

***Return to Social Work:
Learning Materials***



**MODULE 3:
REFLECTIVE SELF**

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Introduction to the module

Reflective practice is a theme that runs throughout the return to social work materials. Module 3 considers critical reflection in practice in more detail with a particular focus on experiential learning. In this module you will have the opportunity to explore the reflective process and see how this links to supervision, working with others, and its role in enhancing professional development. The second important theme in this module is that of evidence-based practice. Social workers use evidence to inform professional decisions and judgements.

This module highlights the importance of practice being based on the best available information. Later modules pick up this important theme and explore the role of research findings and best practice approaches in assessments and report writing (see Module 7).

The module introduces a number of well known reflective models including Gibbs (1988) who highlighted the role of feelings and Kolb (1984) whose work helped to identify different learning styles. It also introduces a newer model by Bogg and Challis (2013) that emphasises the role of outcomes as a rich source for reflection and in shaping future experiences. It also sets out the model defined by Morrison (2005) which made the link between effective supervision and effective practice and identified seven key elements of quality social work supervision.

This module provides tips and advice on how to make sure supervision supports your learning and development. It highlights the importance of supervision agreements, agendas and recording action points.,

The learning outcomes for Module 3 are focused on developing critical reflective practice and this can underpin experiential learning in professional practice. Studying this module, and undertaking the learning activities, will provide you with valuable evidence of reflecting on and developing capabilities around professionalism (Domain 1), diversity (Domain 3), use of practice knowledge (Domain 5), together with Domain 6 (applying critical reflection and analysis).

After studying this module you might want to reread the learning outcomes and the links with the PCF before completing the end of module final reflections, as this might support you in identifying ongoing learning needs.



As you work through this module remember to keep a note of your thoughts, reflections and answers to any of the exercises. You can include these in your social work portfolio as evidence of your continuing professional development (CPD).

Learning outcomes

By reading this module and completing the associated exercises and reflective activities you should achieve the following outcomes:

- Be aware of a range of reflective models and the principles of critical reflection.
- Understand how critical reflection contributes to learning and development.
- Be able to apply a range of reflective models to your own learning and development.
- Have an awareness of your own preferred learning style and how this influences your development needs.
- Have considered your employment options and how to gain employment.
- Reflect upon and identify further learning or development needs in relation to this module.

Links to the Professional Capabilities Framework

By working through this module and completing the activities and self-assessment exercise, you will be able to reflect upon, and further develop your professional capabilities in the following areas at *Social Worker* career level.

Domain 1: Professionalism: Identify and behave as a professional social worker, committed to professional development.

- *Identify and act on learning needs for CPD, including through supervision*

Domain 3: Diversity: Recognise and apply anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive principles in practice.

- *Critically reflect on and manage the power of your role and in your relationship with others*

Domain 5: Knowledge: Apply knowledge of social sciences, law and social work practice theory.

- *Demonstrate a critical knowledge of the range of theories and models for social work intervention with individuals, families, groups and communities and the methods derived from them*

Domain 6: Critical reflection and analysis: Apply critical reflection and analysis to inform and provide a rationale for professional decision making.

- *Routinely and efficiently apply critical reflection and analysis*

In Modules 1 and 2 we made reference to reflection and reflective practice, and how this helps social workers to enhance their skills and practice. In this module we will explore the reflective process in more detail, and see how it links to supervision, working with others, using information effectively, and applying for jobs.

Reflective exercise:

Think about the last time you were in practice as a social worker.

- *What types of development activity did you prefer/learn the most from?*

Write a list; it might include things like attending training, reflecting on casework, reading articles or something else. Keep this in mind as you work through the rest of this module.

As a social worker you are a member of a profession that uses an evidence base to make decisions. You need to make sure that your practice is based on the best available information, and this also applies to how you approach your own capabilities and development activities.

Critical reflection is an approach defined as both an individual domain and a common theme throughout the PCF (TCSW, 2012). It is seen as a fundamental element of professional practice and the linchpin of sound professional judgment and decision making. As a practising social worker, you should be considering how reflection can be applied to all your learning and development activities, whether you are preparing to return to practice or progressing through your chosen career pathway.

Recognising your own needs and knowledge gaps serves three purposes. Firstly it demonstrates accountability and integrity in your approach, as you are being honest about the limitations of your capabilities as well as your strengths. Secondly it provides a focus for your CPD planning as it identifies which capabilities need further development if you are to achieve your career goals. For this to be the case you will need to think about and identify your further career aspirations once you have achieved the level of experienced social worker. Finally, it is an essential part of ensuring that you can demonstrate the impact of your work as a social worker when you come to register or re-register with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).

Useful information: The HCPC CPD standards

All registrants must:

1. *Maintain a continuous, up-to-date and accurate record of their CPD activities;*
2. *Demonstrate that their CPD activities are a mixture of learning activities relevant to current or future practice;*
3. *Seek to ensure that their CPD has contributed to the quality of their practice and service delivery;*
4. *Seek to ensure that their CPD benefits the service user; and*
5. *Upon request, present a written profile (which must be their own work and supported by evidence) explaining how they have met the standards for CPD.*

Source: HCPC, 2012. www.hcpc-org.uk/

HCPC will audit 2.5% of social workers at the end of each two-year registration period to monitor that effective CPD is being undertaken. If you are one of those selected for audit you will need to provide a written profile, supported by evidence, which explains the CPD you have engaged in and how it meets the HCPC standards. This will include the following:

- **A summary of your practice history for the last two years** (up to 500 words). This should show assessors how your CPD activities are linked to your work. This part of your profile should be used to demonstrate the relevance of your CPD activities and plans to your role and practice.
- **A statement of how you have met HCPC standards of CPD** (up to 1,500 words). This statement should show how you and your CPD meet the HCPC CPD standards; you will need to reference all the activities you have taken and the evidence you are including. Each of the five statements [in the standards] should be addressed.
- **Evidence to support your statement.** The evidence you send in will back up the statements you make in your CPD profile. It should show that you have undertaken the CPD activities you have referred to, and should also show how they have improved the quality of your work and benefited service users. Your first piece of evidence should include a dated list of all your CPD activities within the audit period. Any gaps of three months or more should be explained. This will help to show the assessors that you meet standard 1. Your evidence should also be able to show that your CPD activities are a mixture of learning activities and are relevant to your work, and therefore meet standard 2.

A template form for your profile is available on the HCPC website; however it is up to you whether you use this or another format for your ongoing CPD records.

Your profile will be audited by professionals registered by the HCPC, who have been trained to assess CPD profiles on its behalf.

You can see from this that reflection is not only good professional practice, but is also fundamental to your ability to remain registered as a social worker.

Reflective exercise:

Thinking back to your last post:

- *Do you think you were meeting the HCPC requirements for CPD?*
- *What evidence could you produce that you kept your skills and knowledge up to date?*
- *What would you put in your 1,500-word statement to show you have met the five required elements?*

Aligning the relevant frameworks

The PCF gives the outcomes and capabilities that should be demonstrated at each level and in each domain of practice. The approach to CPD developed by the SWRB commits the profession to a flexible approach to considering how CPD can be undertaken and recognised. The *Standards for Employers and Supervision Framework* (SWRB, 2012) give a framework against which the employer role in supporting CPD can be devised and evaluated. They apply to all employers and relate to all registered social workers that they employ, including managers and student social workers, within the organisation or agency.

Commitment to the standards is not mandatory, and while many organisations have signed up to them, a recent survey of 2,000 social workers has highlighted significant variations in a range of areas including workload management, supervision and facilitating CPD opportunities. Currently the standards state that all employers of social workers should:

- Have in place a social work accountability framework informed by knowledge of good social work practice and the experience and expertise of service users, carers and practitioners.
- Use effective workforce planning systems to make sure the right number of social workers, with the right level of skills and experience, are available to meet current and future service demands.
- Implement transparent systems to manage workload and case allocation to protect service users and practitioners.

- Make sure social workers can do their jobs safely and have the practical tools and resources they need to practise effectively. Employers should assess risks and take action to minimise and prevent them.
- Ensure social workers have regular and appropriate professional social work supervision provided by a qualified social worker.
- Provide opportunities for CPD, as well as access to research and practice guidance.
- Ensure social workers can maintain their professional registration.
- Establish effective partnerships with higher education institutions (HEIs) and other organisations to support the delivery of social work education and continuing professional development.

In June 2013 the Employer Standards Group (ESG) announced that due to the variable implementation of the employer standards, a review and refresh would be carried out. The aim will be to look at how the framework is working in practice with a focus on areas where it has been successfully adopted, to identify learning and drive wider commitment to the standards.



For the full story from community care on the findings of the ESG survey visit - <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/articles/28/06/2013/119289/national-standards-for-social-work-employers-under-review-following-mixed-reception.htm>

- ✓ The full report is not yet available, however you will need to keep up to date with this development and consider how it will affect you once you return to practice.

How employers apply the employer standards is one of the benchmarks by which you can assess whether an organisation is the employer for you.

The regulatory body – the HCPC – bases its processes for re-regulation on demonstrated participation in a range of CPD activities and a self-assessment of their impact on practice. All of this is based on the assumption that reflecting critically on your practice is a fundamental part of your professional life. This means that there is now in place an infrastructure that not only enables but also facilitates reflective practice for social workers throughout their careers.

- ✓ Module 1: Returning to social work explores the HCPC CPD standards in more detail.

Reflective practice

Reflective practice is defined as 'A process of reviewing an experience of practice in order to describe, analyse, evaluate and to inform learning about practice'(Reid, 1994 p3). There are a range of models of reflective practice and reflective learning that you might find useful; here are a few to help you to start thinking about what model best suits you.

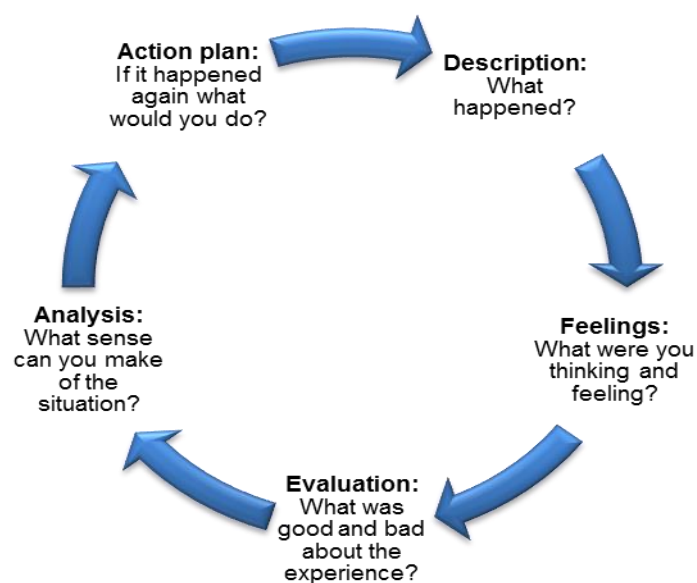
Boud et al (1985) outlined a model of experiential learning with four stages:

1. Return to an event, incident or experience and record it
2. Consider it in detail at an emotional and cognitive level
3. Re-evaluate the event in the light of experience, knowledge and experimentation.
Seek to understand the meaning of the experience
4. Plan for what you might change.

Rolfe et al (2001) set out what is known as the 'So What' model. This considers three simple questions to guide reflection:

- **What** ...is the problem? ...was my role? ...happened? ...were the consequences?
- **So what** ...was going through my mind? ...should I have done? ...do I know about what happened now?
- **Now what** ...do I need to do? ...broader issues have been raised? ...might happen now?

One of the most common reflective cycles used in social work is that defined by Gibbs (1988), who set out six stages of the reflective cycle, as illustrated below:



Reflective exercise:

Think about a situation or interaction that happened to you when you were last in practice and work through Gibbs' cycle as follows:

- **Description:** Describe as a matter of fact just what happened during your critical incident or chosen episode for reflection.
- **Feelings:** What were you thinking and feeling at the time?
- **Evaluation:** List points or tell the story about what was GOOD and what was BAD about the experience.
- **Analysis:** What sense can you make out of the situation? What does it mean?
- **Conclusion:** What else could you have done? What should you perhaps not have done?
- **Action plan:** If it arose again, what would you do differently? How will you adapt your practice in the light of this new understanding?

One final reflective model that you might find useful was defined by Kolb in 1984. Kolb's model identified four stages within an experiential learning cycle. These were:

- **Concrete experience:** The event – describe what happened, in as much detail as possible.
- **Reflective observation:** Consider what has happened from a variety of perspectives e.g. own feelings, the group's, other individuals' views etc.
- **Abstract conceptualisation:** Re-package and process your reflections into a theoretical understanding (using theory to analyse the event).
- **Active experimentation:** Armed with this new understanding, you test your theory so you can do it again, differently this time.

Once you return to social work practice you should also be able to use supervision and appraisal to help you consolidate your development needs and plans and these models will help you to reflect on and learn from your experiences. The next part of this module will give you some ideas about how you might do this.

Using your experience for learning

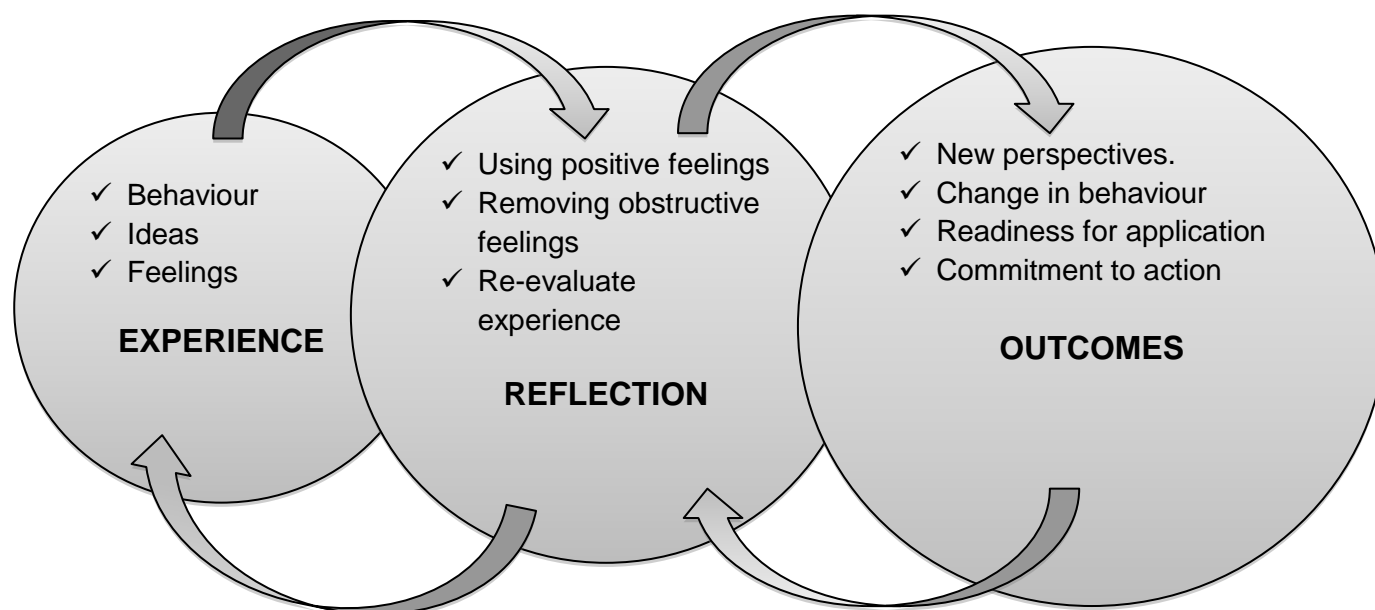
In Module 1: Returning to social work we asked you to carry out a critical incident analysis so you could understand a little more about how you approach your practice and your learning needs. This is called experiential learning, and is a way of approaching the reflective cycle. There are four stages in working with critical incidents and learning from them.

Firstly, you have to be able to describe the incident itself. From here you move on to look at an explanation or interpretation of the situation you have identified. Your explanation will start off in relation to the specific context, but, once you have submitted it to the critical process, you should be able to move on to the third stage and set it in a wider context (for example, philosophical, educational, organisational). The final stage is where you draw conclusions about the significance of the incident, and decide what action you will take as a result of your deliberations.

The four stages of the critical incident analysis closely parallel the four stages of the Kolb learning cycle as shown in the table below.

Critical incident stage	Learning cycle stage
Descriptive/Diagnostic	Experience
Reflective	Reflection
Critical	Theorising
Practical	Experimenting

Another way of looking at this way of analysing a critical incident is to take the model of reflection described by Boud (Boud et al, 1993; Boud et al, 1985). They offer the following diagram to describe the process.



Source: Bogg and Challis, 2013 p63 (adapted from Boud et al, 1993).

The essence of this approach is to focus on the feelings that the incident engenders in you, rather than just the facts of the event. You should use these feelings to frame your response to the incident, and to consider how you might behave and feel differently in a similar circumstance in the future.

You will find this ability to focus on feelings as part of events helpful in maintaining your own emotional wellbeing – a very important part of remaining an effective social worker. In order to thrive in social work, it will be helpful if you can:

- develop strategies for good emotional self-management – supervision, support, using a diary, taking leave, prioritising etc.
- recognise signs of burnout such as frustration, exhaustion, irritation and cynicism about the job
- relish challenge such as taking opportunities for continual growth
- feel you have a sense of control
- learn to deal with conflict.

Learning activity: Experiential learning

Think about something that you have seen or been involved in recently that has made an impact on you. You may choose something that happened at work, at home or during your studies or leisure time. Make a note of an incident that you found thought-provoking and then answer the following questions.

- *What happened?*
- *How did you feel?*
- *How did others react?*
- *What was good?*
- *What needed improvement?*
- *What have you learned?*

Now think about how you could back up or verify your perceptions of the event. Think in particular about what could be used to support your learning through reflection or provide evidence of how you reacted to the event (e.g. feedback from direct observations, service user and carer feedback, reports or notes of meetings you have attended or led).

- ✓ You can also use this process to prepare for when you need to present evidence of your CPD to the HCPC. It should also help you to understand when you are in danger of losing your own wellbeing, or slipping out of control. Using this framework for revisiting incidents, whatever or wherever they arise, gives you a way to regain control or understand why it is all right to relinquish that control to others.

Using professional supervision for learning

We briefly explored the process of supervision and how it is integrated into social work practice in Module 1. Here we want to look at how you can use it for your own learning and professional development.

According to Lord Laming (Laming, 2009 p32) supervision is the 'cornerstone' of good social work practice. This is an opinion reiterated by the Munro Review (Munro, 2011).

Professional supervision is a form of support that is concerned with monitoring current work, reviewing progress against individual work plans, discussing problems, developing solutions and considering how to approach new tasks and projects. It should maximise how you learn from the work you are doing, and offer you the type and amount of support that is appropriate to your stage of development.

There are a range of definitions of supervision in practice; social work supervision is set apart by its focus on the interrelationship between accountability for the standard of practice (case management), staff support and professional development. The definition of social work supervision used in these materials is that set out by Morrison in 2005 who stated that supervision was:

'...a process by which one worker is given responsibility by the organisation to work with another worker(s) in order to meet certain organisational, professional and personal objectives which together promote the best outcomes for service users.'

Morrison goes on to develop this definition and identifies the following functions:

- competent accountable performance
 - continuing professional development
 - personal support
 - engaging the individual with the organisation (Morrison, 2005).
- ✓ The CWDC supervision guide (Wonnacott and Morrison, 2012) has now been transferred to The College of Social Work and is an extensive open-learning resource exploring effective supervision and its impact in practice.

The seven links between supervision and practice quality

One of the key supervisory models used in children and family social work is that set out by Morrison (2005) who drew on the evidence base for effective supervision to identify seven key elements that linked the quality of supervision to the quality of practice and the outcomes for the users of social care services. These elements were:

1. Role clarity: for both supervisor and supervisee.
2. Role security: for supervisee, which comes from a combination of knowledge, skills, experience and support, and appropriate workload.
3. Emotional competence and empathy: which contributes to secure and collaborative working relationship.
4. Accurate observation and assessment: as the basis for future development.
5. Partnership and power: facilitation and direction appropriately balanced and managed by the supervisor.
6. Coaching: the supervisor has a key role in the development of the supervisee's practice skills through a combination of modelling, practice observation, feedback, reflection and problem solving.
7. Planning: developing timely and appropriate plans and monitoring continuous professional development.

There are good reasons for embedding professional supervision for social workers into the employers' structures and the employee's work plan. Organisations are likely to achieve their aims through employing workers who are skilful, knowledgeable, clear about their roles and assisted in their practice by sound advice and emotional support from a supervisor with whom they have a good professional relationship. This will also contribute to the wellbeing and job satisfaction of workers who are more likely to think clearly and exercise appropriate professional judgement while working in challenging and stressful contexts.

The SCIE research briefing (SCIE, 2006) emphasises how effective supervision is a key component in staff management, which can lead to the following improvements:

- greater individual motivation
- understanding of how work links into overall objectives
- more effective time management
- ability to plan workload
- more effective co-ordination of work

- better two-way communication
- reduction in conflict/misunderstanding
- learning on the job
- reduction in stress levels.

Skills for Care (2007, p5) outlined three interrelated aspects to supervision:

- **Line management**, which is about accountability for practice and quality of service. This includes managing team resources, delegation and workload management, performance appraisal, duty of care, support and other people-management processes.
- **Professional supervision** (sometimes described as case supervision) with workers or groups of workers to enable and support quality practice. A key aspect of this function is reviewing and reflecting on practice issues. This may include reviewing roles and relationships, evaluating the outcomes of the work and maximising opportunities for wider learning.
- **Continuing professional development of workers** to ensure they have the relevant skills, knowledge, understanding and attributes to do the job and progress their careers. Constructive feedback and observation of practice should be part of the learning process for workers and supervisors.

The College of Social Work stresses that the integration of critical reflection and supervision are reflected in the PCF (TCSW, 2012 p2). Some central principles in critical analysis and reflective practice that should be demonstrated are the ability to:

- plan, conceiving a range of different hypotheses and scenarios (Domains 5, 6)
- identify and draw on different sources of knowledge, theory and research to assess and plan your work (Domain 5)
- describe and analyse what took place, including impact on self and others (Domain 6)
- evaluate what took place, including critiquing own practice and considering alternative approaches that might have been used or that you might use in the future (Domains 6, 7)
- revise hypothesis in light of this action and reflection and plan next steps (Domains 6, 2)
- draw on evidence to use your professional judgement to influence decision making (Domains 5, 6).

Most of the published work on professional supervision approaches the topic from the manager or supervisor's point of view. What we will try to do here is to help you think about how you can use the systems and structures in place to make sure that you maximise your learning and development through the supervision process.

Reflective exercise:

Consider your previous experience of supervision. Make a note any key themes or memories that you have.

During the rest of this section, you will find it helpful to have in mind, or jotted down somewhere, your memory of a supervision session. Using the reflective model we looked at above, you can use this to consider how you might use supervision more effectively in future. We will give you prompts as we reach a point for you to apply your critical reflection to your own experiences.

Supervision agreements

Most supervisors will want to have a written agreement with each person they supervise. This is a little like a learning agreement insofar as it sets out what the overall issues are that need to be addressed, how often supervision will take place, how the meetings will be run, and how action planning will be agreed and monitored. This is an agreement, not a contract, and both parties should be happy with the resulting document. The detail may be standardised across an organisation, or there may be scope for individual elements to be agreed.

Where an agreement exists, it should be reviewed periodically to ensure that all elements are being covered and that the agreement is still fit for purpose.

Reflective exercise:

- *Have you used a supervision agreement either as a supervisor or as a supervisee?*
- *How helpful do you think it is to have one to ensure consistency in supervision sessions?*

Supervision agendas

Supervision is an opportunity for both parties to raise matters of importance to them across the three aspects of:

- line management
- professional supervision, and

- continuing professional development.

Using a structured agenda that incorporates some flexibility will help to ensure that all important areas are covered. Given that time pressures will often be a factor in supervision discussions it is important to agree and prioritise the agenda at the beginning of the meeting. You should ensure that you have the opportunity to identify the things that you particularly want to discuss during the meeting.

Reflective exercise:

- *How often have you been able to set or contribute to the agenda in supervision meetings?*
- *Are there things you will want to do differently when you start having supervisions once you return to social work to make sure you get the support you need?*

Recording supervision

It is important that all supervision discussions are properly and promptly recorded. This will help to support the completion of agreed actions within agreed timescales and to avoid any confusion or disputes at a later stage. It may be considered useful for both people to sign the supervision record as an agreed version of events, even if this also records any points of disagreement.

The most appropriate method of recording will depend on the working environment, the resources available and the personal preference of the supervisor and supervisee. They may take brief notes during the meeting and then write these up in full later. Others may prefer to do full notes during the meeting, however this can disrupt the flow and take up valuable time. Taking pauses to record decisions or actions agreed can be a useful strategy, and this method also provides the opportunity for the exact wording to be agreed, for both to sign the notes at the end of the meeting and for a copy of the record to be given to the supervisee immediately.

Regardless of the way in which the record is created, it is important that key decisions and actions agreed are noted, with clear timescales and responsibilities for action. This will reduce any confusion and the chances of actions not being followed through or delayed. In this way it should be possible to ensure that the supervision process remains a two-way process as part of a professional discussion.

Reflective exercise:

- *What do you remember about the way your supervision sessions have been recorded?*
- *Have there been occasions when you have been unhappy about the outcome of supervision sessions? How did you respond to this?*
- *What would you like to do differently in future to maximise the benefits of supervision for you personally and professionally?*

Key messages

Supervision is both an important right and benefit. It is the main way in which your organisation monitors and reviews your work, but also ensures you are properly supported and continue to develop your skills. It is therefore important that you are fully involved and make the most of the opportunities that supervision offers. In particular you should:

- prepare for each supervision meeting by reviewing notes from the previous meeting and thinking about the things you want to raise and discuss
- be ready to share your thoughts and ideas in the meeting
- be open about what has gone well and what you have found difficult
- be ready to plan and undertake development activities as agreed with your supervisor
- check and read the notes of your meetings and make sure you follow through and complete any actions as agreed
- reflect on each session and use it as a springboard for the next.

Finally in this section, use your reflective skills to consider how you can ensure your support through supervision mirrors your practice with clients.

Reflective exercise:

What steps can you take to ensure that supervision helps you to:

- *clarify your achievable goals*
- *identify your successes as well as areas for development*
- *focus on solutions.*

Working with others

Learning and reflection do not have to be solitary activities. As you engage with others and learn from and with them, you can expand your horizons beyond what you could achieve on your own. You can engage others in your reflective activities and use your professional

development portfolio, blogs, networking activities or action learning sets to discuss, share and create knowledge.

If you have been out of social work or indeed out of any kind of work for some time, you might have forgotten how much teamwork or inter-agency work is involved. Colleagues can be hugely helpful to you in supporting both your work and your learning, enhancing your job satisfaction and giving you a place to share ideas, knowledge and skills.

Teamwork has been emphasised as being necessary in social work since the findings of the Victoria Climbié Inquiry (Laming, 2009 p37) in order to:

- improve systems of sharing information
- improve working relationships
- establish a common assessment framework.

Reflective exercise:

- *Which teams of which you have been a member have you found it particularly good to work with?*
- *Using your reflection skills and your critical incident analysis techniques, try to identify what it was that made this a positive environment for you.*

Multi-agency working as a key component of the approach to service design and delivery is enshrined in the Children Act (2004). The Act obliged all local authorities to have multi-agency Children's Trusts. Multi-agency working is more than just talking to one another. It is about understanding the roles, responsibilities and duties of individuals, professions and agencies.

There may be challenges to working and learning effectively together. These might include:

- structural separation between organisations, or parts of organisations, leading to departments or agencies working in isolation
- perceived differences in status and power between individuals, professions, or agencies which lead to defensive practice and reluctance to share information
- professional identity and territory
- differences in accountability
- differences in perceived roles and responsibilities
- differences in perspectives on the relationship between the professional and the service user.

These challenges may be exacerbated by the political dimensions of professions. For example, directors of children's services are accountable to an elected body who in turn are answerable to the local public and national politicians and government departments. This will inevitably shape the way in which they work and the frameworks within which they operate. Similarly, working with health services, education, or legal services will bring other dimensions into play, all of which will impact on how the role of the social worker is perceived and put into operation.

Reflective exercise:

You will probably have experience of inter-agency working already.

- *Make a note of how you have used your skills and knowledge, and your ability to reflect on your practice, and that of others, to overcome institutional or organisational barriers to working together.*

- ✓ You will find more details on multi-agency and multi-disciplinary working in Module 7: Communication and Module 10: Working in organisations.



You can read much more about inter-professional and multi-agency working on the SCIE website: <http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/elearning/ipiac/index.asp>

Evidence-based practice

Social work considers itself to be an evidence-based profession. This means that professional decisions are made by integrating the best available evidence combined with practitioner expertise and other resources, with the characteristics, state, needs, values and preferences of those who will be affected by any decisions. This is done in a manner that is compatible with the legal and organisational context.

Evidence comprises research findings derived from the systematic collection of data through observation and experiment and the formulation of questions and testing of hypotheses.

Linking thinking and doing is a key part of critical reflection in practice. Translating evidence into practice is a key focus of social work education at all levels and both the PCF and the HCPC standards of proficiency for social workers (SOPs) acknowledge that research and evidence should be embedded in practice in order to maximise outcomes for individuals.

Analysing information

An important part of ascertaining the evidence base is to know what lies below the surface of what appears to be being communicated. It was partly the need to have the skills to use and analyse information that led to social work becoming a degree-based profession. Gaining a degree involves examining a range of sources and using them effectively to create a coherent argument. This is important in presenting cases and in making your own assessments for future actions.

Things you should consider when looking at information include:

- judging the quality, importance and relevance of each piece of information
- judging the integrity of the sources – is this from a reliable and trustworthy source
- trying to see the meaning of the situation for the person involved
- bearing in mind the legal component and the social work role
- bearing in mind the research and knowledge base.

All of these actions are, in effect, taking you round the learning cycle of action, reflection, theorising, testing. This is why understanding that cycle and the value of reflection for professional development are so important.

Learning activity: Sources of information

Consider the following types of information, then rank them in order of validity and reliability.

- *Newspaper article*
- *Research paper*
- *Case records*
- *First-hand account by a witness*
- *Second-hand account relayed to you by a relative*
- *An incident you personally observe*

- ✓ You will find the suggested answer to this activity in the activity pack that accompanies this return to social work package.

Using information

The final way in which we are going to consider using critical reflection in this module is the way you gather, evaluate and use information. As a social worker you will be well used to differentiating between fact and opinion. This is a crucial part of working with service users and their families. One person's view of an event or situation is likely to be influenced by

their relationship with that incident. You have explored this in the exercises we have given you on critical incident analysis.

When working with information, whether it is verbal, observed behaviour, written or a conceptual framework, you will need to bear the following in mind before using that information:

- Be critically aware; do not accept all information verbatim and at face value.
- Be aware of the gaps in your knowledge:
 - Do I know enough about X's new partner?
 - How can I find out more?
 - Who can help me to supplement what I know already?
- Most agencies have multiple contact points. If it is important, try more than one contact or route for obtaining information.

Module summary

We have reached the end of this module. You should now understand the concept of reflective practice and critical reflection, and how it is embedded in the professional frameworks that contextualise social work. You should know how to further develop your reflective skills and enhance your practice through critical incident analysis, supervision and the way you gather and use information.

Module self-assessment exercise

Complete the following quiz. You may find it helpful to discuss your answers with a colleague or supervisor if available. Remember to keep a note of your answers and any reflections as part of your ongoing CPD portfolio.

1. What is experiential learning?
2. How might you use a reflective model to learn in practice?
3. What is critical incident analysis?
4. How might it be used?
5. What is the purpose of supervision?
6. What are supervision agreements used for?
7. What does TCSW state is good practice in relation to critical reflection?
8. How might you use supervision to support your learning?

When you are happy with your answers refer to the accompanying resource pack to check how many you got right.

How did you score?

Less than 5 = Revisit the entire module and complete the relevant exercises and additional reading indicated

5-6 = Revise the relevant sections where you did not answer correctly

6 + = Well done! Check any answers that you did not get right and make a note of them. Now review the references and resources and follow up on any areas of interest or professional development needs.

Finally, before you move on, complete the following template to identify any further development needs in relation to this area and identify how your learning relates to your capabilities under the PCF.

Maximum score = 10 marks

Final reflection and further development needs

Module: Reflective self

What are the three key areas of learning you have achieved as a result of working through this module?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

This module is linked to the PCF. Write a short reflection about how you think your learning has contributed to your capabilities in each identified domain:

- Domain 1: Professionalism: Identify and behave as a professional social worker, committed to professional development.
- Domain 3: Diversity: Recognise and apply anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive principles in practice.
- Domain 5: Knowledge: Apply knowledge of social sciences, law and social work practice theory.
- Domain 6: Critical Reflection and Analysis: Apply critical reflection and analysis to inform and provide a rationale for professional decision making.

What else do you need to know and/or learn to demonstrate your capabilities in this area?

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Learning resources

Reflective log

The following template is an example of a reflective log that you can use to keep a note of and reflect upon your learning while you undertake your shadowing experience.

Date of event:

Location of event:

Brief summary of learning event:

How was the learning acquired? (e.g. lecture, work with client, team meeting)	What was the subject or topic of the learning event?
What happened during the learning event?	Which part of the event was most significant and/or important to you?
What aspect of the event went well?	What was not so good?
What were your feelings about what happened?	What do you think others were feeling (if appropriate)?
What were your desired learning outcomes?	Where does it link in with, expand or complement your existing knowledge or skills?
What have you learned from the event?	

Conclusions

What do you need to do next?	How can you put your learning into practice in another situation?
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Module self-assessment exercise: Answer sheet

1. What is experiential learning? (1 mark)

Experiential learning is a way of describing learning that happens in everyday life rather than through books or journals, or formal learning such as courses or conferences. It is often described as a cycle that involves engaging in critical reflection on an event or occurrence and considering how that can affect future practice.

2. How might you use a reflective model to learn in practice? (1 mark)

Techniques such as critical incident analysis or SWOT analysis can help you to use reflection to ensure you learn from your practice. This should help you to identify ways of working that you find helpful, and make sure you come to avoid those that hinder your learning and your practice.

3. What is critical incident analysis? (1 mark)

A critical incident is an event or occurrence that gives you pause to think that you revisit so you can use it to have an impact on your practice.

4. How might it be used? (1 mark)

You can use critical incident analysis to examine incidents in a structured way so that you learn from them and use that learning for your future practice. You might choose to look at something within your organisation – such as team meetings and why they do or do not work well. Or you might want to reflect on an interaction with a child and their family to see how you could be more effective in future, or to work out why it went better than you expected. You can choose what you see as ‘critical’ and use the technique to support your practice.

5. What is the purpose of supervision? (3 marks)

There are three main purposes for supervision:

- **Line management:** accountability for practice and quality of service, including managing team resources, delegation and workload management, performance appraisal, duty of care, support and other people-management processes.
- **Professional supervision** (sometimes described as case supervision) to enable and support quality practice including reviewing and reflecting on practice issues such as roles and relationships, evaluating the outcomes of the work and maximising opportunities for wider learning.

- **Continuing professional development of workers** to ensure they have the relevant skills, knowledge, understanding and attributes to do the job and progress their careers, including giving constructive feedback and observation of practice.

6. What are supervision agreements used for? (1 mark)

A supervision agreement sets out the roles, responsibilities and expectations for supervision, as agreed by the supervisor and the supervisee.

7. What does TCSW state is good practice in relation to critical reflection? (1 mark)

Critical reflection and critically reflective practice are central to social work – ‘Critical reflection and analysis’ is one of the nine domains of the PCF, with capability statements built into all levels. However, the ability to reflect and analyse is fundamental to social work. For this reason, the PCF is constructed so that critical reflection is integrated into all domains.

8. How might you use supervision to support your learning? (1 mark)

Make sure you use the following processes in the context of supervision:

- **Supervision agreement** – with your supervisor setting out roles, responsibilities and expectations
- **Agenda** – for each session to ensure you manage the time effectively and cover all relevant aspects
- **Record** – agreed actions and other outcomes to help you with learning and practice development.

Maximum score = 10 marks