

This is the first time that many managers will have assessed their staff against the new professional capabilities framework, so additional support sessions with the module tutors were provided for managers.

Impact assessment

A baseline evaluation was undertaken at the start of the module by NEW College and University of Worcester tutors using the [‘Wisconsin’ model](#) with the intention that the Learning, Development & Wellbeing team will evaluate the longer term outcomes and organisational impact with line managers after six months.

The long term CPD model

As the development of the module has progressed, the partnership has identified that it is part of a wider CPD strategy. The project has enabled us to recognise that academic modules are only one method of CPD and that not all social workers will find that it is their preferred learning style.

There is still a need for the PCF to be incorporated into the supervision, assessment and appraisal of all social workers. This is at an early stage for the partnership but some of the work carried out so far includes:

- sessions being held in teams, rather than as large events, to support the introduction of the PCF for all social workers
- all front line managers being encouraged to complete ‘Enabling Others’ modules to support their on-going assessment of social workers’ practice
- the partnership holding additional sessions for managers to introduce the PCF and its use in supervision and appraisal.

One of the key challenges will be to support a culture change across social work to develop a more reflective model of supervision.

As a result of this Worcestershire is currently reviewing its supervision policy to check that it is in line and meets the requirements of the

Standards for Employers and Supervision framework.

This work has included updating the adult social work supervision pro-forma to include the PCF. Two front line managers and supervisors of staff undertaking the CPD module have been piloting this.

Work is also underway to develop a supervision audit tool. It is proposed that team managers should undertake four audits a year of front line managers' supervision records to check for evidence of learning and development discussion linked to the PCF.

The challenge for us is that the PCF doesn't currently link or easily align with the generic corporate staff review and development processes.

There are difficulties in persuading the agency of the need to change these, given that social workers are only a small part of the wider county council workforce.

The module was oversubscribed; initial evaluation indicates that social workers were motivated by the focus of the learning and the opportunity to be able to obtain academic credit.

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