Case study 'Isabella', evidence 2: Early direct observation of practice showing lack of reflection and procedural approach to practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Template A</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NOSW</td>
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<tr>
<td>Name &amp; role of observer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date &amp; setting of observation</td>
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Section 1 – NOSW to complete

Complete boxes 1 and 2 before the observation

1. Brief background to observed contact between yourself and the service user

I am going to complete an initial assessment with Mr Jones (not his real name). I have not met Mr Jones before, but I telephoned and spoke to his daughter to make the arrangements for the visit. I sought consent from Mr Jones’s daughter for the visit to be observed.

2. Planning for intervention

I have read the referral and spoken to Mr Jones’s daughter (she made the referral). In the visit I want to establish what needs Mr Jones has and what support his daughter offers. I want to consider whether Mr Jones meets the eligibility criteria for services. I understand that Mr Jones has dementia and so I will need to consider my communication with Mr Jones.

Complete boxes 3 and 4 after the observation

3. Brief description of the intervention

I established that Mr Jones had little insight into his situation. His daughter was feeling very stressed by his demands on her time. Although she lives close by, she works part time and is a lone parent with two teenage children who require a lot of support from her as they are completing their exams. I spoke to her about having a carer’s assessment and said that I would make a referral for this.

I completed the assessment paperwork and identified that Mr Jones needs two calls a day to ensure he takes his medication and to assist with personal care and meals.

I have now completed the paperwork to go to panel to request the support package.

I agreed to contact the community mental health team to request an assessment of Mr Jones’s needs.
Direct observation template A, section 2
Observer to complete after the direct observation

Please provide information to support your assessment of the direct observation; reference can be made to the nine domains where relevant. You are not required to make a comment against each domain but can identify strengths and areas for development/concern (including reference to individual capability statements where there are areas of concern).

**Holistic assessment of the candidate’s capability demonstrated in the direct observation of practice (up to 300 words)**

Isabella demonstrated some sound practice in this observation. She had clearly considered the referral and considered what issues might arise. She was able to draw on her understanding of local policy and procedure, wider legislation and service availability (domain 6), she also demonstrated an ability to develop effective working relationships with service users and particularly carers (domain 7). Isabella also demonstrated skills in recording the assessment contemporaneously whilst still maintaining eye contact with the service user - this is a particular skill and one of Isabella’s strengths (domain 7). Isabella also demonstrated her understanding of the need for improved collaborative working and an understanding of the organisational context of her practice (domain 8). Isabella stated that her aims for the observation were to identify the service user’s needs and what support his daughter provided and she did achieve these goals.

However, I do feel that Isabella’s response to our discussions both prior to and after the observation lacked insight into how she has progressed in her first few months on the team and what further development needs she has. I also feel that Isabella adopted a questioning approach to the assessment, leaving me with the feeling that the service user and carer were passive recipients and that the service user in particular was not actively engaged in the assessment process which seemed to begin from the point of considering what services might meet the service user’s needs. I was left with the feeling that Isabella adopts a procedural approach to her practice. I would like her to further consider her practice in relation to domain 6 and feel that this will have a positive impact on other domains. It would also be useful for Isabella to consider how she can draw on a wider range of methods (domain 6) and also how she is developing as a new professional (domain 1).

**Domain 1 Professionalism**
Social workers are members of an internationally recognised profession, a title protected in UK law. Social workers demonstrate professional commitment by taking responsibility for their conduct, practice and learning, with support through supervision. As representatives of the social work profession they safeguard its reputation and are accountable to the professional regulator.

Isabella responded quickly to the referral. Isabella recognised the need to meet timescales and did so, demonstrating her ability to manage her own work. Isabella has recognised some development needs in relation to this observation, but I do feel that these focus mainly on procedural aspects of work. Isabella did not take a critical approach when we discussed the new assessment forms - I feel she could have considered the concerns that many team members have expressed about the form and looked at how she might comment on her views about the new assessment procedure instead Isabella took an unquestioning approach to the new systems.

**Domain 2 Values and ethics: apply social work ethical principles and values to guide professional practice**
Social workers have an obligation to conduct themselves ethically and to engage in ethical decision-making, including through partnership with people who use their services. Social workers are knowledgeable about the value base of their profession, its ethical standards and relevant law. Isabella identified a conflict between her personal and professional values in this situation and she...
discussed with me the way that she had managed this. Isabella also addressed the potential conflict between the service user and his daughter – feedback from the daughter indicates that she feels Isabella managed this well.

Domain 3  Diversity: recognise diversity and apply anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive principles in practice
Social workers understand that diversity characterises and shapes human experience and is critical to the formation of identity. Diversity is multidimensional and includes race, disability, class, economic status, age, sexuality, gender and transgender, faith and belief. Social workers appreciate that, as a consequence of difference, a person’s life experience may include oppression, marginalisation and alienation as well as privilege, power and acclaim, and are able to challenge appropriately.

Domain 4  Rights, justice and economic wellbeing: advance human rights and promote social justice and economic well-being
Social workers recognise the fundamental principles of human rights and equality, and that these are protected in national and international law, conventions and policies. They ensure these principles underpin their practice. Social workers understand the importance of using and contributing to case law and applying these rights in their own practice. They understand the effects of oppression, discrimination and poverty.

Domain 5  Knowledge: apply knowledge of social sciences, law and social work practice theory
Social workers understand psychological, social, cultural, spiritual and physical influences on people, human development throughout the life span and the legal framework for practice. They apply this knowledge in their work with individuals, families and communities. They know and use theories and methods of social work practice.

Isabella demonstrated a good working knowledge in relation to the agency assessment process and the systems for service requests. She also demonstrated a clear understanding of carers legislation and accurately identified the daughter as a carer in terms of this Act.

The service user may well benefit from a more personalised approach to his support and Isabella would benefit from giving consideration to methods of personalised practice – particularly considering the co-production of support plans.

Domain 6  Critical reflection and analysis: apply critical reflection and analysis to inform and provide a rationale for professional decision-making
Social workers are knowledgeable about and apply the principles of critical thinking and reasoned discrimination. They identify, distinguish, evaluate and integrate multiple sources of knowledge and evidence. These include practice evidence, their own practice experience, service user and carer experience together with research-based, organisational, policy and legal knowledge. They use critical thinking augmented by creativity and curiosity.

In our discussions before and after the observation Isabella presented her work in a very procedural way – I invited her to reflect on her intervention but again this focused on very practical aspects of her work. It would be useful for Isabella to consider her practice using a more reflective framework.
Domain 1 Intervention and skills: use judgement and authority to intervene with individuals, families and communities to promote independence. Support and prevent harm, neglect and abuse.

Social workers engage with individuals, families, groups, communities and organizations. They enable effective relationships and use effective communication skills in assessing situations. They are able to use authority appropriately. They evaluate their own practice and the outcomes for those they work with.

Domain 2 Contexts and organisations: engage with, inform, and adapt to changing contexts that shape practice. Operate effectively within own organisational frameworks and contribute to the development of services and organisations. Operate effectively within multi-agency and inter-professional partnerships and settings.

Social workers are informed about and pro-actively responsive to the challenges and opportunities that come with changing social contexts and constructs. They fulfill this responsibility in accordance with their professional values and ethics, both as individual professionals and as members of the organisation in which they work. They collaborate, inform and are informed by their work with others, inter-professionally and with communities.

Domain 3 Professional leadership: take responsibility for the professional learning and development of others through supervision, mentoring, assessing, research, teaching, leadership and management.

The social work profession evolves through the contribution of its members in activities such as practice research, supervision, assessment, teaching and management. An individual's contribution will gain influence when undertaken as part of a learning practice-focused organisation. Learning may be facilitated with a wide range of people including social work colleagues, service users and carers, volunteers, foster carers and other professionals.

Action plan following the direct observation (if applicable)

Have areas of development/learning needs been identified? What action needs to be taken to address these? Are there any other outstanding issues?

Isabella needs to further develop her skills in relation to Domain 6 – if she develops her critical reflection skills further this will help her to improve her practice in relation to all the other domains.

Service user feedback (if applicable)

Mr Jones and his daughter said they felt that Isabella had explained everything clearly to them. Mr Jones reiterated as he had in the visit that he didn’t want any help. His daughter said she felt that Isabella had listened to her effectively and she felt satisfied with the visit.

Observer’s signature:

Date: __________________________

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Direct observation template B, section 1
Observer to complete after the direct observation

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<th>NQSW</th>
<th>Name &amp; role of observer</th>
<th>Date &amp; setting of observation</th>
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**Holistic assessment of the NQSW’s capability based on this observation**

*Please comment on the NQSW’s capability, taking into account the level descriptor.*

**ASYE level descriptor:** “By the end of the ASYE, social workers should have consistently demonstrated practice in a wider range of tasks and roles, and have become more effective in their interventions, thus building their own confidence, and earning the confidence of others. They will have more experience and skills in relation to a particular setting and user group, and have demonstrated ability to work effectively on more complex situations. They will seek support in supervision appropriately, whilst starting to exercise initiative and evaluate their own practice.”

Observer’s signature:  
Date:
Direct observation template B, section 2
NQSW to complete after the direct observation

Complete 1 and 2 after reading the observer’s report

<table>
<thead>
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<th>1. Critical reflection and professional development</th>
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<th>2. Comments and reflections on the feedback given by the observer</th>
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NQSW’s signature:

Date:

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GUIDANCE on the Direct Observation Templates

Template A can be used for formal planned observations of the NQSW’s practice. In these cases the observer will normally be the primary assessor for the ASYE and therefore a registered social worker and be familiar with the ASYE capabilities.

Template B can be used for less formal observations of day-to-day practice. These observations may be undertaken by non-social work professionals and practitioners and include a range of settings, for example, multi-professional team meetings, case conferences or joint visits. In these cases, the observer completing the template may not necessarily be a registered social worker. The observer will still have to have a basic understanding of what is required of an NQSW at ASYE level and should be given the ASYE level descriptor before the observation.

Guidance for using Template A

Preparation for the direct observation of practice:

- The NQSW and observer should plan the direct observation and agree objectives and assessment criteria for the observation (what do they want to achieve in the intervention and there any specific capabilities, identified as areas for development or concern, they would like the observer to focus on and provide feedback). The NQSW should complete and share boxes 1 and 2 of the NQSW form (section 1) with the observer as part of the preparation for the observed session.

- Wherever possible the service user(s)/carer involved should be asked if they are willing to be part of the process. If they agree, it is the responsibility of the observer and the candidate to ensure that the service user/carer is given the opportunity to comment on the NQSW’s capabilities, and/or for the service user to be given feedback about the NQSW and assessor’s own assessment. Not all service users will be able to or want to be involved in the process; others will be willing to contribute and be part of the assessment process. The observer and candidate will need to plan how this is managed using their knowledge of or/and relationship with the service user whenever possible to ensure that this is comfortable for all concerned (Adapted from ‘Assessing practice at qualifying level for social work using the POF’)

- NQSW and observer should agree and clarify the role of the observer during the intervention: how will they be introduced, under what circumstances, if any, will they intervene.

- NQSW and observer should agree what happens after the observation—how and when will feedback be given. What reports/documents need to be completed by the NQSW and observer and by when.

- The NQSW should have the opportunity to reflect and comment on the observer’s report (box 6).