



CURIOUS ABOUT NAAS: WHAT WILL IT MEAN FOR SOCIAL WORK?

Beck, Social Work Consultant in Manchester, was one of the first social workers to take the National Assessment and Accreditation System (NAAS) in her Local Authority. In her blog, she talks about how curiosity about the assessment and encouragement from her line manager led her to volunteer for NAAS despite her initial reservations.

There were a number of reasons why I was persuaded to do the assessment but mainly I wanted to see for myself and not judge the idea of NAAS before I had some personal experience of it. My line manager is the NAAS lead in Manchester and she was also keen for myself and colleagues to go through the assessment first so that we could share our experiences with others and hopefully encourage them to take part.

Preparing for the assessment

I knew quite a bit about NAAS before taking the assessment. We had all attended a briefing for social workers to find out more about the system and it was from there that we booked onto a preparation day put on by one of our local universities - this was a great opportunity to have a really useful practice run.

There were some differences between the way we prepared in Manchester and the reality of the assessment, these were mainly around the layout of the room and the fact that the assessor was there observing but it was definitely good preparation for the assessment.

What reassured me on the day was how welcoming people were. The facilitators were friendly and explained clearly what was happening, which made the whole experience more positive for me and my colleagues.

The post-qualifying standard

Before preparing for NAAS I was already quite familiar with the Knowledge and Skills Statements (KSS) as I deliver training to newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) in Manchester. I'm used to thinking about how we embed the KSS in our local training offer and how the work of NQSWs is mapped against them. The only difference in this situation was that I needed to apply the KSS to my own practice.

I took the practitioner assessment first rather than the practice supervisor one because I felt that in my role as a social work consultant supporting NQSWs I needed to understand the process from this perspective. I might do the practice supervisor assessment in the future but I would need to refresh my knowledge of the relevant KSS if I take that assessment.

Where NAAS fits in

I had questions about why NAAS was needed on top of social workers already being qualified and having access to the existing additional qualifications on offer. My feeling was that if I engaged with NAAS and gave it a try, I might be able to influence how it looks for other social workers in the future.

Now I have taken the assessment, I think that for those who have been in social work for a long time, it is a good opportunity to benchmark where you are up to. It helps you think about how you might develop your knowledge and skills and improve generally. It may be more challenging for those who have remained in one practice area for some time because they will inevitably be more familiar with the knowledge and policies relating to that area, so they would need to review their knowledge of other practice areas to ensure they have an up to date understanding of the broader range of practice. Overall, I think it is probably a helpful thing. For me, it is about finding the right timing for the individual and I don't think people should feel pressured to do it.

Final reflections

What I recognised in preparing for NAAS was that I was refreshing my knowledge and, in some ways, I was learning some new things. For example, I thought I needed to be familiar with the most recent Working Together (2018) and it prompted me to re-read it thoroughly.

In terms of whether it improves my practice, I am perhaps in a slightly different situation to most social workers as I don't hold a caseload or work directly with children and families, but I do sometimes observe NQSWs. Taking the assessment has been useful for re-familiarising myself with certain aspects of practice and I think this will benefit the social workers I am supporting in their day to day role.

Beck has been employed by Manchester City Council since she qualified as a social worker in 1996, and has held a variety of roles prior to becoming a Social Work Consultant in 2012. She helps to coordinate the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) and leads on Practice Learning and student placements within Children's Services.