Lisa met her line manager, Jules, and her ASYE assessor, Frank, in her first week in the Newfield Children with Disability team. In the meeting they developed a learning agreement for Lisa’s ASYE. Lisa brought to the meeting a copy of a report from her final placement whilst at university. The report shows that Lisa is an enthusiastic and promising social worker with a good knowledge of social work theory; however, she has not worked in a Children with Disability team before so Frank and Jules agree to provide Lisa with a detailed induction.

The learning agreement also set out that Frank and Lisa will meet on a monthly basis to review her work and draw together the assessment evidence for the year. This will be in addition to the supervision that Lisa will have with Jules; they will meet weekly for the first six weeks.

In the section of the learning agreement on quality assurance, Jules is named as a third partner who will offer additional support and insight. Based on this, Lisa, Jules and Frank agree to meet together every other month. Lisa and Frank will also have formal review meetings at three and six months.

At the end of Lisa’s second month at Newfield, she meets Frank to review her progress. As well as meeting to draw up the learning agreement, they have had a further meeting to discuss Lisa’s work and her capability to work at the required level. In the previous meeting Frank saw substantial potential in Lisa. However, informal reports from the new team suggest that although Lisa has settled well into the team, she seems to lack confidence in offering judgments. Frank agrees that the work he has seen so far reinforces this. One of the purposes of this meeting is to explore this further as part of continuing to review progress and discuss future plans.

Frank’s concerns centre around the fact that he does not think Lisa has yet begun to show evidence of the potential her final placement report suggested. He has asked Lisa to bring along all the evidence that she has submitted, which includes a case summary and feedback from a child’s parents [see evidence 1] and Lisa’s reflection on an assessment of services for that child [evidence 2].

**Frank and Lisa’s meeting**

Lisa’s reflection on her assessment appears to confirm Frank’s thoughts; it is very brief, quite descriptive and does not provide any evidence of Lisa starting to work in a more independent way or making proactive suggestions for how to manage the case, which Frank would have expected even at this stage in the year. The feedback from the service user appears to suggest that she was satisfied with Lisa’s work but it does not provide sufficient depth to demonstrate Lisa’s capability to work more independently. The source of the problem seems to lie in Lisa’s capability in domain 7, intervention and skills. However, it is also affecting her
demonstration of capability in domain 5 (apply knowledge of social sciences, law and social work practice theory), domain 6 (critical reflection and analysis) and potentially domain 8 (contexts and organisations). So this meeting is very important for helping Lisa to make headway in several aspects of professional practice.

In the meeting Frank asks Lisa how she thinks she is progressing and what she thinks of the standard of the work she has done. Lisa presents very short replies and appears to expect Frank to lead and to fill in the gaps when she is unable to do something. This provides further evidence of her needing to develop capability in domain 7.

Towards the scheduled end of the meeting Frank asks Lisa about her work in the Children with Disability team. Lisa begins by telling him that although she enjoys it there she is finding it very difficult. As the conversation develops it becomes clear that Lisa is feeling out of her depth and she is relying on Jules to provide her with support and guidance which would be more appropriate for a student than a qualified worker even at this stage of the ASYE. Frank talks about how he expects a social worker to develop confidence and competence during their first year of practice and expresses some concern that Lisa shows few signs of this at present. Lisa is very upset as she thinks Frank is telling her that she is failing. Frank explains that at this point it is not about passing or failing and he reiterates that he sees substantial potential in the work she has done so far. However, he is also looking for signs of more rounded development. He wants to ensure that the right things are in place to give her the opportunity to develop her skills and understanding of social work practice. These are capabilities her placement report evidenced and he is sure that she will soon be able to demonstrate them in this new post.

Frank and Lisa revisit the learning agreement. They confirm that they should hold a three-way meeting with Jules, as they agreed. Frank also arranges to meet Jules in advance so that they can discuss Frank’s concerns and agree how to handle the meeting with Lisa.

Frank and Jules’s meeting
Frank presents his concerns to Jules along with details of the conversation that he has had with Lisa. Frank revisits the learning agreement and highlights in detail the areas that he is concerned about, including Lisa’s lack of progress in demonstrating her capability to work independently and her apparent lack of confidence in the areas of effective communication, assessment and intervention.

Jules senses that Lisa’s lack of confidence is impacting on her ability to begin offering judgments. It is evident from the Professional Development Plan Lisa brought with her from training that she has not previously lacked the ability to use theory and policy, but she has not demonstrated the confidence in this team to begin making such judgments herself.

Frank asks Jules about his supervision sessions with Lisa. Jules says their supervision sessions have mainly been focussed on Lisa’s case work. He explains that although he has encouraged reflective supervision sessions, Lisa’s lack of confidence has led to him providing suggestions on how Lisa might handle her case work. Franks and Jules very soon agree that whilst case supervision is important, Lisa needs to be supported more fully to
develop her reflective skills as well as her case work skills and that more reflective supervision might help to unlock Lisa’s potential. Ironically, Jules’s well-meaning suggestions may have reinforced Lisa’s initial dependence on more experienced staff to make judgments and fed her lack of confidence.

Frank and Jules talk about how they might help Lisa to reflect on her work, to learn from her experiences so far and to identify her learning needs. They agree to ask her questions that will help her to make observations about her work so far, to reflect on these and to consider what to do next.

Three-way review meeting

To start the meeting, Frank asks Lisa to tell Jules and him about her first two months in the team. Lisa explains that her final placement at university was in an initial assessment team and that she has little experience of working in a Children with Disability team. She realised very quickly that she did not have as much knowledge or experience as the other social workers in the team and becoming a practising social worker with responsibility for cases had been a daunting experience for her. However, the team had given her some understanding of her role, the systems used in the team and the theory and legislation applicable to her role.

Frank supports Lisa’s account of her first month in the team and says she came to the role as a promising practitioner. However he is concerned that Lisa has not yet provided any evidence that she is starting to work more independently. Frank asks Lisa to think about one of the cases she has worked on so far, tell them about what happened and if there was anything about her work on the case that stood out for her. Lisa tells Frank and Jules about her meeting with Daniel and his mum. She explains that she struggled to communicate effectively with both Daniel and his mum in different ways. This had come as a surprise to her because she didn’t feel she had any communication difficulties when she completed her final placement in the initial assessment team. Frank then asks Lisa what she thinks the impact of this was and she tells him that she has lost self-confidence because of this and as a result she has begun to rely on Jules being there to support her in meetings. She recognises that her lack of confidence has also affected her ability to analyse, to offer and select from a range of theories to deal with her cases and to reflect on the effectiveness of her work.

Frank reassures Lisa that it is not unusual for newly qualified social workers to have to learn to manage cases on their own and that learning to be assertive and manage meetings with service users about sensitive subjects is part of the transition to independent practice. Frank offers his reflections on managing learning and suggests how they might support Lisa in the future. Together Frank, Jules and Lisa review her training so far to enable her to identify relevant opportunities that may help her to develop her skills and confidence.

Lisa says that she would like support to develop her communication skills and asks if there may be someone in the team that Jules could suggest for her to work shadow or to have one-to-one sessions with. Jules thinks that an experienced practitioner in the team might be able to help Lisa to understand that there are a range of methods she can use to engage and communicate effectively with service users, and proposes that Lisa contacts her. He also
recommends training in Makaton and PECS. Frank agrees these are good suggestions for inclusion in the learning agreement. Together they agree that Lisa should draft a short reflection on this learning opportunity, including proposals for how she can put the learning into practice, and bring this for discussion in her three-month review meeting with Frank.

Frank then asks Lisa and Jules to consider how they might address the concerns about Lisa’s ability to apply critical reflection and analysis to inform her professional decision-making (Domain 6). Frank explains that Lisa has been providing very descriptive accounts of her work so far and that her case work needs to demonstrate critical thinking and use of knowledge to support her independent decision making.

Jules has some useful suggestions about online resources that Lisa could access to develop her understanding of critical reflection, critical analysis and critically reflective practice. Lisa agrees that these could be helpful; she can access them during the time that has been allocated for her personal development in the learning agreement and this will allow her to take more control of her own development and begin to work more independently. They agree that Lisa should apply this learning to one of the previous cases she has worked on and following discussion with Jules in their supervision sessions she will produce a short report for the three-month review meeting about how her own practice could be different based on what she has learnt so far.

At the end of the meeting Frank, Jules and Lisa update the learning agreement based on the knowledge they have shared so far and the decisions they have made to support Lisa over the next month.

Frank, Lisa and Jules agree to continue to meet every other month to review Lisa’s progress, in addition to the monthly meetings that Frank and Lisa continue to have. Lisa and Jules also commit to balancing their case work supervision sessions with reflective supervision sessions. Jules offers to model a more reflective approach to casework supervision in order to help Lisa demonstrate these skills and grow her confidence in making judgments. Lisa agrees to be more pro-active in both supervision sessions with Jules and meetings with Frank. As part of this, she agrees that if she continues to have any concern about her progress she will raise it immediately with Frank and Jules.

Finally, Frank asks Lisa to come prepared to the three-month review with detailed work that evidences her ability to make independent judgments. He suggests she should revisit the case summary and reflection in order to deepen the level of analysis and make more detailed justification using social work theories for the proposed course of action in this case. He also wants her to identify any further areas for development that need to be addressed before the six-month review and the end of her ASYE. She will do this by assessing herself against each of the nine domains in the PCF. As they talk briefly about different domains, Lisa begins to realise for herself how her lack of confidence is holding back attainment in a number of areas.

**Commentary – seeking the best solution**

Any new social worker will find the transition between being a student and
practitioner difficult, some more difficult than others. This will depend on many factors that will include the experiences of individual people, the expectations of teams and the demands of the work. The purpose of the ASYE is to manage these difficulties and recognise that this is a transitional year which requires some additional support.

Lisa needs to understand why Frank and Jules have met to review her progress so far and put in place additional arrangements. Her insight into this is crucial if she is to develop her own confidence and capability as a social worker in the children with disability team.

Both Frank and Jules have identified that Lisa is having difficulty in achieving the standard required in her ASYE and the three of them have worked together to identify how Lisa can be supported to develop her skills and confidence. They need to be clear that their quality assurance role involves ensuring appropriate support is offered to Lisa which provides enough opportunities for her to develop her practice to the required level. Meetings such as this are crucial to recording the support that has been offered to a candidate to enable them to have the best opportunity to complete their work to the required standard.

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Evidence 1: Case summary & feedback from a child’s parents

Case summary: Daniel Coleman

Daniel is an 8 year old boy who has complex needs, he lives with his mum and dad and older sister Eve. He was born with cerebral palsy and requires care twenty four hours per day. His family have recently moved into a village in Newfield and I was required to undertake an assessment of Daniel’s needs in order to recommend what services can be provided for him. Jules, my line manager, accompanied me to observe and to make sure that I didn’t miss anything.

I met with Daniel’s mum Patricia on several occasions to discuss his needs, mum was open to meeting with me and she told me all about how his needs had been met previously. Mum is very clear about how this should happen and I felt that it was appropriate. I met Daniel once at his school, The Deans, where he attends 5 days per week. This school meets his needs and he is happy there. I did not meet Daniel’s dad as he was at work.

The family moved very quickly to Newfield, and they did not make arrangements to transfer services over and as yet no files have been transferred from the previous team to ours. Jules and I have made a formal request for the files through our liaison team.

I prepared a report for Jules, my line manager, recommending that we do what Daniel’s mum suggested and continue to offer the care that Daniel received before moving, including home help and some respite. This has not yet been agreed, it will be discussed at the next resourcing meeting.

Service User Testimony

Dear Sir,

I have met Lisa several times, when she visited my house to talk to me about the services that would be provided for XXXX. She seems to be a very nice woman who took time to talk to me and reassured me that things would be OK. We didn’t want to move and I am worried that XXXX won’t get all the support he needs. Lisa has also met XXXX at school and I think she spent time with him to find out what he wants. I know this can be difficult as it is hard to communicate with him.

Lisa took me through some forms and explained that she would pass them on to Jules, her manager, to make a decision about XXXX. I am very satisfied about the work she did and hope that you will see this letter as support for her.

Regards

XXXXX Jones
Evidence 2: Reflection on case summary evidence

I have undertaken an assessment of Daniel in order to provide services for him. I have never done anything as complicated as this before. Jules offered to help where he could so I made the most of this.

Although I was happy to pick up this piece of work, I feel that I am not able to undertake complex work as I lack the experience to complete assessments that my colleagues do. Having spent time talking to several members of the team it is clear that their skills and knowledge are way above mine. They tell me developing these skills is a matter of time and application.

The assessment was difficult as Daniel’s mum was quite anxious that he continue to receive the support he needs. Jules and I planned to meet her on two occasions but we ended up meeting three times in order to get all of the required information. The first two meetings were difficult because she became quite upset. Jules stepped in and suggested that we gave her some space to collect her thoughts. I have never worked with someone as upset as this and it was hard for me to manage on my own. I was very grateful for Jules guiding me about how to respond in these kinds of situations.

I met Daniel at school. He has little communication so his support assistant explained what he was saying. He also didn’t seem to understand some of my questions so his support assistant helped me to explain these to him. I worked with other young people who have cerebral palsy in a temporary role for a voluntary agency just after graduating, but they had better communication skills. I was not prepared for how difficult it would be to speak with Daniel as in my previous work I usually seemed to communicate successfully with young people.

Daniel’s mum has provided some service user evidence for me, which I have amended to protect their identity and respect their privacy. Mum knows that I am going to share this with you for my assessment. I think that this testimony demonstrates that I have acted in a professional way with the family and have provided them with a good standard of social work input.

Overall I feel that this case has allowed me to demonstrate how I undertake assessments in a professional way. Jules and I have discussed my work in this case and he has signed off my assessment for the meeting next week.

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