



# **Concept to reality: Implementation of the ASYE with social workers in adult services**

Evaluation of the ASYE - Summary Report

December 2013

**Written by Host Policy Research**

**Published by Skills for Care**

*Concept to reality: implementation of the ASYE with social workers in adult services*

***Concept to reality: implementation of the ASYE with social workers in adult services***

Published by Skills for Care, West Gate, 6 Grace Street, Leeds LS1 2RP [www.skillsforcare.org.uk](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk)

© **Skills for Care 2013**

**Reference no. R066**

Copies of this work may be made for non-commercial distribution to aid social care workforce development. Any other copying requires the permission of Skills for Care.

Skills for Care is the employer-led strategic body for workforce development in social care for adults in England. It is part of the sector skills council, Skills for Care and Development.

This work was researched and compiled by Host Policy Research.

*Concept to reality: implementation of the ASYE with social workers in adult services*

# Table of contents

<b>Introduction</b>	
<b>1. Overview of research methods</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2. Key findings from the research</b>	
2.1 Communication about the ASYE and provision of support materials	3
2.2 Delivery and assessment	10
2.3 Benefits and issues	19
<b>3. Conclusions and next steps</b>	<b>23</b>

## Introduction

Skills for Care commissioned HOST Policy Research (HOST) to independently evaluate the implementation of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE).

The evaluation of the implementation year of the ASYE in adult services presents an encouraging picture of a real commitment by staff and Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) to embed the process and ensure it reflects local practice as well as national professional standards.

It should be borne in mind that the evaluation was based on the implementation year of a new framework and as such it would be expected that there would be lessons to be learned. Recognising that, the evaluation interim reports outlined a number of early formative recommendations that Skills for Care were able to action. Although this evaluation was commissioned by Skills for Care, it is acknowledged that due to the generic nature of the ASYE that where the recommendation suggests an action for Skills for Care that this will require working in partnership with the Department for Education and The College of Social Work.

# 1. Overview of research methods

Following ADASS and local research governance approval processes, surveys were conducted with the 117 NQSWs and 56 supervisors/assessors who consented to participate in the evaluation. Those in Cohort One (from the first round of registrations during September/October 2012) completed initial, interim and final questionnaires. Those in Cohort 2 (from the second round of registrations during January-March 2013) completed the initial and interim questionnaires.

Interviews took place with 12 non-participating employers comprising Local Authorities and Private, Voluntary and Independent organisations (PVI) to determine the reason for their non-engagement. At two stages in the evaluation discussions took place with members of the Virtual Reference Group. Nine case studies describing the implementation of the ASYE in a variety of rural and urban settings and highlighting areas of transferable effective practice and views of NQSWs, assessors/supervisors, managers and Practice Educators, were conducted. The evaluation was informed by a review of reports relating to the previous NQSW Programmes.

## 2. Key findings from the research

The findings are presented under three main headings:

- Communication about the ASYE and provision of support materials.
- Delivery and assessment.
- Benefits and Issues.

### 2.1 Communication about the ASYE and provision of support materials

**Key findings from the evaluation include:**

Just over a half of NQSWs initially found out about the ASYE from their employer. The other main source of information was their university.

The majority of NQSWs got involved in the ASYE initially because it was an employer requirement.

Almost a third of supervisors/assessors were involved in the delivery of the previous NQSW Programme.

Almost two thirds of supervisors/assessors had received training for their role in the ASYE. At the time of the interim questionnaire, just under a third had received further training, and by the final questionnaire a half had received further training.

Where supervisors and assessors had seen the supporting documents available from the Skills for Care website, the vast majority had found them very or fairly useful, particularly the learning agreement. However, there were large numbers of supervisors and assessors who had not seen the documentation.

Over a third of supervisors/assessors and just under a fifth of NQSWs had not used the Skills for Care website. Where they had done so, just over a tenth of both NQSWs and supervisors/assessors found the website not easy to navigate.

The main initial source of information for NQSWs was Skills for Care, but well over a half of NQSWs were dependent on information on the ASYE from within their work setting. Following the completion of their learning agreement this work-based focus increased.

The main initial source of information for over a half of supervisors/assessors was from within their work setting. By the time of the interim questionnaire the main source was Skills for Care.

Approximately a third of NQSWs and their supervisors/assessors felt the scheme and its benefits had not been very clearly described by their employer.

Initially two fifths of NQSWs and a fifth of supervisors/assessors indicated that they did not have enough information on the ASYE and at the time of the interim questionnaire just over a quarter of NQSWs and just under a fifth of supervisors/assessors still required further information on the ASYE.

According to responses from the initial questionnaire, just over half of NQSWs found out about the ASYE from their employer, indeed the majority of NQSWs overall became involved in the ASYE because it was an employer requirement. It is encouraging that a third of those NQSWs in Cohort Two got involved through their own choice.

The other main source of information at the time of the initial questionnaire for almost two fifths of NQSWs was from their university. This relatively low figure was almost certainly because the majority of the information on the ASYE was published in September 2012 when most universities had lost, or were losing, contact with their students. In future it would be expected that universities would feature more prominently in providing information on the ASYE, indeed the Department for Education and Skills for Care expect this as part of the preparation of students from study to workplace.

### **Evidence from the case studies demonstrating the important role of universities in preparing student social workers**

#### **Transition from student to social worker**

In Redcar and Cleveland there was evidence that Universities are playing a key role explaining the ASYE to their student social workers. One assessor commented on how well informed their NQSW's had been by their Universities:

*'Every applicant knows and asks about ASYE - they now come to us expecting quality support and commitment. This can only be a good thing for the service'*

## Recommendation

1. Skills for Care contact the universities and make sure that they are aware of the available materials and will communicate that information to their students as part of the transition process.

At the time of the interim questionnaire, the main source of information on the ASYE for NQSWs was their assessor (21%). For supervisors and assessors, however, at the time of the interim questionnaire their main source of information was Skills for Care (68%).

Skills for Care ran a series of presentations on the ASYE which the lead officers from employer organisations were invited to attend; we have no verifiable information on how effective the subsequent dissemination to their employees was, especially those who would be charged with supervising and/or assessing NQSWs under the ASYE.

It is however clear from the findings that individual NQSWs in the implementation year of the ASYE were dependent on information from their work setting. From the initial questionnaire, over a quarter of NQSWs considered the description of the ASYE from their employer as 'not clear', and a quarter of supervisors/assessors felt the same.

From discussions that took place at the Skills for Care area workshops and the case study interviews, it is clear that many organisations have downloaded, and continue to download, Skills for Care material, adjusting it for their own purposes and then re-branding it. Readers and users of this material would not necessarily know who had produced the original documents. For this reason when NQSWs, were asked whether they had seen documents from the Skills for Care website, their responses may reflect this. Large numbers of respondents had not seen the individual documents directly relevant to them that were mentioned in the questionnaire. It should also be noted, that significant numbers of supervisors/assessors had not seen the materials on the website and others did not answer the question.

It may be unwise to draw too many conclusions from this. A newly introduced framework by its very nature will involve considerable documentation all of which would be new to those who are involved in implementation. It is possible that some NQSWs and their supervisors/assessors were still familiarising themselves with the necessary record keeping and different approach from the previous framework and may be confused; any subsequent follow up by Skills for Care however should be able to better illuminate this detail.

## **Evidence from the case studies in the practical use of support materials**

### **Making good use of the available support materials**

In Cumbria, the ASYE support material initially available from Skills for Care was viewed as very informative, simple to comprehend and enabled both NQSWs and those that are mentoring, assessing and supervising their work, to understand what was required within the ASYE. This material continues to assist individuals and their line managers with the transition from qualifying to the workplace, and NQSWs are actively encouraged to look at the case studies and determine how the experience of others can be transferred to their situation and assist their professional development. Stemming from reading this, NQSWs report they have been able to better understand the Professional Capability Framework (PCF), capability statements and what they, as individuals, should be able to accomplish in the short, medium and long term. Skills for Care are seen as very much the drivers of the ASYE and good use has been made of the various templates available which have been adapted to fit with the local needs.

### **Presenting key documents in an accessible format**

In Southampton, to facilitate access to key documents a local ASYE handbook was produced. This captured, in one place, all key aspects of the programme and explained how it was to be delivered. It included the learning agreement, details and dates of the support available, contact details of key personnel, protected time, assessment requirements and FAQs. Similar handbooks were produced for assessors, line managers and supervisors and all were well received

### **Available resource materials and a systematic approach**

In Redcar and Cleveland, it was felt very strongly that the Skills for Care materials brought a more systematic approach to the development, assessment and review process of NQSWs than had hitherto existed. By using the same materials, and with the support of the Tees Valley Partnership, employers are interpreting assessment requirements in a more consistent way. This has real benefits to employers and to staff who may wish to transfer from one authority to another.

The perceived quality and usefulness of support materials, particularly those downloaded from the Skills for Care website was good, particularly the learning agreement and the exemplar completed agreement. These helped clarify the management and timing of the support which was to be provided to the ASYE candidates. In addition, its use enabled emerging problems to be identified and addressed at an early stage through the review process.

There is clearly an issue regarding the Skills for Care website, where difficulties in navigation were reported from a number of those currently involved in the ASYE and those who are not presently engaged. This is evident from all the survey responses received and appears to be more than just familiarisation with the site. It should be noted that Skills for Care is in the process of launching a new web site which is already taking into account the interim recommendations.

## **Recommendations**

2. Employers review the information they hold internally on the ASYE and how that information is presented to NQSWs, their supervisors/assessors and line managers. This should include links to sources of information including the Skills for Care and The College of Social Work (TCSW) websites. The case studies have provided examples of how this might be approached.

3. Employers who work closely with each other and local agencies consider the co-ordination of the information and general support provided. This recognises that some NQSWs and their supervisors/assessors may work across several organisations.

4. Skills for Care to develop a formal dissemination strategy to ensure that the individuals involved in the ASYE are told about the website and the materials that can be accessed there, especially the case studies, when they register for the ASYE. This could be by means of a 'sources of information' document signposting the available materials. Such a direct method is likely to be more effective than relying on a cascade effect from the employer which does not appear to have been an efficient method in the implementation year.

5. Skills for Care conduct a professional review of the website. This should include the way the material is presented and the signposting of materials to appropriate individuals such that there is clear indication of the intended audience (NQSWs, supervisors/assessors, employers and more general enquires). This might be achieved, for example, by regrouping and rebadging materials according to the intended audiences, such that the initial ASYE screen starts with a simple menu choice according to the person viewing. Then the selection takes an individual again to an uncluttered screen with clearly named documents.

6. When the website has been reviewed/reconfigured it might be appropriate for a website guide/toolkit to be produced to make navigation easier for each of the main ASYE audiences. However, if the website is reconfigured and properly tested for ease of use then there may be no need for this.

At the time of the initial questionnaire, 40 per cent of NQSWs overall indicated that they did not have enough information on the ASYE and there was little difference between responses from the two Cohorts. Similarly, 22 per cent of supervisors/assessors overall felt they did not have enough information on the ASYE initially to fulfil their role. To some extent this would be expected at the early stages in the implementation of the ASYE and given the perception of the speed at which it was introduced. The initial need was largely centred on process issues, how to evidence requirements, complete proformas, etc. For example:

*'How to evidence/what is classed as evidence. Proformas that my employer want us to use'*

*'A simple guide is needed with a check list of what is actually required, with step by step instructions. An on-line assessment tool listing requirements that can be submitted during and at the end would also be useful'*

*'There has been little information from our employers about how to complete the portfolio, so we are left with little clarity about what is expected of us. When we ask, it appears that our managers do not know either. I take responsibility for not doing research on ASYE, but I was not even aware that there was a website/ on-line resource'*

In responses to the interim questionnaire, just over a quarter of NQSWs and just under a fifth of supervisors/assessors overall indicated that there was still a shortfall in required information on the ASYE. At this point, whilst there were still queries from NQSWs in relation to portfolios and general clarification on processes and roles, the focus from supervisors/assessors was on clearer guidance and progress of candidates through the ASYE process and assessment rather than generic issues.

This suggests that individuals need different information at different points in time. There also needs to be an effective method of notifying audiences that new information is available on the Skills for Care website, and the simplest way might be through a dedicated ASYE RSS feed so that individuals who sign up to it get an automatic notification when additions are made to the ASYE materials.

## **Evidence from the case studies in relation to cascading information about the ASYE through the organisation**

### **The importance of internal communications**

On the whole, staff at Blackburn and Darwen feel that communications have been very strong at a local level. The workforce development team have been proactive in providing Practice Educators with relevant information on the ASYE and they, in turn, filter this and pass it on to NQSWs and/or their managers either using the regular development meetings or through group e-mails. In addition, the workforce development team have put on training sessions and are happy to answer questions or provide individual support when needed. Issues that come up through supervision have been passed on to the training team who have then ensured that the areas are covered in subsequent development meetings. Topics have included the Learning Agreement, writing up case studies, dealing with difficult clients, preparing for hearings. Practice Educators and managers also attended a Lancashire-wide training event on the introduction of the ASYE earlier in the year.

### **Central co-ordination for the ASYE**

A critical feature of the success of the Local Authority's approach in Southampton was the establishment of central coordination for the programme. In practice this is shared by the Service Manager (Adults) and the learning and development lead. Several respondents identified the coordination function as pivotal, particularly as this was a new and potentially complex development programme. The hands-on model of the coordinators afforded a rapid response to questions - as one assessor noted: 'I always got an answer within 24 hours'.

Operationally, the learning and development lead planned, coordinated, arranged workshops advised the Practice Assessors, delivered reflective practice support and conducted second marking. Everything was clearly documented including session hand outs, assessment documents, due dates, handbooks and ASYE files. Having clear lines of responsibility was viewed very positively in that it simplified communication and eased implementation. As a result, all participants knew who to contact if issues arose.

## Recommendations

7. The establishment of an RSS feed just for the ASYE pages of the Skills for Care website so that individuals receive up-to-date information that is directly relevant to their situation.

8. Employers take steps to ensure that NQSWs and their assessors/supervisors have all the information they need throughout the different stages of the ASYE, not just when they register. This should reflect the fact that they have different information needs at individual points in time (e.g. on registration, prior to three and/or six month assessments, in preparation for final assessment etc.)

## 2.2 Delivery and assessment

### Key findings from the evaluation include:

Just over half of NQSWs felt reflective supervision had met their expectations but just over a quarter stated not always. At the time of the initial questionnaire, almost all NQSWs had agreed the frequency and duration of their supervision sessions. The vast majority of supervisors/assessors confirmed overall supervision sessions were being delivered in accordance with those agreements and this was confirmed by NQSWs.

Halfway through their ASYE, just under two thirds of NQSWs said they were receiving sufficient feedback on their progress.

The vast majority of NQSWs stated their supervision was supporting their reflective practice either very or quite well.

Midway through their ASYE just under a third of NQSWs were not clear what they had to do to meet the standard and pass the final assessment.

The majority of supervisors/assessors were very or fairly confident in their ability to provide reflective professional supervision. At the time of the interim questionnaire almost a half felt they were not receiving enough supervision and support from their employer to help them deliver reflective professional supervision. By the final questionnaire, just over two fifths felt the support received for their supervision/assessment activities did not meet their expectations.

The majority of NQSWs found their experience of workload management to be positive initially though this had dropped slightly by the time of the interim questionnaire.

*Concept to reality: implementation of the ASYE with social workers in adult services*

For most, their experience was how they had expected workload management to take place. By the final questionnaire only just under a half said their workload management was conducted as set out in their learning agreement.

For just under three quarters of supervisors/assessors workload management was proceeding as they had originally anticipated and in the final questionnaire over three quarters of supervisors/assessors stated the workload management was either very or quite effective.

The majority of NQSWs and supervisors/assessors stated protected development time was as set out in their learning agreement.

The vast majority of NQSWs and supervisors/assessors were aware of the PCF and standards described for the ASYE and consider the capability statements as either very or fairly suitable. The vast majority of supervisors/assessors confirmed progressive assessment against the standards described in the PCF is taking place and were also very or quite confident in their ability to assess against the standards and to provide holistic assessment.

Just over half of NQSWs and three quarters of supervisors/assessors had found it very or quite easy to change from a competency-based assessment to holistic assessment for capability. Just over three quarters of NQSWs and the majority of supervisors indicated that that in the development of professional judgement and confidence a holistic rather than competency-based assessment is preferable.

Almost three quarters of supervisors/assessors considered their employer's arrangement for assuring the quality of assessment decisions worked very or quite well.

A key dimension of the induction and probation process is for NQSWs to establish an open discourse with their supervisors. Some organisations have established 'Learning Sets' of NQSWs for people to discuss expectations and experiences.<sup>1</sup> The majority of survey respondents expected workload management to be a significant part of their supervision, however it was clear that workloads and employer approaches to the management of workloads varies considerably across the country.

Evidence from the good practice identified in the case studies suggested that given that there is not a definitive workload management system that can determine fair workloads, it is crucial that expectations about workloads are part of every session between NQSWs and their supervisors. These conversations should address what caseload NQSWs are being allocated and whether it is manageable.

---

<sup>1</sup> Evidence from case studies and observation at the ASYE workshops by Skills for Care.  
*Concept to reality: implementation of the ASYE with social workers in adult services*

## **Evidence from the case studies in relation to workload management**

### **Developing a tool for workload management**

In order to ensure that all involved in the process have the necessary time to discharge their professional responsibilities, Norfolk have developed a tool that enables them to quantify the amount of time needed by activity (for example, supervision, assessments, protected time and case work) and to calculate the staffing requirements for each team. This has been in operation for a few months and will be reviewed in the autumn.

The issue of workload management is linked to the requirement for protected development time as a heavy caseload will impinge on the NQSWs ability to take advantage of study time. The majority of NQSWs and supervisors/assessors stated that protected development time was as set out in the learning agreement. We have seen the importance that supervisors/assessors have placed on the example learning agreements and guidance notes that are available from Skills for Care. These could be reviewed to ensure the requirement for agreed caseload and protected development time is clear.

## **Evidence from the case studies in relation to protected development time**

### **Regular protected development time**

To signal the importance Blackburn with Darwen places on supporting the ASYE, one Friday each month an afternoon is set aside for NQSW development. The session runs from 1pm until 5pm, but the senior social workers who deliver training are there only between 2pm and 4pm. The intention is that the first and last hours can be used by NQSWs to work on their portfolios or to discuss issues amongst themselves, offering peer-to-peer support. Any concerns or unresolved issues can then be raised with the senior social workers. It is important that these meetings are 'off-site' to ensure this time is uninterrupted by case work.

On the whole, managers have been supportive of the approach but work pressures have meant that NQSWs tend to arrive at 2pm for the formal session, although they do stay on afterwards. An important aspect of the approach is that those leading the sessions are not managers and emphasise that they are all in practice and still learning and developing; this encourages NQSWs to be open about the challenges they encounter. For NQSWs, knowing that they are expected to attend the regular sessions keeps the ASYE process high on their radar and prevents it being side-lined due to pressure of case loads.

As NQSWs join the authority, they join in with the existing group rather than a new group being constituted for them. This enables the new employees to learn from the experiences of others who are slightly ahead of them as well as giving confidence to the more advanced ones who realise how far they have come.

### **Recommendations**

9. Skills for Care issue further guidance in relation to what constitutes effective workload management and what protected development time should entail. This should be linked to our later recommendation on the training and development of supervisors/assessors.

10. Employers should ensure that workload management is regularly reviewed internally to ensure caseloads are manageable and that NQSWs feel able to take their protected development time.

11. Skills for Care review the Learning Agreement template and the guidance notes to ensure these issues are adequately covered within them. The importance of the Learning Agreement needs to be further stressed in communications with key audiences.

At the early stages of the evaluation, responses to the initial questionnaires showed high levels of awareness of the Professional Capability Framework (PCF) and the standards described for the ASYE were considered suitable for the participating NQSWs. As time has progressed and the PCF has become embedded in the ASYE supervisory processes, the interim and final questionnaire responses suggest a very positive appreciation of the individual capability statements as confidence to deliver the ASYE increases. Just over three quarters of NQSWs and the majority of supervisors indicated that that in the development of professional judgement and confidence a holistic rather than competency-based assessment is preferable.

### **Evidence from the case studies in relation to the Professional Capability Framework (PCF)**

#### **Integrating knowledge with the PCF**

Lewisham were not involved in the previous NQSW process and although this had advantages in that there were not two frameworks being implemented simultaneously, it also meant that they had no experience of managing a formal process for the NQSW's transition year. The starting point for line managers and Practice Educators was therefore a better understanding of how NQSWs move from Student to Practitioner, how to support NQSWs to establish coping mechanisms and sound post-qualification skills

such as record keeping, report writing, case management and time management. They were then able to mesh this knowledge with the requirements of the PCF and their roles and responsibilities within the ASYE. This was underpinned by a two day training course in reflective practice and on-going and regular meetings with those carrying out a similar role in the neighbouring boroughs of Bromley and Sutton. The latter in particular has enabled Lewisham to exchange effective practice and use as informal moderation which is in addition to the internal formal moderation/quality assurance protocol already established. Lewisham are working with partners to create an overarching moderation which includes an external element but this has not yet been finalised.

At the time of the initial questionnaire both NQSWs and supervisors/assessors were clear on their expectations of what should be included in reflective supervision and the majority of NQSWs had agreed the frequency and duration of their supervision sessions. By the interim questionnaire, however, 'constructive challenge' and 'feedback from people who use services' had gone down significantly (from 62% to 31%). This is potentially an issue for holistic assessment as service user feedback is an important part of developing professional social work practice. The survey results suggest a lack of coherence in approach to obtaining service user feedback which needs to be addressed.

### **Recommendations**

12. In order to develop a solid approach to holistic assessment, guidance is developed to facilitate the gathering of service user feedback. This should contain the types of approaches that could be used and also exemplar proformas for gathering consistent information.

13. Employers review their approach to obtaining service user feedback to ensure it is fit for purpose and supports holistic assessment.

The majority of supervisors/assessors were confident in their ability to conduct reflective supervision and holistic assessment based on their previous experience and expertise. However, the evaluation findings suggest that additional training may be required and indeed from the case studies we have identified a number of areas where this approach has been taken with successful outcomes. This leads to another area central to successful delivery of the ASYE which is support.

## **Evidence from the case studies in relation to holistic assessment**

### **Holistic assessment in practice**

Staff at Poole believe they have developed a sound model for the ASYE which is firmly rooted in holistic assessment, considers examples of professional practice in a range of different settings and contexts, and is undertaken by a number of experienced assessors. This is underpinned by partnership networking and collaboration which reinforces the multi-disciplined approach of the Authority and its neighbouring boroughs. The process is constantly evolving and different ways are being identified to ensure that not only are NQSWs being supported, but also those who have line management/assessment responsibilities for the NQSWs such as supervisors and Practice Educators. Any achievement in implementation so far is felt to be because of the balance achieved between reflection and action, and because individuals involved in the ASYE are well supported. NQSWs report that they are enjoying the ASYE and fully understand its aims and that it is particularly helping them to network efficiently and to monitor their own work.

### **The importance of regular assessment**

Assessments of NQSWs in Lewisham are conducted regularly with the underpinning theme being to what extent an NQSW is contributing to service quality and development. NQSWs are observed in a range of different settings, at different times and conducted by different observers though always with those who are familiar with the PCF. NQSWs are subsequently asked to critically reflect on their performance and in what way this has contributed to their professional expertise.

### **Assessment and feedback from service users**

Within Poole feedback from service users has been incorporated in assessment areas such as direct observation and NQSWs are encouraged to submit letters or feedback they have received as individuals. Currently there is a debate within the Authority about the function of feedback - is it merely as evidence to support the ASYE or has it a wider purpose which incorporates real meaning to service users? Currently feedback that naturally occurs is seen as more valuable and more relevant than orchestrated responses such as questionnaires.

The Social Work Reform Board (SWRB) listed the support expectations for the ASYE within the requirements in the Employer Standards and Supervision Framework<sup>2</sup> with the overall expectation that this applies to employers, supervisors, and social workers.

An important thread of the ASYE is therefore that the learning agreement completed at the start establishes the:

- Frequency of reflective supervision.
- A professional development plan.
- Statement on reduced workloads in the first year of employment to accommodate this.

The final questionnaire asked supervisors/assessors in Cohort One how well the provision of reflective professional supervision with their NQSWs had worked and all respondents indicated it had worked 'very' or 'quite well'.

Only two fifths of supervisors/assessors felt they were getting adequate support from their employer. From the case studies the picture varies with some supervisors/assessors indicating that the support they received was well structured and regular while for others it was structured but less effective. Overall the NQSWs interviewed during the case studies reported feeling well supported, having their learning agreements reviewed regularly, and their learning needs met.

## **Evidence from the Case Studies in relation to the training of supervisors and assessors**

### **Developing good quality supervision**

Norfolk County Council provided training for supervisors at the start of the programme, with additional training provided by the University of East Anglia (UEA) linked to the three-monthly milestones. The training sessions focus on supervision and assessment skills, the expectations of each stage and the evidence requirements, including guidance on completing the paperwork. UEA also provide supporting material and guidance. Supervisors have the option of submitting a reflective essay exploring how their involvement with the ASYE has improved their own practice, which attracts 20 credits towards a Masters degree. The UEA training and materials are closely linked to the PCF expectations. Norfolk believe strongly that good quality supervision is central to the ASYE process, as well as being fundamental to professional practice for experienced social workers, yet the skills needed to be a good supervisor do not come

<sup>2</sup> Support expectations for the ASYE within the requirements in the Employer Standards and Supervision Framework , dated October 2013 available on Local Government Association Website at [http://www.local.gov.uk/workforce/-/journal\\_content/56/10180/3511605/](http://www.local.gov.uk/workforce/-/journal_content/56/10180/3511605/)

naturally to everyone. Consequently, Norfolk is currently exploring introducing a professional development pathway for supervisors.

### **The importance of training provision**

In Lewisham, Practice Educators and line managers were offered training to familiarise themselves with the ASYE and this was welcomed in part because the post qualification world in Adult Services is not seen as well developed as in Children's Services and so this has allowed a clearer professional identity to be established. Line managers interviewed felt that because of the support and information they have received about the ASYE they have become better supervisors and now able to see the value of well conducted supervision for an NQSW within the induction year.

### **Recommendations**

14. Skills for Care review the guidance on training provision for supervisors/assessors to ensure it allows for further development and support for those with less experience and/or new to that role, including an understanding of how to support the development of reflective practice. There also needs to be explicit guidance for employers on providing support to supervisors/assessors to enable them to do their supervision/assessment duties effectively.

15. Employers, recognising the central role of supervisors/assessors, ensure that sufficient support is in place to enable the effectiveness of that role. This includes providing supportive management, but also a review of training needs which will vary according to the individual experience of the supervisor/assessor. Where employers work with others locally, the provision of training might be developed and delivered cost-effectively across the organisations.

In relation to assuring the quality of the assessment decision, it is encouraging to note that the early survey responses reported some processes in place to support this and at the time of the final questionnaire, almost three quarters of supervisors/assessors indicated their employers' arrangement for assuring the quality of the assessment decisions worked 'very' or 'quite well', though a quarter stated it did not. It should be noted however, that at the time of the final survey not all assessment processes were completed so this is only a partial picture.

## **Evidence from the case studies in relation to the quality of the assessment decision**

### **Quality assurance of assessment decisions**

Blackburn with Darwen recognises the 'high-stakes' nature of the assessment and the consequent need to ensure that decisions are fair and consistent; on the other hand, they fully support the concept that managers are best placed to make professional judgements about NQSWs' practice. Managers being accompanied on occasion by Senior Leaders and one observation being conducted by another professional, help to ensure consistency in judgements. Blackburn with Darwen is working closely with their sub-regional partners, Blackpool Council and Lancashire County Council, as well as the University of Central Lancashire, to ensure a consistency of approach across the area. Panels will be held with membership from each of the above organisations to review portfolios and assessments, which will include the reflective essay that will already have been marked by the University. The purpose of the panel is not to 're-mark' any components, but to quality assure the process. Further quality assurance will be provided by the University's accreditation processes as portfolios meeting the required standard will constitute a completed module of a post graduate certificate in social work.

### **Ensuring the fairness and robustness of final decisions**

Norfolk County Council puts considerable emphasis on quality assuring the ASYE process. Observations are carried out by more than one person and the three and six month reviews are checked by team managers. Practice consultants and team managers can turn to the learning and development consultant and to heads of social care for support and advice in making judgements should they need to.

For the final assessment, a review panel will be convened which will be made up of senior managers from across the three service areas (Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Mental Health) as well as the Learning and Development Consultant. This panel will review the submitted evidence for the ASYE from 18 NQSWs in total, ensuring a standardised approach across Norfolk. This is a big resource commitment which reflects the importance Norfolk places on needing to ensure the fairness and robustness of final decisions. NQSWs can, in addition to including it as part of their ASYE evidence to the council, submit their reflective essay to University of East Anglia (UEA) for academic accreditation which also provides a further quality check.

Norfolk is also part of an Eastern regional partnership of local authorities who will be carrying out regional standardisation and quality assurance of the ASYE by reviewing evidence provided by NQSWs and assessors, as well as sharing examples of good practice. This partnership will review and share learning from local and national evaluations of the ASYE. UEA will also be contributing to the regional quality assurance

and standardisation by providing feedback on a sample of the ASYE reviews, direct observations and final assessment reports from all of the local authorities in the partnership.

Quality of assessment is an area of concern expressed by the majority of members of the Virtual Reference Group and also reflected in comments from the non-participants interviewed and from some questionnaire responses. From the case studies some locations appear to be well advanced in planning quality assurance procedures with elements of internal and external input.

Indeed, partnership is a recurring theme in the case studies which provides cohesion in most respects with which all stakeholders can identify.

### **Recommendations**

16. Building on the evidence from the evaluation, Skills for Care work with key stakeholders to develop, monitor and support a nationally consistent approach to the assessment process.

17. Employers should have a clear plan and procedures in place for ensuring the quality of assessment. The case studies have suggested that where local employers work closely together this could be achieved as a group approach such as a local assessment panel.

## **2.3 Benefits and issues**

The key findings from the evaluation include:

NQSWs and supervisors/assessors identified a range of benefits for the NQSW in taking part in the ASYE, the main one of which was 'Development of professional confidence'.

The main benefits for supervisors/assessors were identified as 'Continuing professional development', 'Learning to provide reflective supervision' and 'Learning to provide holistic assessment'.

Both NQSWs and supervisors/assessors saw the ASYE as supporting CPD.

By the final questionnaire, over two thirds of NQSWs would recommend the ASYE to other NQSWs. The vast majority of supervisors/assessors would recommend the ASYE to other organisations.

*Concept to reality: implementation of the ASYE with social workers in adult services*

For NQSWs the main messages to sell the ASYE to another NQSW included that there is time for reflection, receiving structured support and guidance and the importance of peer support.

For supervisors/assessors the main messages to sell the ASYE to another organisation were that the ASYE helps to develop the NQSW into a competent social worker, that it provides a good probationary period and that it provides opportunities for CPD.

The case studies provide clear indicators of the keys to good practice.

From the initial questionnaire, 'Development of personal confidence' and 'Acknowledgement of personal responsibility for continuing professional development (CPD)' featured highly as key benefits for NQSWs and 'Continuing professional development' followed by 'Learning to provide reflective supervision' and 'Learning to provide holistic assessment' were the highest ranked benefits by supervisors/assessors. According to supervisors/assessors at the time of the final questionnaire, the main benefits to the NQSWs taking part in the ASYE include confidence, the receipt of structured support, and credibility with future employers and CPD.

Clearly the ASYE was seen by respondents as an opportunity to develop supervisor/assessor skills and there is a large amount of evidence from the interim questionnaires from both NQSWs and supervisors/assessor on how the ASYE process complements CPD. In the final questionnaire, CPD was cited by three quarters of respondent supervisors/assessors as a benefit of their participation in the ASYE followed by 'learning to provide reflective professional supervision' and 'learning to provide holistic assessment'. Evidence from the case studies suggested that supervisors and Practice Educators welcomed this not least because it helped give a professional identity to their role within adult services that is frequently not as defined as that of children's services in many regions, a point also made by members of the Virtual Reference Group. An awareness of CPD was viewed as an important thread in developing capability not least in relation to team work.

In terms of how NQSWs thought it complemented their own CPD a range of positive comments emanated from both the survey and the case studies, notably:

*'It gives a framework to stages of professional development. Gives insight into multiple routes of learning and evidence of CPD. Gives regular opportunity to remove self from daily practice and focus on CPD, learning and theory – energising CPD.'*

*'It encourages continued learning, policies and practices are always changing, nothing stays the same and this should be the mind set of any practitioner. Learning doesn't end when you get your degree.'*

Supervisors/assessors were also very aware of the positive contribution made by ASYE to CPD. For example:

*'It sets the standards from the point of qualifying. It has also focused attention on the need for experienced social workers to retain involvement in CPD, share their knowledge and expertise and invest in the learning culture of the profession. It's a good habit to establish, logging/evidencing on going learning activity.'*

*'It is the foundation to a career in social work, expectations of behaviour stated and followed through in the ASYE year will continue to be mirrored as a social worker progresses. It fits well with the HCPC having expectations that a social worker no matter what their grade will be able to show how their practice has developed between registration periods.'*

### **Evidence from the Case Studies in relation to how the ASYE complements the CPD of social workers**

#### **Tailored learning for NQSWs that contribute to Masters level credits**

For Norfolk County Council, the University of East Anglia (UEA) provides two teaching days, a workbook of readings and activities and a range of other on-line resources as part of a training module that NQSWs are signed up to at the start of their ASYE. This provides the majority of the tailored learning that is provided to NQSWs but is also supplemented by workshops organised by the Learning and Development Consultant to meet specific learning needs identified in personal development plans. All NQSWs are required to write a piece of critical reflection as evidence towards the end of their ASYE. As part of the UEA module, they have the option of submitting this to the University and it can attract 40 Master's level credits.

The final questionnaire asked NQSWs from Cohort One, as they neared the completion of their year and based on their overall experience whether they would recommend the ASYE to other NQSWs. Over two thirds (67 per cent) said they would. The final questionnaire asked this question of supervisors/assessors and 86 per cent supervisors/assessors said they would recommend the ASYE to other organisations. One NQSW stated:

*'ASYE is a good idea, however it needs to be clear what the individual needs to complete and in what detail, for example what actually needs to go in the ASYE folder and in what detail. The ASYE is a beneficial if the right support is there and everyone is given the same amount of time aside each week out of their working week'.*

The key messages that NQSWs would use to “sell” the ASYE to others were:

- Allows time to reflect on your practice and develop your role.
- You receive structured support and guidance.
- Peer support helps to share knowledge and experience.
- Beneficial in the transition from education to social work practice.
- Workload management/protected caseload are valuable.
- Good for future employment opportunities.

Supervisors/assessors were also asked what key messages they would use to “sell” the ASYE to another organisation. The most given messages were that it helps to develop the NQSW into a competent social worker, that the ASYE provides a good probationary period and provides opportunities for CPD.

The main issues identified by NQSWs related to supervision. This is also true for the supervisors/assessors but they also had concerns about restructuring, engaging their employer and unresolved queries such as how the ASYE works with agency staff, perhaps reflecting once again the challenging background against which the ASYE was introduced.

The issue of agency staff and how they can be supported to participate in the ASYE, and whether that is the responsibility of the agency or the employer with whom they are working on their temporary contract, has arisen during the evaluation, particularly in the Virtual Reference Group discussions.

In one case study all temporary workers were offered the ASYE enrolment and ad hoc training. However, there is no major evidence from the fieldwork that would lead to conclusions or recommendations in relation to the use of temporary workers. We note that the Local Government Association has facilitated the development of a Protocol for the Engagement of Agency-based social workers in England,<sup>3</sup> developed in discussion with the Employer Standards Working Group, but that the ASYE is not specifically mentioned within that.

---

<sup>3</sup> Protocol for the engagement of agency-based social workers in England, dated October 2012 available on Local Government Association Website at [http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=4c6cea5e-63bc-4b41-8f29-91cb7a2e8a6d&groupId=10171](http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=4c6cea5e-63bc-4b41-8f29-91cb7a2e8a6d&groupId=10171)

The importance of engaging the HR team especially within a statutory authority was evident from the case studies. This helped to overcome legal employment issues, help facilitated a single probation/ASYE process and helped HR to consider how the PCF and assessed standard are likely to affect job specifications and job roles in future.

### **3 Conclusions and next steps**

The evaluation of the implementation year of the ASYE in adult services presents an encouraging picture of a real commitment by staff and NQSW to embed the process and ensure it reflects local practice as well as national professional standards. There are still issues to be resolved largely connected with workload management and the availability of suitably experienced supervisors and assessors to facilitate the process. There is evidence that successful and sustained delivery of the ASYE is most likely to be achieved when all stakeholders work in partnership to ensure that communications and delivery are cohesive. The evaluation highlights the importance of NQSWs taking some responsibility for their own development in order that their future professional capability reflects personal needs as well as the vision of the organisation in which they work and service users.

Skills for Care  
West Gate  
6 Grace Street  
Leeds  
LS1 2RP

Telephone: 0113 245 1716  
Email: [info@skillsforcare.org.uk](mailto:info@skillsforcare.org.uk)  
Web: [www.skillsforcare.org.uk](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk)

*Concept to reality: implementation of the ASYE with social workers in adult services*