

CELCIS Education Forum

Notes from discussion on reflective supervision

November 2019

A presentation was delivered by Barnardo's Scotland to 39 Education practitioners at the CELCIS Education Forum on the 6th of November 2019. The presentation was followed by individual table discussions around 3 questions, and a whole-group feedback session. Below is a summary of the feedback received from this session.

General

Forum members noted that there will be different structures for the care sector when compared to Education. They highlighted that it will be important to understand what the teaching population/educators and support staff need. An important point was raised around clarity about what Supervision is and what it is not, and members cautioned against translating social work Supervision structures wholesale across to Education. Members asked where it might be working already and when it could be built into the school day, and they noted the importance of having Supervisors with the skills and expertise to deliver Supervision.

Do you think there is a gap within Education for Professional or Reflective Supervision and why?

The general consensus from members was yes, there is a gap for Reflective Supervision within Education. Members noted that there is often an attitude of 'just get on with it, it's part of your job', and that teaching can be isolating, especially for Head Teachers. Some members noted that teaching staff can feel uncomfortable approaching Senior Management Teams with issues as they may be viewed as not delivering or failing, they noted there is still a huge stigma within Education around this but that mandatory Supervision, such as in Social Work would go some way to removing this stigma, but that historically Supervision just isn't part of Education culture or structures.

Some of the current pressures within Education were highlighted by members such as an increased pressure around attainment; pupil support workers working longer hours; and teachers experiencing vicarious trauma but that this isn't recognised as it is in other professions such as Social Work. They also noted that the focus in schools has shifted towards wellbeing and nurture, and that demand is greater than before and more visible for those children with unmet needs.

Members noted that although informal supervision may exist such as debriefing after an incident, and professional support exists there are no formal Supervision opportunities. They noted that Supervision is especially important for guidance staff and Heads, and that time for reflection is crucial.

What would be different if there were opportunities for professional Supervision?

Many similar themes were noted by members such as the benefits of time to reflect on practice being built in and just being the norm; emotional support and therefore improvement in health and wellbeing; reduction in sick leave/absences and improved retention of staff; staff feeling valued; improved quality of teaching and performance; and an enhanced level of understanding about where children and families are coming from which would increase the quality of service provided to them.

Members noted that you '*can't pour from an empty cup*' and that all staff need support to keep their cup topped up. They noted that regular Supervision could support improved relationships and strengthen connections whilst supporting the 'whole' person. Compassion fatigue was also raised by members who noted that Supervision could reduce this and allow you to "*go back in and get on with the job*", whilst also allowing space for professionals to have more compassion for those they are working with, as well as increasing motivation and morale.

One member noted that Supervision is empowering and could help "*make you a more confident practitioner*". Members talked about Supervision as a protective factor; having dedicated time to decompress in a positive way; a way to develop coping strategies; and a way to provide containment, manage stress and enhance emotional regulation. One member also noted that Supervision could help improve the reputation of the profession.

What would enable effective implementation of Supervision within Education?

Members highlighted some of the areas they thought would need to be considered to ensure Supervision was implemented effectively including the cost of allocating protected time and more generally the financial implications of this kind of provision.

Members noted the importance of training for Supervisors as well as supervisees on the key principles of Supervision such as reflection, attunement and active listening as well as the need for appropriate signposting to other supports where necessary. Space and dedicated time were raised, particularly the time out of class which may be needed for Supervision sessions. It was noted that Working Time Agreements (WTA) could be used to formalise Supervision structures, similar to a parent's agreement. Members mentioned the need for Supervision to be embedded in school policies and for Heads of service to be aware and have a good understanding of the benefits.

Members raised some potential difficulties around implementation such as it being an alien concept to many; it could be misunderstood and seen as a burden and more work rather than the opposite; it could be perceived as punitive and a way of being checked up on; and it could also be poorly implemented if the focus is on processes and operationally driven rather than focusing on the health and wellbeing of the supervisee.

But members also noted "*where there is a will there is a way*" and there was an overall feeling of optimism within the group that although there would be challenges they were not insurmountable.