Children's Workforce Development Council

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Social Work Reform Conference

Seminar Two:
The Step-up to Social Work Scheme

Session Notes

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Please note that the information contained in this document is strictly confidential. The recruitment and selection tools outlined are 'live' and will be used in subsequent recruitment campaigns for the Step Up to Social Work Programme. We would therefore ask that you retain this document securely and do not circulate it to any third parties.

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Background

As we are all acutely aware, the role of the social worker is of primary importance to a vast number of families and individuals across the United Kingdom. They offer vital support and assistance to many who experience difficulties in their lives. In order to achieve CWDC's aims of professionalising the service and alleviating the recruitment and retention issues currently experienced, it is essential that the right people are selected for these roles.

Working with children, particularly in the Child Protection Arena, can be especially demanding, requiring an empathetic and resilient approach and is therefore not suited to everyone. The challenges faced by children's social workers have been further intensified as a result of media attention following high profile cases. This was highlighted by Nushura Mansuri of the British Association of Social Workers when she said that "nobody would dispute since Baby Peter that recruitment issues have been exacerbated".

Research carried out by the Conservative Party in February 2009 found that Local Authorities' vacancies rates for social workers stood at c15% on average, with some councils reporting a rate of 40%. This increases pressure and undoubtedly presents a degree of risk. Social workers are stretched and whilst not denigrating the commitment of agency/temporary resources, building the long-term relationships that are often needed is simply not possible with temporary staff.

As a result there are undoubtedly areas where motivation issues and increased workloads are causing significant numbers of social workers to leave the profession, taking valuable skills and experience with them.

On a positive note there has been recognition of these challenges and they are being addressed through the Change for Social Work with Children and Families Programme, implemented by CWDC, of which the Step Up to Social Work Programme forms a part.

CWDC launched the Step Up Programme as a pilot project to recruit trainee social workers onto an innovative work-based placement programme leading to an MA in Social Work. The programme is delivered through Regional Partnerships and supported by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). As part of this, Penna was delighted to be retained to design and deliver the recruitment and selection process.

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Challenges

Given the importance of the social worker role, it was incumbent on Penna to scope, design and deliver a recruitment campaign that selected a special type of candidate, dedicated to making a difference, whilst adapting to the challenges faced as a result of completing a work-based placement at the same time as studying towards a Masters level qualification.

Placements for the programme were across eight different Regional Partnerships, each made up of multiple Local Authorities. Two Higher Education Institutions (HEIs); Salford University and Manchester Metropolitan University, were given responsibility for designing and ultimately awarding the masters element of the programme. Given the dual aspect of the programme it was essential that the selection tools assessed both the work-based requirements of the Regional Partners and the academic requirements of the HEIs.

As well as the Regional Partners and HEIs, CWDC retained project management partner, PIPC and service users were also involved in the development and delivery of the project. With so many key stakeholders, careful management and planning of the consultation process throughout the project was a major influencer in its success.

Another challenge was the very tight timescales within which work had to be completed. Factors included the advent of Purdah which dictated the window within which advertising the programme took place. We also had to be able to make offers to successful candidates in sufficient time for teachers (should they apply to the programme) to serve their full notice period ahead of a September start date.

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Penna Resourcing Solution

Specifically, Penna was retained to design and deliver the recruitment process to select 200 high quality candidates on to the Step Up to Social Work Programme. To this end we:

- conducted stakeholder interviews with representatives from the Regional Partnerships, CWDC, PIPC and HEIs to help us identify the key skills, behaviours and personal qualities required to be a successful Step Up candidate

- ran two focus groups with service users to gather their views on the design of the recruitment process. These were facilitated by our Occupational Psychologists

- developed an Assessment Framework with nine key competencies which outlined the type of effective behaviours that we would like to see Step Up candidates demonstrate and also those behaviours deemed less effective

- designed a selection process to measure these nine competencies – the selection process we proposed involved a Self-Selection Questionnaire (optional pre-selection tool), Application Form Questions, Situational Judgement Test (SJT) and Assessment Centre (AC) exercises

    - The SJT comprised a number of scenarios that newly-qualified social workers may experience, designed to give candidates a realistic understanding of what the role of a social worker will ultimately entail, and measure their potential to be successful in this field. We were unable to use the SJT as there were insufficient candidate numbers to warrant a second stage sift, however, we did ask candidates who had attended the AC to complete it for further information so that we could analyse the data and set a suitable benchmark

    - The AC involved two interviews (one Regional Partner and one HEI), a group exercise (involving service users), a written exercise and a telephone-based simulation exercise (role play)

- circulated draft versions of all selection tools to stakeholders, each explaining the rationale behind their development and requesting stakeholder feedback. All feedback was also circulated as were final versions of the selection tools

- conducted benchmarking exercises at the application stage for Regional Partnerships that were over-subscribed. All Regional Partnerships had a fixed number of places at assessment centre and some Partnerships had more successful candidates than spaces. In such instances, candidates were put in merit order based on their score from the application form. In a 'tie' situation, candidates' experience was reviewed and those with experience of working with children were given priority

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- provided Penna's experienced Assessment Centre Managers to facilitate each AC, managing the views of Regional Partners to encourage them to see the benefits of a candidate's performance overall, rather than relying solely on the interview they had conducted

- managed data integration sessions after each AC to determine the overall result for each candidate. There were three possible outcomes, namely; successful, unsuccessful and those candidates who were borderline and warranted further discussion by the Regional Partners

- ran a 'final' data integration session within each Regional Partnership to discuss all candidates that had been assessed in their region to decide to whom they wanted to make offers

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Benefits

Being part of such an important pilot programme, it was our role to ensure candidates were managed both efficiently and professionally, and that they were assessed objectively whilst getting a realistic insight into social work. We believe we achieved these things and provided CWDC with an extremely flexible service, in order to meet frequently changing needs.

Whilst an independent review and validation of the Programme has yet to take place, anecdotal evidence from stakeholders regarding the selection tools has been on the whole very positive.

The Assessment Centre added a new dimension to the recruitment process that is usually undertaken to recruit trainee social workers. The exercises enabled the client to see how candidates performed in situations that they may experience on the training programme and as a newly qualified social worker. For example, in the written exercise they were asked to read through a case study of a young person and write a briefing document outlining the key facts and make some recommendations; in the group exercise they had to liaise with service users; and in the telephone based simulation exercise they had to take a call from a young person and build rapport with them.

All candidates attending the assessment centres were asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire before leaving about their experience of the event. Feedback from this exercise was excellent with many candidates stating how the process had given them a valuable insight into the programme and the role of a social worker.

Summary

- Over 2000 applications received and manually processed
- Over 1800 applications screened in a secure environment to meet CWDC's stringent security requirements
- Over 500 candidates invited to assessment events
- 40 Assessment Centre events carried out in four weeks across multiple venues within eight Regional Partnerships
- 216 offers made across Regional Partnerships

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Step Up to Social Work

'A practice-led programme for professionals'

Selection Process

Self-Selection Questionnaire

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Eligibility Questions → GCSE – Maths, C & English, C; Degree – 2:1; Criminal Record Checks; Available to start Sept 2011

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Competency Based Questions → Child-Centred Approach; Motivation; Values

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Situational Judgement Test

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Assessment Centre → Interview A – Regional Partnership; Interview B – Higher Education Institute; Group Exercise (including service user involvement); Written Exercise; Telephone Based Simulation Exercise

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APEL

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ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

BEHAVIOUR	DEFINITION
Child-Centred Approach	Has the young person's or child's interest at the centre of all they do.
Values	Consistently exhibits behaviour in line with the values of the Social Work profession.
Verbal Communication	Communicates effectively and professionally with others to ensure they are understood, adapting their style to the audience and/or situation as appropriate.
Written Communication	Writes in a clear and professional style to aid understanding and influence others.
Resilience	Displays resilience, maintaining a professional service and optimistic outlook under difficult circumstances.
Analysis & Decision Making	Gathers information to solve problems and inform decisions; considers the wider implications and takes ownership for decisions made.
Planning & Organising	Organises self effectively, takes a structured and methodical approach to ensure that tasks are completed on time.
Building & Managing Relationships	Builds and maintains positive relationships with service users, colleagues and other professionals.
Self-Awareness & Self-Development	Is passionate about Social Work and motivated to succeed in this field; understands own values and has the ability to self-reflect to enhance personal development.

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ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

	1st stage sift	2nd stage sift	3rd stage sift	Assessment Centre				
Assessment method / Behaviour	Application Form	SJT	Written Exercise	Interview -	Interview - HEI Local Authority	Group Exercise	Written Exercise	Telephone Based Simulation Exercise
Child-centred Approach	✔	✔		✔		✔	✔	✔
Values	✔	✔			✔			✔
Verbal Communication		✔		✔ (direct observation)	✔ (direct observation)	✔		✔
Written Communication	✔		✔			✔ (evaluation form)	✔	✔ (evaluation form)
Resilience		✔		✔				✔
Analysis and Decision Making		✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	
Planning and Organising		✔			✔		✔	
Building and Managing Relationships		✔		✔		✔		
Self-awareness and Self-development	✔	✔			✔	✔		✔

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SELF-SELECTION QUESTIONNAIRE (SSQ)

WHAT IS IT?

- A tool that potential applicants will have the option to complete when they visit the microsite for the Step Up to Social Work Programme
- It is designed to serve two purposes:
    - o To enhance prospective candidates' understanding of the Step Up programme (e.g. what will be expected of them, what it will involve)
    - o To allow prospective candidates to informally self-assess their likely 'fit' to the role in terms of their skills, abilities and preferred working style
- Optional to complete – should be viewed as part of the attraction process rather than as part of the application process
- Includes 10 pairs of statements and for each pair potential applicants have to select the statement that is most reflective of them
- After they have indicated their preference in each case, they will be given some further information about the role, and they will be able to see if their selection matches the preferred option
- Once candidates have completed the whole questionnaire, they will be given automatic feedback as to whether they are likely to be a suitable candidate for the Step Up programme. This feedback allows them to make an informed decision as to whether or not to apply

EXAMPLE QUESTION

Example Question (correct response highlighted – box is further information about role)

I like to have a moderate workload which is easy to manage

I enjoy being busy and having lots to do

As a trainee on the Step Up to Social Work programme you will need to balance both academic and professional requirements. If you are on placement the hours will not always be 9-5 and you will need to spend additional study time at home to ensure you achieve the Masters degree within 18 months.

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APPLICATION FORM

KEY BENEFITS

- Key minimum criteria identified (essential & desirable)
- Consistent & robust behavioural criteria used to screen all applications ensuring standardisation and objectivity
- For oversubscribed locations candidates were 'top-sliced' to take the highest calibre through
  - reviewed application form score and extent of their relevant experience of working with children

KEY CRITERIA – MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

- GCSE - Maths C, English C
- Degree - 2.1 or above
- Criminal Record Checks
- Available to start September 2010

COMPETENCY BASED QUESTIONS

Based on the outputs of the role analysis we also identified 3 key questions to include on the application form as the initial screening stage for applications:

- Experience of working with children and young people in a professional capacity was deemed critical for individuals applying to the Step Up programme
- A motivation question was included to understand why candidates were applying for the Step Up programme and to gather evidence around their own self-awareness and self-development
- A values question was included to assess the candidates' knowledge of the values that are important in social work and to encourage them to think about when they have personally demonstrated these at work. Again, this was also used to gather evidence around self-awareness and self-development

Q1 CHILD-CENTRED APPROACH

Outline experience you consider as relevant to this application. This experience must include working and building relationships with children and young people in a paid or voluntary capacity.

Q2 MOTIVATION

What has influenced your decision to apply for the CWDC Step Up to Social Work Programme?

Q3 VALUES

What values do you believe are important in Social Work?

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SITUATIONAL JUDGEMENT TEST (SJT)

WHAT IS IT?

- A series of work related situations
- Candidates are required to determine the most appropriate course of action
- Multiple choice options
- A Situational Judgement Test (SJT) was designed to act as a further screening tool that candidates will be invited to complete once they have passed the application form sift
- SJT comprised a number of scenarios that newly-qualified social workers may experience, designed to give candidates a realistic understanding of what the role of a social worker will ultimately entail and measure their potential to be successful in this field
- The scenarios were generated following our discussions with key stakeholders. In some instances we adapted the situations provided to us to ensure they don't rely on procedural knowledge, as candidates obviously won't be expected to have this. In other cases, we used key behaviors as a basis for the scenarios
- We piloted the SJT and identified 11 questions which were suitable for use based on our analysis of the statistical data produced

HOW IS IT SCORED?

- Clearly defined 'correct' and 'incorrect' answers for each situation
- Enables a truly objective assessment
- Identifies the candidates' potential to be able to deal effectively with relevant situations

KEY BENEFITS

- Will substantially improve candidate engagement giving individuals a deeper insight into the role of a Social Worker.
- To reduce the possibility of inadvertent bias against some under-represented candidate groups.
- To act as an efficient sifting mechanism – easy for candidates to complete and easy to score.
- Very accessible for candidates
- Easy to complete
- Reduces the time required for the process

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SITUATIONAL JUDGEMENT TEST (SJT)

EXAMPLE QUESTION

A new health visitor has contacted Social Services to express her concerns about the standard of hygiene in the home of a new baby. This is one of the families you are working with so the call has been referred to you.

The health visitor states that the house is in a worse state than last week and is disgusting.

She has no other concerns apart from the state of the house.

Your last visit to the family was 2 days ago and although the house was messy and untidy the children were being well cared for in your opinion.

Example Question		
Please select the First and Last option from the following 4 options by placing an 'X' in the appropriate box.	First	Last
A Arrange to meet with the health visitor to discuss the situation further.		
B Inform the health visitor that the family are coping well at the moment so in your opinion a messy house is not a priority.		x
C Spend time asking the health visitor further questions to ensure you fully understand her concerns and how this impacts the children.	x	
D Arrange to visit the house again yourself.		

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ANALYSIS & VALIDATION

The SJT was not subsequently required since the volume of candidates applying meant that an additional sifting stage was not needed for this campaign. However we did ask candidates who had attended the AC to complete it to give us further information to validate the tool. 264 candidates chose to complete the SJT post-assessment centre, providing us with a large amount of data to analyse, and we received some very positive feedback as follows:

- "the SJT was bang on and gave a really good idea of what the job involves"
- "the SJT was really interesting and helpful – it gave me something to think about"

Outputs of the analysis of the 'live' candidate data allowed us to provide recommendations as to how the SJT may be a valuable addition to candidate selection on future occasions as follows:

- The 11 questions originally identified by the pilot are still suitable for use
- We were able to recommend a benchmark of 14 (out of a possible 22) as 33% of the 264 individuals scored 14 or below, so approximately 1/3 of candidates would be sifted out if we set the benchmark at 14 – this is best practice.
- In our adverse impact analysis, we were looking to check that the percentage of a minority group passing the SJT at the benchmark, is at least 4/5ths (80%) of the overall candidate pool, to show that they are not likely to be disadvantaged by setting the benchmark at this level.
- There was a significant correlation between the SJT total score and total AC competency score. This demonstrates a positive relationship between the two, giving us confidence that as a candidate scores higher on the SJT they are likely to perform better at AC.

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ASSESSMENT CENTRE

KEY BENEFITS

- Best known predictor of future performance in role
- Allow multiple assessors to observe **candidates in a variety of different exercises,** rather than just relying on candidate's performance at an interview to recommend them for a role
- Promote fair and objective assessment of individual performance through use of a structured process
- Gives assessors the opportunity to observe **how candidates act in different situations**
- Provides primary and secondary evidence
- Provides candidates with a realistic preview of what will be expected in the role
- Allows candidates multiple opportunities to demonstrate their capabilities

SELECTION TOOLS

There were 5 **key elements** included within the assessment centre:

- Interview – Local Authority
- Interview – Higher Education Institute
- Group Exercise (including service user involvement)
- Written Exercise
- Telephone-based Simulation Exercise

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TELEPHONE BASED SIMULATION EXERCISE

KEY BENEFITS

- One of the best methods of observing how a candidate reacts under pressure, thinking on their feet, and their resilience
- Allows assessors to see how candidates would communicate with a young person, and by making it a telephone call the age of the role player is immaterial

SCENARIO/TASK

- You are asked to imagine that you are working for a fictional county council called Hutton County Council (HCC). Four months ago you started a training scheme at HCC to become a qualified social worker. The training scheme enables you to experience different aspects of the role of a social worker, whilst completing a degree in Social Work, in order to qualify in this profession
- Your current placement is within Children's Services, where your line manager is Ania Gorski
- This week you are working on the duty desk, acting as the first point of contact for individuals contacting Children's Services, where your role is to answer telephone calls
- Telephone calls come from a wide variety of people including members of the public, family members, schools and health professionals
- In a couple of minutes' time you will receive a telephone call from a young person in distress. You will have **up to 10 minutes** to deal with the call
- Your objectives are as follows:
  - Listen to the young person and reflect back your understanding of the situation
  - Respond appropriately as this is a young person in distress
  - Build rapport with the young person and gain his/her agreement for a member of your team to contact his/her father, addressing confidentiality issues with the young person. **Please note you are not expected to get contact details from the young person as these will be automatically recorded on the computer system.**
- When you are ready to receive the call, a ring tone will sound and it is then your responsibility to answer the call by saying **"Good morning Children's Services, can I help you?"**

Please assume your own name for the purposes of the exercise.

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GROUP EXERCISE

KEY BENEFITS

- Building realtionships is a key aspect of the role
- It was extremely important to involve service users as part of the assessment process and therefore the Group Exercise was the most appropriate forum to involve them

SCENARIO/TASK

In your group we would like you to draw on your own experiences and those of the young people to discuss and summarise:

1. What are the most important skills and attributes for a social worker to have when they work with children and young people?

2. How can social workers ensure that children and young people are involved in the decisions that are made about their lives?

However, to make this exercise more fun we would then like you to use this information and the materials provided to produce a kite!

- The key responses from question one should be written on the main body of the kite.
- The key responses from question two should be written on the bows which should be stuck on the tail of the kite.

The group will be given 25 minutes in total to complete the task and you should spend 10 minutes on each question.

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INTERVIEWS (HEI/Local Authority)

KEY BENEFITS

- Interview process assessed both academic and work-based elements of the process

Notes:

- Following the completion of the 2010 'Step up Programme' it has been agreed to integrate the two interviews

SCENARIO/TASK

HEI Interview Sample Questions:

- Planning & Organising
  Please provide an example of a time when you had a particularly heavy workload to manage with a number of competing priorities

Local Authority Interview Sample Questions:

- Child-centred Approach
  Please provide an example of a time when you had to take some action concerning the wellbeing of a child or young person
- Resilience
  Please provide an example of a time when you had to overcome an extremely challenging situation involving another person, preferably at work

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WRITTEN EXERCISE

KEY BENEFITS

- Written communication is critical for social workers – they have to review lots of information, identify themes, assess risks, form a judgement based on evidence, and produce written reports on the basis of this
- Important part of the assessment centre because this looked at their ability to write reports as opposed to saying that they can write reports, especially when under pressure

SCENARIO/TASK

Your Role

Two months ago you started a training scheme at HCC to become a qualified social worker. The training scheme enables you to experience different aspects of the role of a social worker, whilst completing a degree in Social Work, in order to qualify in this profession. Your first placement has been in the TLC team and as an unqualified social worker you are supported and supervised by Pat Murphy who is an experienced and qualified social worker.

The Situation

Today is **Tuesday 1st May** and Pat, has been called to an emergency case meeting. She has therefore left you an email asking you to review a case involving a young person.

Attached to this brief you will find the following information:

- An email from Pat Murphy, your Supervisor
- A file note about the case
- Information about young people who leave care
- A list of the accommodation options for young people leaving care in HCC
- A summary of some recent background research

The Task

You now have **60 minutes** to read through this information and produce a brief written report for your Supervisor that covers the following:

1. A summary of the key issues in relation to the case which includes any wider concerns you have.
2. Your initial recommendations on the best accommodation options with an explanation of why you have come to this conclusion based on the information provided.
3. A brief plan of what you consider to be the next steps.

All of the information that you need to complete this task is in this brief. No information other than the information presented to you in this brief is required to complete the exercise.