

Essex County Council – People Operations

ASYE internal moderation panel – combined adult and child and family

Essex County Council is the second largest local authority in the country and People Operations is responsible for the statutory social work services to adults and child and family in Essex.

As a large organisation we employ a high percentage of newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) across the organisation and as such were keen to ensure we supported them appropriately with the original NQSW programme and from 2012 with the ASYE.

As part of the design and implementation of this programme it was important to ensure we had a system in place to assess the robustness and validity of the ASYE assessor's judgements in relation to their recommendations of pass/fail for the NQSW.

What we wanted to achieve

Essex People Operations employs between 100-200 NQSWs a year across the services. We therefore needed to implement a process that promoted consistency and a regular forum that supported understanding of the principles of ASYE that was shared across the service.

We also needed to ensure there was accountability for decision making at senior management levels within the organisation including the principal social workers.

What we did

The panel meets approximately once a month and is made up of a range of experienced senior practitioners, team managers and service managers across all service areas. The panel provides the opportunity to share professional discussion regarding quality and to enable NQSWs and assessors to receive constructive feedback to inform their development.

The panel is joint between adult and family operations which ensures consistency across both services and this provides a clear and transparent process of evaluation for all involved. The panel influences future planning for ASYE by identifying common issues arising. Panel members only mark portfolios of NQSWs who are not part of their service or known to them. This will generally mean that adults panel members will mark family portfolios and vice versa.

The panel is chaired by the family operations ASYE coordinator who is a registered social worker and she ensures a consistent approach is applied on all panels. The panel also includes a representative from Anglia Ruskin University as part of our partnership arrangements.

The panel uses a standard template which was developed within Essex County Council to mark the portfolios which includes a checklist to ensure all documents are included and adequately completed. It asks for detailed feedback on the assessor report and three other documents/items within the portfolio. Finally it asks for a summary and endorsement of the pass/fail recommendation. There is a space for feedback to the NQSW and to assessor/manager.

In the event a concern is raised over the quality of the evidence or the assessment judgement the portfolio is passed for a second assessment by the principal social worker in the relevant service. They make a final decision as to the appropriate outcome.

What we achieved

The panels have now been running since June 2014 with peaks in the summer months where we had two panels every month. We have representatives from a range of services attending each month and this supports the process of embedding ASYE within all teams and promoting and raising the quality of assessments, evidence and judgements in the ASYE.

The chair of the panel has delivered training to assessors on how to improve their judgements and the evidence requirements have been reviewed to ensure the relevance of documents within the portfolios. Essex currently works in partnership with two HEIs (higher education institution) to produce an academic element to the ASYE programme. This data has been shared with our HEI partner who delivers our academic ASYE programme, informal assessor support sessions and our formal Practice Education programme. This ensures the messages are shared consistently at all levels of the organisations.

Where portfolios presented at panel are considered to have insufficient evidence, they are deferred and returned to the candidate for submission at the next panel.

Since the panel has been in place we have begun to see a decrease in the numbers of portfolios being returned to candidates and it is likely that this is due to a clearer understanding of the requirements across the service.

What we learnt

It can be difficult to get the commitment from people to attend the panel as frontline operational staff are often pulled in different directions, however we have not yet had a situation where we have not been able to complete marking within 24 hours of the panel.

There are pros and cons to having different panel members at each panel. One of the disadvantages of this is that the panel lacks consistency. This is mitigated by having a consistent panel chair who oversees all the recommendations and provides advice to panel members. It also takes time for new panel members to gain confidence in the role so panels can take longer as people become familiar with the process.

While we are still in the process of supporting new panel members we are maintaining a face to face panel. Moving forward it is possible we will utilise technology to hold virtual panels.

The benefits of a changing panel are that the overall awareness and knowledge of the ASYE is better understood throughout the service and this has helped embed ASYE through all levels of the organisation. It also means we are able to run the panels once a month without impacting too significantly on individual member's time.

Initially we set panels for a whole day but found that marking three to four portfolios was enough for most people in one sitting, so the panels are now set for just over half a day.

A further issue was ensuring portfolios were submitted in time for the panels so we have adjusted portfolio submission dates to fall a week before the panel in order that we can ensure we have the right resources in place.

Although new panel members may prefer to mark portfolios from the same service area, they are later able to apply the same judgements across services. This helps identify issues such as an over dependency on jargon. Having a joint adult and child and family panel enables us to apply the same assessment criteria and standards regardless of the knowledge of the service area.. At the same time by reviewing portfolios from across services there is an increase in understanding of the issues and type of work from a variety of settings. Importantly it also enables panel members to build relationships with colleagues across services.

As we go forward we will be checking that the process that we have in place will meet the new Skills for Care internal moderation requirements. Overall we have found that the quality of portfolios is improving and the process is receiving positive feedback. We find the consistent approach across adult and child and family supports an understanding of the expectations and standards for all social workers.

The panel provides an opportunity for all managers within adults and family operations to gain a better understanding of the ASYE and the standards applied to assessment. By providing a consistent chair who is suitably qualified we are able to ensure standardisation while at the same time involving a range of staff within the service. Having different service areas marking the portfolios gives everyone the opportunity to really consider the evidence that is available rather than focussing on case management issues and it also increases understanding of the different service areas.

Jan Williams – ASYE coordinator Family Operations – Panel Chair

The main feedback I've had from panel members is how useful it has been for them in understanding what they need to provide as an ASYE assessor and what they should be ensuring their NQSW provides, and what a quality folder should look like. As for the panel being adults and families, I think the main thing is that they get to see that the same standards are applied across both and that assessing social work practice is the same regardless of the role of the NQSW'

Tracey Field – ASYE coordinator – Adult Operations

For more information please contact

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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.

Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (adults)

We can provide information and resources to help social work employers to implement the ASYE in adults services.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/ASYE

Finding and keeping workers

This online resource aims to be the first place you visit for recruitment and retention information and includes a range of useful videos, case studies and websites.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/findingandkeepingworkers

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