

RESEARCH BRIEFING

EVALUATION OF THE TRAINING PROGRAMME: 'IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF SERIOUS CASE REVIEWS'



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WHY IS THIS STUDY IMPORTANT?

Serious case reviews (SCRs) are local reviews which take place when a child dies, or is seriously harmed, and abuse or neglect is known or suspected. Since 2010, the government has made publishing the SCR report a requirement in an effort to increase transparency and enable professionals to learn from the detail of these reviews. Working Together to Safeguard Children (2013 and 2015) revised the guidance on conducting SCRs. The guidance set out the principles for learning and improvement that should be followed during the review itself and when producing the report for publication. This was because of concerns that learning was not being shared and acted on as effectively as it could be. To assist with this the Department for Education funded a training programme for lead reviewers and commissioners of SCRS. The key aims of the programme were to offer training and support to improve the quality of SCRs. Participants were trained to achieve Department for Education requirements to produce reports which: are well written and easy to understand for professionals and the public; provide a sound analysis in order to avoid the risks of repeating the same mistakes; and are suitable for publication without needing to be amended or censored because of identifying personal information. The training was designed and delivered by a consortium including NSPCC, Action for Children, and an independent training organisation, Sequeli.

AIM OF STUDY

This independent evaluation aimed to report on the overall success of the training and support programme from the perspectives of the participants. The study also aimed to assess the extent to which the training helped participants to produce good quality SCR reports.

HOW WAS THE STUDY DONE?

The elements of the programme that were evaluated were; a two-day core training module delivered on four occasions, five half-day taster workshops delivered twice, a one-day seminar for Commissioners (Local Safeguarding Children's Board Chairs, Board members and Business Managers) held twice, and four Action Learning Sets designed to promote ideas sharing follow on from the two-day core modules and/or the taster workshops.

Participant profiles were completed by 71 delegates who attended the two-day core training. These included information about demographic characteristics, professional characteristics, and previous SCR experience. 75 *course feedback questionnaires* gained attendees' views on the two-day training and a *focus group* with 6 participants sought views on the challenges they face in report writing. A sub-sample of participants also took part in an *interview* which further explored views on report writing challenges and how much the training had helped (18 participants in total, 7 were interviewed and 11 written responses were also received). An analysis of 121 *workshop evaluation questionnaires* was conducted, along

with 46 *course feedback questionnaires* from the two seminars for Commissioners. 14 *Action Learning Sets feedback questionnaires* were also included in the analysis.

KEY FINDINGS

The findings were framed around what the designers of the training programme had been asked to achieve by the Department for Education:

- To identify, encourage to attend, and provide the service to at least 50 individuals likely to be leading SCRs in the next 2 years.
 - The courses were oversubscribed and some people had to be turned away.
 - Many new and experienced participants reported a growing reluctance to be involved with SCRs. Their concerns were linked to uncertainty about the purpose of SCRs and fear of adverse publicity that could damage their future careers.
- Encourage participants with a wide range of backgrounds, including those new to SCRs.
 - 61% of participants in the two-day core training were female, 97% were over 40 with the majority of these (55%) in the 51-60 category.
 - About half the participants were from a social work background, 14% from law, 9% with a health background and 15% from the police.
 - 43 attendees (61%) had experience of authoring different types of reports for the SCR process, 11 participants had no previous reviewing experience.
- To develop skills to meet the Department for Education requirements of; providing a sound analysis, writing in plain English, and producing reports suitable for publication without personal data that needs to be protected.
 - Overall, the evaluation sheets completed in all elements of the programme were very positive, for example 86% of two-day course attendees said the course was a useful foundation for developing these skills.
 - Participants reported that the training provided a good opportunity for discussion, it was worthwhile attending, it gave participants a chance to reflect and it helped some to think analytically about the purpose of the review and its conclusions.
 - In contrast, the interviews revealed frustration among some that the level was quite superficial and they had learnt nothing new.

- Many thought that the writing in plain English requirement was not adequately covered and felt clear examples were lacking. Participants were much more positive about gaining confidence around writing reports suitable for publication without personal data.
- Provide clarity about what a good report looks like and how it could and should be used.
 - Some participants expressed confusion about the purpose of SCRs, in terms of whether they are a learning tool for future practice or an investigation into who is to blame.
 - Many participants wanted to see more examples of good SCRs provided by the Department of Health in the training materials.
- Provide ongoing support to individuals as their skills develop.
 - Not many participants signed up for a telephone mentoring system for support after the course. However, some participants felt that the programme helped them establish more informal peer support networks.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY & PRACTICE

- Policy makers need to be aware of the findings about the anxieties felt around becoming involved in producing SCRs. Commissioners need to improve support to encourage reluctant reviewers to take on the work.
- Meeting the needs of people with very different levels of experience presented a challenge for the programme. Training providers planning for future delivery of the programme need to consider how best to cater for this range of experience.
- Writing skills should feature more prominently on future courses as this is fundamental to the success of a report. Guidelines around this, and from the DfE about the acceptable degree of flexibility over approaches to SCRs, would help to relieve anxieties around producing a 'bad' report and its consequences.
- The DfE and training providers need to give more concrete examples of good SCRs. Case material could be improved, or better utilised, as many participants requested more practical examples and less theory.
- LSCBs need to provide good quality professional supervision to report authors. Peer support could be more formally arranged. Participants viewed this as something that could not only improve report quality, but also help

combat the isolating and often emotionally distressing nature of the work.

STRENGTHS & LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Strengths

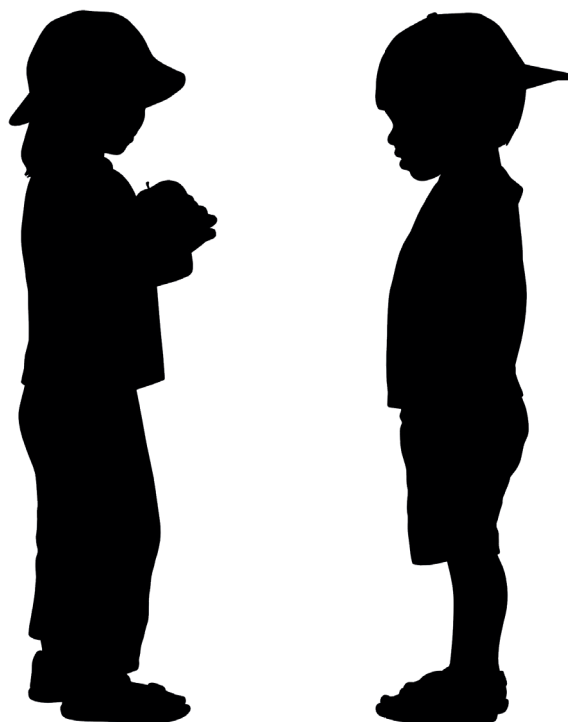
The independence of the evaluation gives an unbiased view of participants' experiences of the training programme.

Limitations

The evaluation aimed to gather the views of the participants rather than those who were involved in designing and delivering the programme. Although in some respects this limits the scope of the study, it does mean that the evaluation is wholly independent of the programme providers.

IMPACT OF THE STUDY

The recommendation for the DfE to provide clear examples of what a good SCR and report is and looks like have been accepted by the DfE who commissioned a 'Learning into Practice Project' as part of its Innovation Programme to consider in depth the quality of serious case reviews.



FIND OUT MORE

FULL REPORT goo.gl/BhyLGG

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