

**Children and Young People's
Overview and Scrutiny
Committee**

18 November 2019



Social Worker Academy Progress

Report of John Pearce, Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 The purpose of the report is to provide members of Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee with information on the progress and achievements of the Social Worker Academy.

Executive summary

- 2 The Social Work Academy, a 'grow your own social workers' initiative, was created in 2016 and continues to provide excellent support and opportunities to Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) during their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE). The number of ASYE social workers supported by the Social Work Academy and the newly created Enhanced Social Worker Practitioners (ESWP) has grown year by year with at least two cohorts of ASYEs joining each year.
- 3 The ESWP posts were introduced to aid the recruitment and retention of experienced social workers and to allow more ASYE's to be placed in teams, whilst insuring that they continued to receive good support by the Academy practice leads and from within their team. Work is continuing to embed the role of the ESWP within teams.
- 4 In our recent Ofsted Inspection, the Social Work Academy was praised and reported as a strength.
- 5 The turnover of social workers is reducing and therefore the number of vacancies in the service is slowing which, assuming this trajectory continues, means the number of ASYE's needed within the service will also reduce and stabilise. This is reviewed regularly at a meeting between the Strategic Managers for Families First, Human Resources

and the Service Improvement Manager, who has management oversight of the Social Work Academy.

Recommendation

- 6 Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee are requested to;
 - (a) receive the information contained in the report and presentation and comment accordingly.

Background

- 7 The Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee's review of the Role of the Social Worker from a Child's Perspective recommended that the committee monitor the development and progress of the Social Worker Academy.
- 8 In accordance with that recommendation arrangements have been made for the Strategic Manager Safeguarding Professional Practice and the Service Improvement Manager to attend a meeting of the committee on 18 November 2019 to present this report.

History of the Social Work Academy

- 9 The Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) was introduced in England in 2012 and is overseen by Skills for Care and assesses social workers against the Knowledge and Skills Statements mapped to the Professional Capabilities Framework. In May 2016, Durham Children's Services piloted a Social Work Academy, a 'grow your own' innovation which initially recruited 12 AYSE social workers. Due to the success of the pilot, in 2017 it became a mainstream programme. All NQSW are supported by the Academy programme which currently has two dedicated practice leads. One of these practice lead posts is a permanent post and the other is currently a fixed term post funded from reserves until the end of March 2021. This temporary post is currently vacant and is at the interview stage of recruitment.
- 10 Since 2016, 44 Social Workers have been supported by the Academy with 37 remaining to complete their full AYSE in Children's Social Care, please see Table 1 below. This has enabled them to develop a strong foundation for their practice with children and families focussing on embedding the Knowledge and Skills Statement, developing critical thinking and emotional resilience and ending with a 2–5 year career development plan to aid retention and to develop and shape the workforce for the future.

Table 1

Cohort	Cohort Period	Numbers	Remain in CSC	Left after completing ASYE	Left mid ASYE	Retention once ASYE completed %	Reasons for leaving
1	2016 to 2017	12	7	5	0	58%	All 5 left to pursue agency work
2	2017 to 2018 & 2019	19	8	5	5 (+ 1 re-deployed)	42%	4 x left profession 6 x moved to another LA
3	2017 to 2018, & 2019	12	9	2	1	75%	2 x left profession 1 x moved to another LA
4	2018 to 2019	26 (25 yet to complete ASYE by end of Feb 2020)	To date 1	To date 0	To date 0	To date 100%	
5	2019 to 2020	14 (14 yet to complete ASYE by Autumn 2020)	NA	To date 0	To date 0	Recently Started	
6	2019 to 2020	10 (10 yet to complete ASYE by Autumn 2020)	NA	NA	NA	Starting week beginning 7/10/19	

- 11 The number of ASYEs have increased year by year in response to service needs and vacancies. Each year there are at least two main recruitment periods meaning that 2 or more cohorts of new ASYEs overlap. In September 2018, it was proposed that the number of ASYEs increased over establishment as part of the retention strategy to develop an 'Enhanced Social Work Practitioner' (ESWP) role. The details of this are contained within Proposals for Recruitment and Agency Staff Cost Pressures Report, dated 24 September 2018.
- 12 Children's Social Care has 12 ESWP posts, one based in 12 of the 14 Family First Teams. They report to and are supervised by the Team Manager. Currently, 11 of these posts are filled with one being at the interview stage. ESWPs are experienced social workers who hold an often complex but reduced and protected caseload to allow time for them to mentor at least two the ASYEs in their teams and provide them with support, direction and fortnightly case mapping and discussions.

The Academy Practice Leads continue to provide reflective supervision, monthly development and training days, 3, 6 and 12 monthly reviews and one at 9 months if required and remain as the assessors of the ASYE's portfolio. They make a recommendation to approve or not to the Academy Panel who make the final decision about them passing their ASYE. They also provide additional support, learning and reflective supervision to those ASYEs not directly linked to an ESWP.

- 13 There is ongoing work to embed the ESWP role.

Current Position

- 14 From the week beginning 7 October 2019 the Social Work Academy will be supporting 49 NQSW to complete their ASYE. Of these, ten have joined us through the Frontline route (a graduate programme for entry into social work) and are currently temporarily in family worker posts pending formal confirmation of them having passed their degree which is due the week beginning 7 October 2019, four are highly likely to complete and pass their ASYE at the October 2019 ASYE Panel and three additional NQSW are due to start shortly. In addition, between October 2019 and January 2020 a further 18 are due to complete their ASYE.
- 15 Recruitment for NQSW is reviewed regularly as the numbers recruited directly relate to service need and capacity within the service to support NQSW. This is reviewed regularly at a meeting between the Strategic Managers for Families First, Human Resources and the Service Improvement Manager, who has management of the Social Work Academy. The next review is due to take place in November 2019 where a decision will be made about potential recruitment in January 2020.
- 16 Most of our ASYE's continue to work in Families First teams but the Academy also support an ASYE social worker in the Children Looked After teams, Young Peoples Service, Fostering and Children with disabilities teams. The key to the programme is to build a strong foundation in child focused reflective and analytical practice and then to continue that support through to progression as these are the experienced social workers, aspiring practice educators and managers of the future.

Impact of the Social Work Academy

- 17 The ASYE academy model has been a key part of the Children's Services Workforce strategy to address the shortage of social workers and subsequently retain them within the service. This strategy has been successful and in September 2019 we reported only 8 social work vacancies which had not progressed fully through the recruitment process. Agency workers located in social work teams made up 5.61%

of the establishment, lower than both the regional average (8.8%) and the national average (15.4%).

- 18 The recruitment of good NQSW is easy and we always have considerably more appointable candidates than vacancies. Overall we have retained 68% of the NQSWs the Academy has supported to complete the ASYE since 2016. Since the commencement of Cohort 4 we have retained 100 %. Where Social Workers have chosen to go elsewhere this usually happened after a few months after completing their ASYE with them often attracted by higher salaries or different types of work. Positively, 9 social workers who have been previously supported by the Academy have since progressed to senior social work posts, and a further 2 are now ESWP.
- 19 Whilst this overall retention is lower than we want it to be, there are some indications to suggest the number of post ASYE social workers from the more recent cohorts (3 and 4) leaving the Service is lessening but this needs further analysis once a longer period of time has passed. One hypothesis is that, as our work around retention of staff, which included better working environments, lower caseloads, retention payment and more support progresses our post ASYE social workers, like our more experienced social workers are more likely to stay. Of course, once social workers have successfully completed their ASYE, they are sort after due to the national shortage of experienced social workers.
- 20 Since November 2017, NQSWs have received an increment to their salaries on completion of the ASYE which improves the attractiveness of remaining with Children's Social Care.
- 21 During our recent ILAC Ofsted inspection (September 2019) and number of ASYE's were spoken to by inspectors and some portfolios and reflective supervision files were viewed. The feedback was very positive. ASYE's were also spoken with during the Focused Visit in January 2019 when again, inspectors said that the ASYE's reported feeling very well supported and were given opportunities and had positive experiences of the Academy.
- 22 One of the real strengths of the Academy is the level of support, learning and reflective supervision they receive, which is evidence below in some recent feedback

"The most important role Shelley [Practice Lead] has played for me has been in reflective supervision. In supervision, Shelley is supportive but also challenges in a constructive and gentle way. She has really supported me to consider different views, which is vital to good practice. Shelley has been a huge emotional support to me throughout the year. She has a way of making people feel at ease and comfortable to show

vulnerability. She recognises that sometimes all you need is a listening ear.” An ASYE 11 months in to the programme.

Shelley has provided some of the most effective reflective supervision I’ve had throughout my time in Durham County Council. She does this by getting to know her ASYE’s really well and understands our individual strengths and areas of improvement. It is clear that Shelley is passionate about training up effective and compassionate social workers. She encourages us every day to reach out potential.” An ASYE part way through the programme.

“Shelley’s reflective and therapeutic approach to supervision is what has driven me to be the social worker I am today and I feel without Shelley this may not have been what has seemed a very steady and smooth transition for me. Although I now a senior social worker whom is 2 years qualified, I have no doubt that Shelley will always be there to guide and support me should I need her and it is always lovely to see her in my office offering words of support to my front line practice.”
Previous ASYE who is now a Senior Social Worker.

- 23 Shelley Gill, our permanent Practice Lead has recently been shortlisted for the prestigious national Social Worker of the Year 2019 awards, under the category of Practice Educator of the Year.

Future need and Developments

- 24 As part of our recruitment and retention strategy we need to ensure that we continue to provide high quality opportunities for ASYEs and we know that the academy model has been effective in doing this.
- 25 There is a continued need to develop and embed the ESWP role within teams to ensure that it dovetails with the work of the academy and results in all ASYEs receiving a consistently strong offer of support.
- 26 It is difficult to predict the vacancy rate and therefore the number of NQSWs that we will need the Academy to support in the future. We do know, however, that the turnover of social workers within Children’s Social Care is reducing and is now lower than regional and national rates. For Families First, where most of the vacancies are filled by ASYE’s the turnover rate in September 2018 was 17.65% and this dropped to 12.94% in September 2019.
- 27 In March 2019, Skills for Care, ASYE regulators, started an annual programme of visiting local authorities and agencies who provide ASYE for NQSW. In order to assure the continued good practice and support taking place in the Social Work Academy and as preparation for a potential visit, plans to gather feedback from ASYEs and to gain stronger performance and quality reporting to support further improvement is planned and being implemented. This will include using the Skills For Care questionnaire annually, developing our own

feedback opportunities, including a focused discussion group, ensuring that audits include a proportion of children's cases held by ASYE's and that this is reported separately as well as part of overall learning from audits to support specific learning and improvement.

Conclusion

- 28 The Social Work Academy continues to provide high quality learning, excellent support and opportunities to Newly Qualified Social Workers during their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment. Enhanced Social Work Practitioners are becoming part of the Academy and overall support provided to ASYE's and this helps to support the recruitment and retention of social workers and will continue to be required.

Background papers

- None

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

The Social Work Academy assists the council to ensure there are sufficient social workers employed to carry out the duties towards children and families living in Durham which are set out in the Children Act 1989.

Finance

There is permanent funding in the Children's Social Care budget to fund NQSW posts and one Academy Practice Lead post. A second Practice Lead post is funded from reserves until 31st March 2021 and funding would need to be identified if this post is extended or made permanent.

Consultation

Not applicable

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Not applicable

Human Rights

Not applicable

Crime and Disorder

Not applicable

Staffing

The Social Work Academy supports the recruitment and retention of staff as does the Enhanced Social Worker Practitioner. Vacancies are filled in consultation with Strategic Managers and Human Resources

Accommodation

Not applicable

Risk

An increased number of ASYE within Children's Social Care needs to be balanced against the needs of the service to fill vacancies and the ability to ensure they receive high standards of support, guidance and supervision. This is considered prior to any recruitment episode and adverts that include opportunities for NQSW are released only with the agreement of the Strategic Managers for Families First, Human Resources and the Service Improvement Manager.