

Support for Professional Practice in Guidance

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There has been much debate about the use of the word 'supervision'. Some are uncomfortable with this term so to represent the support system we propose, a new working title of 'support for professional practice in guidance' has been agreed with Careers Scotland. We feel that this more clearly reflects the supportive nature of the activity and links it to professional reflection and development.

Why is support and supervision needed now?

Careers Scotland was established on 1 April 2002, bringing together the 17 Careers Companies in Scotland, with 22 Education Business Partnerships, staff from the 17 Adult Guidance Networks and the 22 Local Learning Partnerships into one single all age guidance organisation for Scotland. A key role for the new organisation has been supporting inclusion through a range of projects established across Scotland under the recommendations of the *Beattie Committee* (Implementing Inclusiveness Realising Potential, 1999). Inclusion projects have employed a significant number of key workers from a range of backgrounds and experiences to provide the intensive, on going support needed by people facing exclusion due to disadvantage and personal problems.

As a result of this important inclusion agenda in Scotland, it is clear that careers advisers, key workers and other staff in Careers Scotland are being called upon to work more intensively than in the past with the hardest to help client group, those variously termed disengaged, disadvantaged or excluded.

Consequently, there is an emerging need for the introduction of a model of support and supervision to help practitioners engaged in guidance and key worker activity to deal with the demands and challenges of the job.

During 2002, the careers guidance course tutors at the University of Paisley were commissioned by Careers Scotland to undertake desk-based research into the various models and approaches to support and supervision used in 'helping professions', into developments to date in the guidance profession itself and recent research into supervision by the Connexions service. There was also extensive focus group discussion involving around 80 members of staff from across Careers Scotland at all levels during the latter part of 2002. This clearly affirmed the need to develop a support and supervision model suited to the career guidance profession in Scotland.

This report summarises the feedback from focus groups and outlines the resulting recommendations.



Summary of feedback from focus group discussions



11 focus groups including 72 members of Careers Scotland staff met at the end of 2002. The discussions covered the following topics.

Issues and problems staff are now dealing with

Staff are now working more intensively with clients, particularly the hard to help and those with 'chaotic lifestyles', as well as networking with a wider range of agencies. There is some sense that people feel they do not have the knowledge and expertise to do this work, including addressing the requirements of providing all-age guidance, and that some staff are experiencing more stress than in the past as a result.

Experience to date of receiving support and supervision

This was variable, with careers advisers reporting that they get little or no formal support after their probationary year. Those involved in adult guidance and special needs work had developed mainly informal (but sometimes formal) support networks through working on and discussing cases with colleagues and developing peer support systems. Those recruited to Careers Scotland with social work or community education backgrounds came from a culture of supervision and felt the lack of it was an issue given the changing role and more intensive work with clients. Some inclusiveness projects have been able to set up support systems for their teams, sometimes drawing on supervision by experts outwith Careers Scotland.

Is there a need for a support system?

Unanimously 'Yes', and strong views that it should be able to 'make a difference' to people's work and result in changes to working practice through the opportunity for personal reflection. All agreed on the educative (personal development) and supportive (offloading) aspects, the majority disagreed with the managerial (maintenance of standards and quality) perspective, suggesting a need to distinguish between 'support' and 'supervision' more clearly: people need both but not at the same time or necessarily by the same person (hence our new definition noted above).

Preferred models

A wide range of views were expressed about the 'model' that would best suit career guidance workers and that no

single model would fit all contexts: there needs to be opportunities for informal support from a group of peers (e.g. case discussions, team meetings) as well as opportunities for formal support on a 1:1 basis which should be delivered by someone whom staff knew was interested and trained to do so, either within or outwith the organisation. There seemed to be a need to cover educative and personal development issues as well as allowing staff to offload concerns and reflect on solutions. There was also a feeling that while the support and supervision process should enable staff to be proactive in "helping themselves", management would need to be committed to the process to effect real change. There were also wide views regarding the formality/informality of the process. People have appreciated informal peer support in the past but recognised that for the model to be effective a formal/regular time allocation is needed.

Any threats or concerns?

Its introduction should be systematic, thorough and with organisational and management support. Time allocation should be protected. Boundaries, including confidentiality, need to be clear. It needs to be given by someone that the supervisee could trust. Opinion centred on the involvement and agreement of the supervisee and if records were to be kept the supervisee should have a copy. The agenda for support and supervision should be based (at the very least) on 50% of the supervisee's issues, clearly reflecting the supportive nature but also taking account of the needs of the organisation. Some felt it would be helpful for support to be given by someone external to the organisation (particularly for 1:1 support). Many valued support being provided by colleagues (though not necessarily in the same part of the organisation) because of the common knowledge base and understanding of the issues.

Issues supervision should cover

Emotional support was ranked very high, but from the discussions there also emerged a separate training need about various aspects of clients' lives (e.g. mental health, child protection), issues around managing caseloads, discussion of limits of own practice, identifying stress and

managing change. There was seen to be great value in getting another perspective to any issues/concerns the supervisee had. Some thought it also depended the stage you were at in your career and there was support for all types of supervision (e.g. supportive, educative and managerial) to those in their initial/probationary year.

What would a training programme for supervisors cover?

It was obvious that clear guidelines on the definitions and limits of what support and supervision are (for both supervisor and supervisee) were needed. It should be

“sold” positively and only those interested in being supervisors encouraged to take up the training as part of their own self-development. Enhanced guidance skills, group dynamics and knowledge of inter-agency work are some practical issues that could be included. It should be relevant to the range of jobs within Careers Scotland. Training should be broken up to allow time to “do it” and then receive feedback. It should also allow for on going and refresher training. Interestingly, many expressed the view that it was not a course for delivery through distance learning. The principles and approach should also be introduced during initial training.

Conclusions

Our research has found that there is clearly a demand for a system of support for staff at all levels. This is particularly necessary (and now urgent) for those working with the hardest to help: principally key/link workers. From our focus groups it was also evident that team leaders could also benefit from 1:1 support. Systematic training of staff supervisors will be required but until a support and supervision training programme is in place for Careers Scotland, we have arranged, as an interim measure, for supervision sessions to be provided by external consultants, with expertise in the field of counselling supervision. We are currently designing a training module for interested staff (*Support for professional practice in guidance*) that will be piloted this year. There is an issue over extending a system of support to all members of staff carrying a client caseload given the constraints of time and cost. Training of considerable numbers of staff will be required if a formal support system is to be developed internally, and there will be a significant cost if support is to be provided by external consultants for any length of time. These are areas that we will return to once the training is underway and the work of the external consultants has been evaluated. Where support is not enough in helping staff to deal with the rigours of the job we have also recommended that Careers Scotland provides access, in confidence, to an external counselling service.

Introducing a support system needs to be portrayed as a positive development, helping staff to give the best they can to their clients, giving them an opportunity to talk and if necessary to offload, thereby developing a culture where staff are proactive in helping and developing themselves. Educative and supportive aspects to support were regarded as particularly valuable, the managerial less so. We therefore recommended that these two areas are dealt with separately i.e. supervision of caseloads treated as a different role to that of supporting people to do their jobs well. Support needs to be formal, 1:1 and regular (notionally 1.5 hours every six weeks for staff involved in intensive work with clients) and the time needs to be protected.

While formal support and supervision sessions are now going to be introduced for some staff in Careers Scotland, there is still a place for discussions in the form of peer group support to cover case work and critical incident with colleagues in the same role, but we would argue that to be more effective this should also be treated as more formal than in the past, given time and done regularly.

Finally, all focus groups felt the need for a specific support system for the guidance profession, which could borrow elements from counselling and social work supervision but needed its own focus. In addition, its introduction needs to be systematic, thorough and with full organisational/management support.

Reference

Beattie Committee (September, 1999) *Implementing Inclusiveness Realising Potential*. [The Beattie Committee Report], Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.

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See www.naega.org.uk for Janet and Graham's *Select Bibliography on Supervision (Support for Professional Practice in Guidance)*