



Department
for Education



Tool 6: Gathering feedback from people who need care and support following direct observations of practice

Assessors often seek feedback from people who need care and support after a direct observation of practice. This covers the specific issues associated with gathering feedback at this time.

Whilst feedback from people being supported will be occurring all of the time, it is common for this to be formally collected as part of the observation process.

Informal feedback

Informal feedback can be gathered by the assessor as they observe the interaction between the NQSW and the person who needs care and support.

Formal feedback

Very often assessors will stay after the observation has ended and seek formal feedback from the person being supported at this stage. The way that this stage of the observation will be handled should form part of the preparation and planning for the observation, so that everyone knows how this will happen. Ensuring that the person has a choice about whether or not to provide feedback and how they want to provide feedback is the most important issue to consider.

The feedback can be 'free flowing' and unstructured or may be structured by the assessor asking questions. A combination of the two may well provide the best quality feedback.

Structured questions

When asking questions of the person being supported, these can focus specifically on the observation experience, such as:

- Were you clear about what to expect today?
- What went well during the observation?
- What could have gone better?
- Did you get what you wanted out of the observation?

Or the questions can focus on the person's wider experiences of work with the practitioner. For example:

- Do you find the worker reliable?
- Do you feel they are respectful of you?
- What do you think of the worker's communication?

- Does the worker carry out actions as planned? Can you give me some examples?

Drawing on observations of informal feedback

The informal feedback that the assessor has noted should be used to enhance the formal feedback process. Incorporating the informal feedback into the formal feedback discussion gives an ideal opportunity to validate the informal feedback and to enable the person who needs care and support to return reflectively to their feelings and responses during the observation. For example, the assessor could draw on their observations and ask the person about these:

“I got the impression that you were confused by the worker’s explanation of the assessment process. Is that right?”

This could then be followed up by “What could they have done to make you feel more confident about that?”

Focusing on practice

When gathering evidence about the worker’s practice, it is important to focus on the actual practice and the process the person has experienced, rather than the outcome. A person who is happy with the outcome of an assessment, for example, may be very positive about the worker, whereas if someone is unhappy with the outcome of an assessment they might provide negative feedback - in both scenarios the feedback might not actually reflect the quality of the worker’s practice. Focusing on specifics when seeking feedback encourages the person to provide a more objective view of the practitioner’s performance, rather than one based purely on outcomes. Gathering feedback following observations can assist in addressing this dilemma –the assessor will have viewed the practice and can therefore formulate questions to ensure that the feedback focuses as much as possible on the practice of the worker rather than on the outcomes of the process.

Sharing and using the feedback

Very often NQSWs are particularly anxious about feedback from people they have been supporting following observations and are keen to hear the feedback. The feedback is therefore often shared during the informal feedback discussion (generally immediately after the observation). To make the feedback useful to the practitioner and to ensure that it doesn’t become tokenistic, it is important to ensure that it is also discussed in the formal planned feedback session. Asking the practitioner to reflect on the feedback, through asking the following questions, can be useful at this stage:

- What difference do you think being involved in providing feedback made to this person?
- What surprised you about the feedback?

- How do you feel about the feedback?
- How might these feelings impact on your practice?
- What might you do differently as a result of the feedback?

Sharing the observation report documentation

The involvement of people being supported in the process of direct observation is part of a wider agenda to involve them in social work education. The challenge for the assessor is to avoid the possibility of such feedback being tokenistic.

For example, it might be useful to share the observation report with the person being supported and ask for their comments and feedback. The person is after all an integral part of the event being observed, and it often occurs in their own home. They may want to make specific comments on the report of the observation. Clearly this should be discussed and agreed with the practitioner being observed - particularly as it is not currently standard practice. As a minimum though, it would be good practice for the assessor to share their record of the feedback discussion with the person being supported.

Challenges in feedback following observations

Whilst obtaining feedback after an observation is often the most straightforward way for assessors to gather feedback from people who need care and support, there can be significant challenges which the assessor and NQSW need to consider and negotiate together:

- Obtaining feedback immediately after the observation may be problematic because sometimes people have simply 'had enough' at this point and just want everyone to leave. The individual may also want time to reflect and to see if the practitioner follows up as they have said they would. So would it be better to arrange a separate appointment to obtain feedback?
- People may focus on the outcomes of the visit rather than on the practitioner's practice, as we have explored. How can you ensure the feedback remains balanced to ensure the process and practice is covered as well as the outcomes?
- The feedback may well be important to others, for example, if the feedback provides insights into systems and outcomes. How can the assessor and NQSW ensure that this feedback is passed on as relevant?

Integral, not "add on"

Since feedback from people who need care and support is often sought at the end of a direct observation of practice, it can be seen as an 'add on' (the icing on top of the cake). However, obtaining a person's views is more than just the decoration on the cake, it is an integral part of the process which should be given sufficient thought – through planning and subsequent reflection.