Reflecting on user feedback I realise that I have somewhat confused feedback about my practice with self-assessment and feedback about services received. When I started in this role I was given a standardised feedback form that we are obliged to offer to service users. Reflecting on this, I recognise that the structured nature of the standardised form offers mainly closed questions with little scope for prompting service user narrative or descriptive feedback. Moreover, although the mandatory nature of gathering feedback could be viewed as positive, upon reflection it has perhaps been relegated by members of the team to a bureaucratic exercise. The 'boxes are ticked' but the content of feedback is perhaps overlooked and the development of practice based on content could perhaps be described as negligible.

I have offered the feedback form to several service users in order to ascertain their satisfaction with the service they have received. The manner in which I have requested this feedback emphasises this point, perhaps to the detriment of looking to receive feedback about my own practice. I also have not considered the appropriateness of this nature of feedback collection. I have perhaps assumed that agency policy on this should not be questioned, and that the form is comprehensive enough to cover the bureaucratic and service outcomes that need to be identified.

Discussing my work with Mick during supervision, Varsha agreed with the above observations about how feedback is approached by the team, but highlighted that fact that there appeared to be a lot of implicit feedback regarding my work with him in other documents, in particular the chronological notes. She suggested she had observed elements of my practice that had been developed, perhaps, in response to this implicit feedback; one example being Mick's wish that members of his family be more involved than previously. Varsha indicated that I had recently acted in this manner with other service users in looking to determine the level of involvement that they wanted from their families. Varsha furthermore highlighted that a person-centred approach with Mick appeared to have been successful in developing my relationship with him, and therefore that feedback that could be gathered in this manner might have been more appropriate than a structured questionnaire. We agreed that I should work towards gathering feedback from other service users and carers with these considerations in mind.

We also talked about the feedback form that Varsha has been using after direct observations. She developed this in her practice educator role and it does focus more on feedback about the practitioner rather than feedback about the services received. I hadn’t really thought about this before and so took the issue to discussion at our ASYE action learning set. Many of the other practitioners in the set said that
they had been struggling to some extent with obtaining service user feedback - one particular area of concern was about the way that this needs to be more than a tick box exercise. We reflected on the power dynamics inherent in working with service users and how this could have an impact on honest service user feedback.

One person said that they worried that if feedback from service users was negative this would mean we could fail the ASYE assessment. However, some of the others challenged this and said that as long as we reflect on why the feedback might be negative that should not affect the assessment - one person shared how something like this had happened when she was on her final placement and I found that really interesting and reassuring.

I have offered four service users and carers the option of how they would like to offer feedback. On two occasions service users/carers have preferred to use the standard team feedback form and to give it to me at a next appointment. However, on the other two occasions I have discussed face-to-face the nature of my interventions with service users and included them in chronological notes.

I noted that after the last direct observation the feedback that Varsha obtained stated that I had not fully explained my role and that of others. I therefore specifically asked the service users in the face-to-face discussions about this. The face-to-face feedback from both service users/carers indicated that they would have liked me to offer more clarity on the nature of social work interventions. This has suggested that I have not explained how and why I would be working with service users clearly enough and is something I would need to focus on in future.

Given the complex nature of my interventions with Mick and other services users, it is perhaps fair to suggest that I have viewed gathering feedback as a task that needed to be completed in order to satisfy agency policy and to inform only certain elements of their care. I have overlooked the importance that feedback could have had on my personal development as a practitioner. This was perhaps because by using the form I would be able to avoid any direct criticism of my practice, and therefore avoid having to experience or reconcile any negative emotions this might provoke. I have also perhaps overlooked the importance of identifying the most appropriate manner in which to gather feedback. I do recognise that, because of power dynamics, service users and carers may not always be totally honest in their feedback. However, I believe I have developed good relationships with several service users that, upon reflection, might have been better utilised to gather feedback in an unstructured manner that could have been more honest and specific to my practice.

I believe my development as a practitioner has been positively influenced by reflecting on the feedback I received from service users since my last supervision. I believe I have moved from a starting point of understanding the importance of gathering feedback, to a platform of insight that includes being able to separate different elements of feedback (such as service delivery, service user satisfaction and also professional capability and development). I also believe the gathering of
feedback needs much more careful preparation, and that feedback avenues need to be critically examined in order to determine their appropriateness and utility. It is not always enough to devolve feedback responsibility to a pre-existing agency document. Although I believe I have tried to be responsive to feedback, my responses can only have been as useful as the feedback gathered.