

Practice guide

Family Help & Children's Social Care

Workforce – Social Work Academy, Westmorland and Furness

Background, purpose & rationale

Westmorland and Furness children and families service have created a culture that supports innovation in practice, where the views of practitioner's influence change, the workforce feel safe, and where they are encouraged to learn and develop. The primary purpose of the Children's Social Work Academy is to create a supportive and empowering environment, providing comprehensive training, professional development, and support for frontline practitioners in Children's Social Care.

The academy will focus on enhancing skills and knowledge by offering advanced training programmes to ensure social workers are up to date with the latest practices, policies, and research. It will promote best practices, establishing standards and guidelines that reflect sound social work practices across the directorate. To supporting career development the Academy provides pathways for career progression and specialised training at every stage within Childrens Social Care.

What we did to improve children's outcomes

The rebranding and relaunch of the Children's Social Work Academy has strengthened career progression routes for staff. Our Children's Social Work Academy is our approach to training and development across the workforce. As part of our commitment to continuous improvement, leaders have introduced Collaborative Practice week, a dedicated time for reflection, learning and innovation. Each week has an identified practice theme, ensuring relevance to current challenges and priorities within the service. Development mornings are held in-person monthly; these are an opportunity to consult with the Children and Families directorate on key practice changes, ensuring we are driving forward good practice.

We have taken proactive steps to improve the retention of child and family practitioners, recognising the importance of workforce stability in delivering consistent, high-quality support to children. As part of this, leaders have delivered events designed to show appreciation for staff, acknowledging their hard work and dedication. These events also served to strengthen team cohesion, reinforce a culture of value and recognition, and support staff wellbeing. Our first Children and Families Awards Night in November 2024, saw the workforce come together to celebrate each other. We had several award categories, recognition of each team, and feedback from families to highlight the positive and impactful work our service delivers on a daily basis.

We have set up a good practice forum; to celebrate good practice throughout the year, ensuring good practice is acknowledged and celebrated at every level of the service. A trauma-informed approach is being embedded across the service, this commenced with a self-assessment, followed

by targeted training and a session on secondary trauma for staff. A staff wellbeing focus group was subsequently launched to co-produce improvements to the wellbeing offer.

What is the impact?

Ensuring that our Children's Social Work Academy is embedded, and culture is felt at every level is essential to create a positive impact on children and families. To evaluate and strengthen this impact, we implemented regular staff Feedback sessions to assess alignment with our culture and council values; Child and Family Feedback to gather insights on their experiences; observations of practice to evaluate how our practice principles are reflected in daily interactions; and audits to ensure continuous celebration of good practice and identify areas for improvement

Culture - during March 2025 our staff consultation found 98% of the workforce thought the culture had positively changed since Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). Workers were asked to scale the progress since LGR (1 - not satisfied at all, 10 - extremely satisfied). In March 2025, the response rate increased compared to December 2023, and the average score raised from 7.2 to 7.9.

Practice - our quarterly Collaborative Practice Week was launched in June 2023, the week includes collaborative audits, observations of frontline practitioners, and masterclasses. Family feedback is ascertained as part collaborative audits and observations, in 2024 we enhanced our approach to feedback and have continued to grow and develop our co-production events. Family feedback gathered during collaborative audits increased from 62% in June 2023, to 71% in December 2024. There was a 17% increase in collaborative audits completed April 24 – March 25 and a 60% increase in "good" audits during this period. During each practice week, three, two-hour Masterclasses are held, each session identified based on the needs of the service. During a recent staff consultation event, our workforce was asked to rate the masterclasses they've attended (1 - not helpful, 10 - excellent). In March 2025, the response rate increased and average score also raised to 7.1 compared to 6.7 in December 2023.

Workforce - feedback was gathered from our Children and Families Directorate Awards Night to measure the impact on the workforce. The event was described as a positive celebration of lifting and bringing people together, it raised morale, workers felt valued and appreciated, everyone felt like one team. We are in the first 7 months of embedding our Children's Social Work Academy and have already seen the positive impact in feedback from the workforce. Additionally, we have seen a reduction in our agency worker rate, which is now at 16%.

Find out more

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