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| Adult Care and Quality Standards |
| Practice Observation Framework |
| Audit and Practice Improvement Team/Children’s Services |



# Introduction

This is a framework for undertaking formal observations of practice (child and family practitioners and their supervisors) across Children’s Services. The purpose of this framework is to set out a policy of standards and expectations so that there is a consistent approach to this for all practitioners and managers.

This framework sets out the expectation in relation to practitioners and managers being observed in their practice on a regular basis as they go about their core duties, such as going on home visits, chairing meetings, presenting at meetings, partnership-working and communicating with members of the department as well as offering supervision.

# Objectives

The overall objectives of this framework are:

1. To embed a structure of regular observations of practitioners and managers.
2. To continuously support the improvement of practice quality which are hoped to also result in positive outcomes for children/ young people and families

# National Context

The design of this framework has been informed by the initiatives put forward by the key messages from the Munro Report of child protection. It also takes into account the Ofsted inspection framework which includes a proactive approach of also talking to and observing practitioners in their day-to-day work and observing relevant meetings and panels.

The key messages are as following:

1. Offering support to the continuous professional development of practitioners and managers; and having in place a social work accountability framework informed by knowledge of good social work practice and the experience and expertise of children/ young people and their parents/ carers who receive use services as well as practitioners.
2. The need to continuously strive towards the achievement of better outcomes for children and families
3. The need to consistently demonstrate a high level of quality of direct work and relationships with children and their families
4. The need to emphasise professional judgement amongst practitioners.
5. The value of reflective practice and supervision
6. A positive learning environment and culture

Observation is an important part of learning. Much of what social workers and practitioners need to be aware of cannot be learned solely in a training course setting and observation is an excellent alternative to traditional training approaches. Observation presents an opportunity to see real-life workers in real-life situations.

Observation is important at every stage of a practitioner’s career, not only for students, but for ALL workers.

It is an opportunity for the observed worker to…

* See practice through someone else’s eyes
* Re-evaluate the interaction from a different perspective
* Receive feedback and suggestions for practice improvement
* Enhance their personal and professional development

# The nature and context of a direct observation

Direct observation is a requirement for managers (Team Managers and Senior Managers) to observe a practitioner carrying out a task, evaluating their performance and providing formal feedback both verbally and in writing.

A formal direct observation relates to the following

1. A formal, pre-negotiated process – date of observation agreed jointly, both parties are aware that feedback will be given after the observation.
2. Verbal agreement is obtained from the child/ young person/ parent/ carer prior for the observer to join them in the meeting/visit.
3. A discussion is held before the observation between the two parties to agree what the observer is going to be looking for/assessing and the nature of the work being observed to provide some contextual information to the meeting with the child/ young person/ parent/ carer.
4. It is clearly differentiated from co-working and other on-going informal observations.
5. The observer does not interact in the observation and takes notes of what is going on; observing the worker and the response of the child/ young person/ parents/ carers.
6. The observer completes the feedback template based on their observations of the practitioner.
7. A short feedback meeting is arranged by the observer with the practitioner to provide verbal and written feedback and to address any immediate practice issues. A copy of the feedback form will be given to the practitioner and their manager.
8. A copy of the feedback form is kept in the practitioner’s supervision folder.
9. A copy of the feedback form is also sent to the Audit and Practice Improvement Team for quality assurance purposes and to collate a report: this will analyse all reports and any themes arising from the practice observations will be shared accordingly.

The following situations are considered some suitable examples for formal observations of practice:

* Home visit
* Interview with a child/ young person/ parent/ carer in the office or other venue
* Chairing a meeting that involves child/ young person/ parent/ carer (CP conference, core group meeting, CIN review, LAC review, Pathway Plan Review, etc.)
* Practitioners presenting information at panels, meetings
* Practitioners giving evidence in court
* Supervision

*Please note: the above is not an exhaustive list*

# The nature and context of an observation of supervision

The supervision framework agreed in Waltham Forest sets out the expectations for supervision related to the practitioner’s work with children/ young people and their families, depending on the nature and complexity of the situation, as well as the expectation for individual supervision for each practitioner.

An observation of supervision offers an opportunity for a senior manager to get a better understanding how support is offered to practitioners, work related as well as to the individual professional.

It is the expectation that the observing manager consults with the manager and the individual practitioner about their intention to observe and seek the agreement of both. The observing manager is expected not to interrupt or join any conversation in the meeting and is expected, following brief initial and verbal feedback, to provide a written observation report to the observed manager as well as the Practice Improvement and Audit Team/ QA. These individual reports will be analysed, and findings collated and shared accordingly.

# The link between observation and appraisal/ probation; (for permanent staff), performance management and supervision (for all)

It is an expectation that line managers use the process of supervision to discuss the feedback reports of staff that have been observed, address any immediate practice issues, and take forward any identified areas for future development. It is also an expectation that line managers will offer praise and celebrate the positive elements of the work.

The observation of practice/ supervision reports should also be used as evidence in staff appraisals and can also be used to contribute to the probationary period; they can serve as evidence to ensure that new starters are performing to a satisfactory standard.

Observation of practice/ supervision reports can be used as a tool to identify any practice areas that present a challenge and allow remedial action to be taken promptly. Regular reviews are an essential part of the process providing both supervisor and social worker with an opportunity to check progress and achievement of objectives.

# Guidelines for observations of practice/ supervision

1. It is aimed for 2 cycles of observation (6 months each) to be arranged per year with team managers observing 2 team members/practitioners in that time. Members of the Senior Leadership team will be asked to observe 1 manager in each 6 month period.
2. It is the aim for each practitioner in the service to be observed once a year where possible.
3. The Divisional Director will undertake a formal observation of supervision twice a year.

The Practice Improvement and Audit Team oversee and coordinate each observation cycle, including identification of practitioners/ managers and allocations of observations.

Observations are aimed to be allocated as following for **each cycle of 6 months**:

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| **Manager/ Senior Manager** | **Observation of Practitioner** | **Observation of Practice Supervisor/ Head of Service** |
| Corporate Director | n/a | Twice yearly |
| Assistant Directors*(SFS, Corporate Parenting, QA)* | n/a | Twice yearly |
| Heads of Service*(MASH, SFS, Corporate Parenting, QA)* | n/a | Twice yearly |
| Team Managers of all teams* MASH
* Assessment
* Long term SFS
* SEND
* Children in Alternative Homes
* Care Experienced Young Adults
* Access to Resources
* Fostering (TM and DTM)
* Permanence/ Post Order
 | 2 per cycle | n/a |
| Audit and Practice Improvement Team/ QA (Manager and Senior Practitioner) | 1 per cycle | n/a |
| Managers of IRO’s and CPC’s and manager of PAT/NRPF/FGC tea, | 1 per cycle | n/a |

***NB:*** *\* an observation cycle runs for 6 months*

***NB:*** *whilst observers will be allocated specific practitioners/ practice supervisors for observation in a particular cycle, a level of flexibility can be exercised by the observer in consultation with the Audit and Practice Improvement Team.*

# Evaluation and analysis

All managers are required to submit a copy of the observation report from each observation to the Practice Improvement and Audit Team once the observation has been completed and the practitioner/ practice supervisor has been given the feedback formally.

Analysis of the practice themes emanating from the feedback will be compiled by the team following each cycle and will be shared with the Children Services Leadership Team. This will also be considered in the training plan and children’s social care improvement activities for the following year.

# Appendices

# Observation of practice – process chart – step by step guide

# Feedback

*Observers*

Given effectively, feedback is a major motivational tool for organisational leaders. The expectation if for managers to provide feedback which is constructive and balanced in regards to strengths and areas for improvement. Giving feedback is the process of telling another individual how they are perceived. It can be a source of anxiety for both giver and receiver.

The most constructive feedback is high on support and high on challenge. Feedback between the practitioner and observer is a critical component of the learning process of both. Following the observation, the observer should give the practitioner the opportunity to reflect on the session. Brief verbal feedback should be given following the observed practice and a subsequent written record of this feedback given within a week, using the template in appendix one.

The feedback should identify how specific standards have been met, i.e. evidence related to agreed aspects of practice. It is helpful if written feedback is specific, constructive and owned. The practitioner may comment in writing on points made by observer and on their future needs for training and development.

Constructive feedback can:

* Improve performance
* Increase morale
* Develop teamwork
* Enhance the quality of service provided

The risks of lack of good feedback are that it can:

* Demoralise
* Reduce confidence
* Cause conflict

*Practitioners*

It is essential that practitioners believe that direct observation practice is in place to support and assist their practice and professional development. Practitioners need to acknowledge that feedback will consist of praise for good practice as well as constructive criticism. Practitioners are encouraged to embrace direct observation as a learning tool.

# Templates for practice observations – please see below

* Observation of Child and Family Practitioner
* Observation of Practice Supervisor

**Practice Observation**

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| --- | --- |
| **Name of Worker:**  | **Date of observation:**  |
| **Name of observer:**  | **Role of observer:**  |
| **Setting of observation:**  |

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| **1. Holistic assessment of areas of strength and improvement demonstrated in the observation of practice (up to 500 words)** |
| *Give a brief background to the observation; was the worker prepared? Able to respond to questions posed? Demonstrated relational aspects of practice? Showed cultural competence?* |
| **2. What did the practitioner do well?**  |
| *What skills and knowledge did they demonstrate at this observation?* |
| **3. What could be developed further?** |
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| **4. Action plan following the direct observation with SMART objectives**  |
| *How will we address any learning and development needs been identified from this observation?* |
| **5. Practitioner’s reflection on the observation and feedback** |
|  |
| Grading |  |

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| --- | --- |
| **Observer’s signature** |  |
| **Date** |  |
| **Workers signature** |  |
| **Date**  |  |

**Observation of Supervision**

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| **Name of Manager being observed:**  | **Date of observation:**  |
| **Name of observer:**  | **Role of observer:**  |
| **Setting of observation:**  |

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| **1. Holistic assessment of areas of strength and improvement demonstrated in the observation of practice (up to 500 words)** |
| *Give a brief background to the observation; was the manager/supervisor prepared? Demonstrated relational aspects of practice? Showed cultural competence? Was the supervision well structured?* |
| **2. What did the manager/supervisor do well in relation to direct practice?**  |
| *What skills and knowledge did they demonstrate at this observation? Did the supervision discussion help the practitioner to analyse and assess risk and need? Did the supervision help the practitioner to reflect on their work with the children and families and other professionals? Did they test hypotheses based on social work knowledge and research? Did discussions help the practitioner to consider alternative explanations and consider different approaches to work with the child and family?* |
| **3. What did the manager/supervisor do well in relation to supporting the practitioner to develop professionally?** |
| *Did the supervision discussion help develop a clear understanding about practice standards? Did the manager/supervisor provide feedback, guidance and challenge where appropriate?* |
| **4. What skills could be developed further?** |
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| **5. Action plan following the observation of supervision with SMART objectives**  |
| *How will we address any learning and development needs been identified from this observation? Are there any aspects of supervision that need to be developed?* |
| **6. Manager’s / Supervisor’s reflection on the observation and feedback** |
|  |
| Grading |  |

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| --- | --- |
| **Observer’s signature** |  |
| **Date** |  |
| **Manager/ Supervisor’s signature** |  |
| **Date**  |  |