

Northumberland Safeguarding Children Board Learning Culture Strategy

Vision and Commitment

The learning culture of Northumberland Safeguarding Children Board (NSCB) is focused on developing a capable and confident workforce equipped with the knowledge and skills to provide relevant, effective, evidence-based services. Each individual worker must be able to:

- undertake their own professional role in relation to safeguarding and protecting children
- work effectively with other professionals within and across agencies

All those involved in providing services for children and families in Northumberland should have an enquiring mindset, constantly open to new learning, including the ability to reflect on their own professional practice. This expectation applies to all levels of the workforce, from strategic managers right through to frontline staff (paid and unpaid). NSCB sees continuous professional development as an integral part of striving to improve outcomes for children and families.

NSCB is committed to the provision of high quality learning opportunities, constantly seeking creative and effective ways to support the workforce in developing their professional practice. Learning provision is responsive to national, regional and local issues and also addresses the identified learning needs of staff within NSCB partner agencies.

Ongoing learning and staff development are seen as a priority for the (NSCB) partnership with clear commitment to invest in staff to maintain a capable and stable workforce. There is a focused approach to learning that reflects corporate and strategic direction and collaborative learning approaches are well prioritised and a strong commitment to improving outcomes for children, young people and their families through effective workforce development.” *Ofted Report 2012*

Promoting and Supporting a Learning Culture

The NSCB, via the Learning and Development Committee, provides a multi-agency forum for the identification of shared learning needs and the design of appropriate learning opportunities. It also monitors the learning programme, ensuring a quality assurance framework for single and multi- agency training. This includes the integration of learning from Independent Management Reviews and Serious Case Reviews. In addition to supporting partner agencies by providing a needs-led learning programme, the L&D Committee contributes to the culture of accountability and challenge within the partnership, raising and maintaining the profile of learning across the workforce.

Data collection and reporting focuses on the quality of learning provision and also ensures that all partner agencies make an active contribution to the programme both by providing staff to facilitate training and by ensuring their workforce engage in the learning process.

NSCB recognises that professionals learn in a variety of ways and absorb information from a wide range of sources. Our approach to learning is underpinned by established learning theory and recognises the value of both formal and informal methods of learning

“A learning culture exists and the board demonstrates the use of some imaginative methods to ensure that lessons from management reviews are widely disseminated” Ofsted Report 2012

‘Classroom-based’ Learning - The Multi-Agency Training Programme

The NSCB recognises that inter-agency working is most effective when workers recognise their own role and responsibilities and also understand the role and function of other agencies who may be involved with children and families. The purpose of bringing professionals together in a shared learning environment is to develop and foster a shared understanding of principles, processes, roles and responsibilities. It can also support improved communication between individual workers and their agencies by developing a common language and a shared understanding of assessment, critical analysis and decision-making, particularly around thresholds for referral. Multi-agency training develops ‘very substantial improvements in self-reported understanding of the roles of different professionals and in their confidence and comfort in working with these colleagues’ (Carpenter et al, 2009).

NSCB is aware that the investment of partner agencies in multi-agency training must be used to best advantage so that impact on practice is maximised. This requires effective planning and carefully considered use of time and resources.

The training programme, therefore reflects:

- NSCB priorities
- identified training needs of partner agencies (both managers and practitioners)
- national and local learning from Serious Case Reviews (SCRs).

When planning training opportunities and programmes, careful consideration is given to which courses can be co-facilitated using ‘in-house’ staff with content expertise and which courses will need to be commissioned to provide access to additional specialist trainers. The programme is also responsive to emerging needs, being reviewed bi-monthly by the L & D Committee.

Learning events are carefully planned to ensure best use of time available and courses have clear learning outcomes so that managers and delegates can match learner needs with the most appropriate learning provision. Use of pre-reading materials supports the acquisition of knowledge, priming delegates before the course takes place.

NSCB quality standards (adapted from the regional QA framework) clearly establish the need for training to be delivered by appropriately qualified and experienced professionals. This

includes an understanding of how to facilitate learning as well as subject knowledge relating to the course material. Course content is underpinned by the use of up-to-date research, establishing a clear link between theory and practice. Trainers must be able to establish a safe learning environment which models the importance of asking questions and reflecting on practice.

Learning events maximise the use of interactive teaching methods, focusing on facilitating group learning rather than adopting a purely didactic approach. Thus trainers use the experience and knowledge of the delegates in the training room and provide structured opportunities for the sharing of perspectives and practice. Learning materials are regularly reviewed to integrate learning from local and national SCRs.

A key aspect of all learning events is that the voice of the child must be 'brought into the room'. This may be done by use of materials created by young people (DVD, artwork etc) or by use of exercises/activities which specifically focus on the child's experience.

In order to maximise access for the workforce in this rural area, the NSCB recognises the need for learning events to be provided across Northumberland.

In order to support the provision of high quality safeguarding training at both single and multi-agency level, the NSCB provides Continuing Professional Development opportunities for local training facilitators via Training for Trainers, a QA Trainer Forum and via shadowing opportunities.

Classroom Based Learning – Additional Specific Learning Events

In addition to the pre-set NSCB multi-agency training programme, additional learning events are scheduled as needed in response to emerging issues/need. These events may take the form of SCR workshops, briefings on specific topics or conferences which draw on national speakers with specialist expertise. Messages from these events are then incorporated and integrated into the wider training programme so that opportunities for learning are maximised across the workforce. Support is also available to single agencies who are developing/delivering 'in-house' training in response to local SCRs, Multi Agency Deep Dive Reviews (MADDR) or Multi Professional Improvement Forums. This ensures consistency of learning messages across partner agencies.

Learning in the Workplace - E-learning

As technology develops, NSCB is embracing the increasing opportunities to support learning in the workplace including the use of e-learning packages. Although e-learning does not allow workers from different agencies to learn in a shared environment, it has a useful part to play in ensuring that face-to-face training time is used to best effect. E-learning is an ideal vehicle for delivery of pre-course learning material, allowing delegates to arrive at multi-agency training with up-to-date knowledge and information. Using e-learning in this way

enables providers of face-to-face training to spend more time focusing on skill development rather than knowledge acquisition.

E-learning provides flexibility in terms of when (and where) the learning takes place, allowing staff to break down their learning into bite-size chunks, completed at the convenience of the learner and their employer. It can also provide effective refresher learning and updated information about policy or procedural changes.

Given Northumberland's rural geography, e-learning also reduces the time, cost and inconvenience of travelling to training venues.

In order to use e-learning to best effect, it is important to recognise its limitations as well as its strengths. Whilst it is an excellent vehicle for communicating information, it does not allow learners to develop the interpersonal skills which are often at the core of safeguarding children. This skill development is only possible in learning situations which require the learner to interact with a trainer, mentor or other professionals 'in person'. It is also necessary to recognise that whilst e-learning is effective in teaching about clear cut situations, it does not easily incorporate critical analysis of 'grey areas' and these are often the situations which learners are keen to explore in the safety of a learning environment. Finally, e-learning used in isolation from face to face contact with a trainer, does not allow learners to develop and ask their own questions, a key feature of developing reflective practice.

Given these limitations, NSCB promotes the use of e-learning within a wider CPD framework. It is an effective tool used as part of a menu of learning techniques, enabling the provision of 'blended learning' opportunities.

Effective use of technology is also supporting NSCB learning by providing increasing opportunities to access podcasts, webinars and 'live links' to training events and conferences. Working in partnership with a local high school specialist media centre, NSCB is developing a resource bank of webinars delivered by professionals with a high degree of specialist knowledge on a particular topic.

Learning in the Workplace - Peer Learning and Peer Support

Learning opportunities are not limited to course provision. NSCB recognises the importance of fostering a learning culture within staff teams and across agencies so that all multi-agency working provides the opportunity for practitioners to develop their own professional practice. Creating a culture of professional dialogue (including professional challenge) supports the process of reflective practice. This may take place informally among peers who share the same professional role, or between professionals of different disciplines who share case responsibility for particular children and families. It is also crucial that managers identify formal opportunities for shared learning, via team meetings, mentoring arrangements, joint-working arrangements, peer supervision or work shadowing. Learning via peer-contact must form part of supervision conversations to ensure that what has been

learnt is compatible with practice guidance – checking that the practice being learnt from peers is good practice.

Learning in the Workplace – Supervision

Many professionals have access to formal supervision by a line manager or senior practitioner. These meetings are key opportunities to support the development of learning through reflective practice and to embed reflective practice in the thinking of each practitioner. Supervision must create a safe space for exploring professional dilemmas and acknowledging learning needs.

NSCB recognises the implications for this in engaging managers in the learning process. New NSCB training initiatives have manager training embedded in their development in order to provide a shared language which can enhance the supervision process.

Learning in the Workplace - Reading and Research

NSCB sets a clear expectation that all professionals must maintain up-to-date awareness of research messages and their implications for practice. However it is important that continuing to read and study is a recognised part of the professional learning process outside the 'classroom' environment. The NSCB supports this by issuing regular newsletters, posters and other promotional materials which highlight relevant research, distilling messages into accessible formats. Learning from SCRs is specifically promoted by the publication and distribution of NSCB leaflets on significant cases. These publications signpost the workforce to original sources of information so that practitioners can easily access the full reports as appropriate.

Roles and Responsibilities in the Training Transfer Process

“Successful training requires dialogue between those who provide training, managers and staff about the structures necessary to ensure training transfer is maximised” *RiP 2014*

Research in Practice, in their 2014 publication 'Ensuring effective training: Briefing for LSCBs' identifies four key factors in training transfer:

- workplace factors
- subject climate
- training design and delivery
- individual characteristics of the learner

At a strategic level NSCB members recognise their role in influencing workplace factors to create a climate where learning is valued, learning needs are clearly identified (linked to the needs of the individual worker and the priorities of the organisation) and workers are actively encouraged to demonstrate the impact of new skills, knowledge and attitudes on their professional practice.

NSCB trainers are sensitive to the subject climate, both locally and nationally; and course content is regularly updated to ensure it is current and relevant to the circumstances of the learners. NSCB trainers have responsibility for training design and delivery and learners must recognise the need to take responsibility for their own learning.

A: Strategic & Operational Managers

Manager support was rated as the most important factor influencing the effectiveness of training ... managers should be ... 'transfer agents'. *RiP 2014*

In order to maximise the extent to which new knowledge and skills are transferred from the learning environment into professional practice, the role of the manager is key, both before and after the training is undertaken.

Before the training, discussion between the manager and the learners should:

- clarify the rationale for attendance / learning activity
- set learning goals for the individual
- establish the expectation that learning will form part of a post-course conversation between the manager and staff member back in the workplace

After the training, a reflective conversation needs to support staff in consolidating learning by identifying opportunities for the application of new knowledge and skills in their professional practice.

C: Trainers

"The way training is designed and delivered can have a huge impact on training transfer. It is important to remember that training is a process rather than an event" *RiP 2014*

Before the learning event, during the planning process, trainers will ensure the training complies with NSCB quality standards for multi-agency training. Pre-course contact with delegates will be used to prepare them for the learning process.

During the learning event, it is the responsibility of the trainer to establish an environment which actively supports the learning process. This includes the physical surroundings, the content and the teaching style.

After the learning event, the trainer(s) will measure:

- the acquisition of new knowledge and skills
- the learner's perception of how far the course content met their learning needs and demonstrated relevance to their work context
- the learner's perception of how well the course was delivered/facilitated and how well the trainer engaged them in the learning process

Post training evaluation will be conducted in line with the NSCB Impact Evaluation Strategy

D: Learners

Learners, in conjunction with their manager, will identify training opportunities which best meet their individual learning needs. The NSPCC report 'Ten Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them' (Broadhurst et al, 2010) highlights the need for professionals to have an 'open, enquiring mindset' in their daily practice and NSCB expects this quality to be reflected in learners' approach to formal and informal learning. This is particularly relevant where delegates may be attending multi-agency training in order to meet the mandatory requirements of their organisation and there is a risk that delegates are completing training because they 'have to' rather than because they 'want to'.

"Intrinsic motivation to learn has a stronger relationship to transfer than extrinsic motivation (Burke and Hutchins 2007)"
RiP 2014

Conclusion

NSCB recognises that the quality of the Northumberland workforce is key to achieving successful outcomes in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people. High quality learning and development provision underpins and supports the quality of professional practice. There is a clear expectation that individual workers will have an open and enquiring mindset; this includes staff at all levels across our partner organisations, from strategic managers to front-line practitioners. Professional challenge is encouraged in the partnership; this must be apply to learning provision as well as service provision in order to ensure a culture of continuous learning and development.

Anne Lambert
Learning and Development Officer
June 2014