

Cumbria External Moderation Panel for Children's Services

ASYE External Moderation

Eighteen months ago our organisation developed an Internal Panel for the scrutiny and moderation of Assessor recommendations about NQSWs' ASYE. We also established an External Panel to moderate the judgments of the Internal Panel. These different levels of moderation support the quality assurance system of our programme and help drive consistency in decision-making.

Currently, we have 40 NQSWs on the ASYE Programme in Children's Services. This includes a cohort of 10 NQSWs who have joined our Social Work Academy, which started in September this year. The Academy is an important part of the plan to develop the workforce in the Children's Services Directorate and in the future all NQSWs recruited to the Directorate will be supported in their learning and development through the Academy. The Directorate is also supporting the 'grow your own' strategy and a small cohort of Social Workers who have been through the scheme have also joined the ASYE Programme this year.

It is a mandatory requirement that all its NQSWs, in both Children's Services and Adults Services, undertake the Programme. This is because the Council understands the benefits that accrue from the ASYE Programme for the development of its workforce and for the provision of its social care services.

What we wanted to achieve

In setting up the External Panel process we wanted to achieve the following objectives, namely:

- scrutiny of the Internal Panel's judgments and the moderation of the quality of the support arrangements provided by the ASYE Programme through a moderating body outside of Cumbria County Council and within a partnership arrangement
- involvement of people in need of care and support in these tasks as we believe they represent a significant dimension of the public interest in this process
- strengthening of the ASYE partnership arrangements across the statutory and private, voluntary and independent sector and
- meeting the quality assurance standards promoted by the DfE.

We wanted the outcomes of the External Panel to correspond as far as possible with these objectives:

- For the people who use the service:
 - (i) participation in scrutinising the decisions of Cumbria County Council
 - (ii) a meaningful voice in identifying how the standard of work submitted might be improved and how the Programme might be developed
 - (iii) promotion of the transparency of the decision-making process in ASYE.

- For the workforce:
 - (i) the knowledge that the Internal Panel judgments would be more likely to be right because any of its decisions could be scrutinised for accuracy, consistency and robustness. This would afford NQSWs confidence that the judgements would not be arbitrary or unconsidered
 - (ii) the expectation that NQSWs and Assessors would receive further feedback on the standard of their work from a moderating body
 - (iii) the communication of key messages to NQSWs about how to improve their portfolios and for Assessors, their assessments.

- For the organisation;
 - (i) information about the quality of its final decision-making in ASYE
 - (ii) information about the functioning of its support arrangements and key messages about areas for improvement
 - (iii) assurance that the ASYE Lead, NQSWs and Assessors would be receiving feedback about the standard of their work and how it might be improved in the future.

What we did

Establishing the External Panel involved liaising and networking with the local Universities, carer and service user groups and obtaining the approval of the ASYE Steering Group in Cumbria County Council, which oversees and guides the work of the ASYE Lead. It also involved writing standard documentation such as Terms of Reference, templates for Agenda and Minutes and Feedback.

The Panel presently comprises of 6 members drawn from both local HEIs, representatives from the service user and carer community, our Principal Social Worker and the ASYE Lead. The representatives from the service user and

carer communities were drawn from one of the University's Panels and their networks. They were trained along with other members of the Panel. Internal Panel members also attended the training to strengthen their understanding of the roles of each panel and their relationship.

The External Panel meets bi-annually and scrutinise a minimum of two portfolios at each meeting, which are selected through the random sampling method by the Chair. The Assessors and NQSWs whose portfolios are selected are informed of this; in the communication about the Panel's purpose it is emphasised that the Panel does not have the power to override the final judgment of the Internal Panel on the Assessor's recommendation.

The portfolios are accessed and read by all members through Objective Connect (OC). OC enables the storage and sharing of portfolios and other Panel information with people and agencies outside of our organisation with an UK Government level of security. It is a practical solution for the dissemination of documentation to all Panel members who are located across a large geographical area covering Cumbria and north Lancashire. At our most recent meeting a Panel member was unable to attend and so posted their assessment of the portfolios on the OC External Panel site.

In the Panel meeting the Chair facilitates first the scrutiny of key documentary evidence and then any other documentation identified for scrutiny by a panel member. The members' views about the quality of the assessment decision and the support arrangements are summarised and recorded by the Chair. Panel members are confident in their scrutinising role so meetings can be animated.

We are still a 'young' panel in terms of our length of existence and so are only now beginning to embed a settled process.

Following the publication by Skills for Care of the ASYE (adults) external moderation guidance in September, we have arranged to crystallise the panel process in writing for current and new members. Ideally, we would like to import SfC guidance on adults' panels into children's, as we consider it to articulate best practice. One

element of best practice that we will struggle to implement currently is the involvement in the Panel of another employer with at least two NQSWs, an element that promotes consistency of decision-making between employers. We know of no ASYE Provider within the PVI sector in Cumbria that currently supports at least two NQSWs through the Programme. I have already called on the goodwill of the Lancashire ASYE Leads network for their support in meeting the guidance of the Adults External Moderation process and feel it would be unfair to draw further on this goodwill, as it could not be reciprocated in full.

The Panel provides specific and timely feedback to the Assessors and the NQSWs whose portfolios have been considered. It also provides feedback about the Programme to the organisation, which is taken to the ASYE Steering Group. The key general messages from the Panel are communicated to the NQSWs and their Assessors within a few days of the Panel meeting.

What we achieved

The outcomes from this process are more than were envisaged at the start of this work. Some of the more significant are:

- issues and themes about our ASYE Programme identified in the scrutiny and moderation process are taken back to the ASYE Steering Group for consideration and action
- the confirmation of exemplar pieces of work for sharing with NQSWs and their Assessors
- the key messages for NQSWs and their Assessors about how their portfolio documentation may be improved and occasionally, the standard of work. These messages are incorporated into end of year sessions for NQSWs who are due to submit their portfolios
- the validation from the Panel of the social work practice undertaken by our NQSWs and Assessors

- the working relationships we have been able to build through the Panel with members of the ASYE community in the PVI Sector.

What we learnt

The key learning point has been the value of this process in contributing to the goal of achieving consistency and quality in our ASYE Programme. It has also been helpful in confirming the calibration of the ASYE practice capability level. With the publication of the proposals for the Approved Child and Family Practitioner status, it is unclear what space there will be for the External Moderation process in the quality assurance of the Employer Endorsement stage. Given the many benefits of this process, its continuation would be valuable to our ASYE Programme.



The External Moderation Panel process is an important element in the system of quality assurance for our ASYE Programme. It has helped to improve the consistency of decision-making in the Programme and is also a resource for developing good practice across the ASYE community



Cumbria Chair of External Panel

Skills for Care Recommends

Skills for Care has helped to develop the ASYE process and provides some practical resources and funding potential for employers involved in providing adult social care.

Continuing to develop Social Workers

Skills for Care has produced core principles, resources and guidance to support employers to develop the social work workforce.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/swcpd

Action Learning for Social Workers

Action Learning facilitation as a useful support package for NQSWs undertaking the ASYE. Our resources include a number of videos which provide the views of, managers and facilitators.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/socialwork

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