Supporting employers, adult social work and the white paper

Case studies and resources to illustrate the implementation of continuing professional development in social work

The project was undertaken by the University of Hertfordshire in relation to its 'Safeguarding Adults' 30 credit module at Masters level with its local authority partners: Hertfordshire County Council, Bedford Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire, and Luton Borough Council. It illustrates how learning and assessment on an academic module can be tied to practice, supervision and appraisal. The case study provides some detail about how employers and candidates were engaged in the process. The project focused on improving the integration of critical reflection and analysis within the module and more widely into CPD. Hertfordshire County Council and the University of Hertfordshire are in the process of testing an online tool to measure the impact of CPD on professional development and practice.

CPD approach

The continuing professional development (CPD) approach used in this case study is a traditional academic module route, using a module that had already proved effective and popular, 'Safeguarding Adults', a 30 credit module at Masters level. However, the difference was that the revisions to this module, effected through the course of the project, were based upon the idea that in order for learning in CPD to be most effective, activities on the module, and assessment of it, should be closely aligned with work-based activity and, crucially, be part of ongoing supervision. This in turn should then be contained within a commitment to the development within practice of 'reflective practice' (RP) skills for the candidate that are assessable and measurable. The process and outcome of offering enhanced reflective supervision as part of the academic programme is set out in the 'Handbook on principles and methods for employers to support Reflective Practice (RP) in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for the social work workforce: an exemplar from an 'Adult Safeguarding' module at Masters level'.

Work-based learning and assessment

To achieve these objectives, the project engaged with managers as well as social worker candidates. Focus groups were arranged that were open to all managers in the county of Hertfordshire, in addition to focus groups and individual interviews with the managers of staff undertaking the Safeguarding module. These were to gauge:

- how best to use CPD studies to improve work-based learning and assessment
- how to measure the value and impact of such CPD in practice.

We undertook to review and enhance the module's focus on impact on practice and the development of reflective practice within supervision in order to help managers and staff to meet their requirements under both the HCPC requirements and the LGA Standards for Employers and supervision framework. Content and outcomes were also mapped against the HCPC Standards for Social Workers and the PCF.

Learners' and managers' views were systematically gathered at the start and then at the end of the module, by interviews and emails, to determine how the use of these methods enhanced RP and practice through supervision. This included a measurement of the development of various aspects of RP. Three specially constituted tutorial/focus groups with candidates on the Safeguarding module, and 14 interviews with their managers, took place to obtain feedback from them on our evolving plans for the assessment. Finally, a further opportunity allowed for them to comment on the draft proposed assessment that we developed from this work.

Key messages

It became clear that RP assessment should be based on practice over time, with guidelines for what to consider within the assessment and how this aligns with supervision in the workplace.

- **Supervision** that had a focus and time for RP was the main issue for a number of candidates and managers, and a key component for social workers to be able to develop critically evaluative skills. Staff acknowledged their own personal responsibilities as professionals to do this, but this also needs to be recognised by their agency and their supervisor. Candidates stated that it would be useful to have trigger questions to promote reflective thinking (for details of one process for this, and a suggested checklist of trigger questions, see the module assessment for safeguarding. The process and outcome of offering enhanced reflective supervision as part of the academic programme is set out in the handbook.

- **Constructive criticism, near misses, success:** Constructive criticism in an environment of 'no-blame' was thought valuable by the social workers, e.g. 'near misses', with a focus on learning in order to avoid future problems.

- **Links from module assessment to supervision:** Assignments need to be explicitly linked to promoting RP and, in turn, be linked to supervision and appraisals. All welcomed linking this with direct practice and with performance management, but time constraints can limit managers'

feedback on the work and assignments, so a practicable way to achieve this is needed (see the module assessment).

- **Spaces other than supervision:** Time and space with others than managers or supervisors was seen to be important; one means reported as being valuable was peer support.

- **Outcomes:** Taking these points into account, and after further consultation with managers and candidates following distribution of the suggested assessment, the module assessment was determined. From the consultation, and with our local authority partnership, we developed a new assessment that included a requirement for embedding the assessment within supervision over the period of attendance on the module. This also allows the manager and candidate jointly to review progress made or distance travelled, from the learning in the course of the module.

Supporting the development of critical reflection

The project focused on improving the integration of critical reflection and analysis that is pivotal to the process of professional decision-making by autonomous professionals at 'social worker' or 'experienced social worker' level in the PCF. Critical reflection was integrated within the module and the assessment.

It became clear that the method and approach developed with our partners, candidates and managers had wider applicability in the development of RP and its measurement in supervision and appraisals as part of ongoing CPD. The project also piloted the use of enhanced seminar support to review methods for RP in the delivery of the modules in group sessions with learners.

In our consultation, we found the focus on reflective practice (RP) in the Safeguarding module (and in the Personalisation module for those who had taken it) is valuable. What then becomes important is how this emphasis on RP is used subsequently. There can be conflict between case management and in-depth discussion, with the latter often overlooked. Candidates thought they needed a trigger for reflection, (see module assessment 'section B.

Checklist of issues for supervision) with dedicated space in supervision, as pressures in supervision tend towards case turnover rather than reflecting. The links between academic and work-based assessment and performance development over time are set out in the module assessment that also contains details of the work-based assessment.

Outcome of supporting critical reflection

As a result of a first round of consultation, we reworked the methods and then checked the efficacy of the final product with consultees in a second round. It became clear that assessment should be based on practice over time, with guidelines for what is considered, and how, within RP. The way that the revised assessment can provide crossover points between supervision in the workplace and the module's teaching and assessment can, we suggest, provide a model for how reflective practice (RP) can be used more effectively in module assessments, and also then in supervision in a much wider sense. The process and outcome of offering enhanced reflective supervision as part of the academic programme is set out in the handbook.

Impact assessment

The module assessment gives a flavour of the way that the project sought to measure the impact of the learning on professional practice over the course of the module.

Alongside the work on this project, Hertfordshire County Council and the University of Hertfordshire have been examining the development of an online tool that could be used several months after the module or CPD learning activity. This will analyse from the perspectives of both social worker and manager what impact the learning from the module has had on the RP and professional development of those taking it, and for practice.