SISCo – Supporting Induction in Social Care

Project Newsletter

No.1: August 2006

Welcome to the first SISCo project newsletter. This newsletter will be published at key milestones in the life of the SISCo project, and distributed to project participants and a wider audience of interested individuals and organisations.

If this newsletter has been forwarded to you and you would like to receive it directly, sign up at the project website at www.sisco.org.uk

Background to the SISCo project

SISCo – Supporting Induction in Social Care - promotes the integration of 'basic skills' assessment with the implementation of the sector-wide Common Induction Standards for adult social care in England. The project is jointly supported by the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE), Skills for Care and the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA).

The project's aim is to raise awareness of the communication, number and IT skills demanded by social care job roles, and assist employers in developing these skills in the workplace. The project will produce practical support tools for managers that are relevant to employers' identified needs, as well as social care standards.

The SISCo project team is working with 20 social care employers in SE England. Learning providers from SEEDA's Skills for Life Networks are acting as auditors and facilitators. The first phase of the project, an audit of existing workplace practice around induction, was conducted in May and June 2006. The results are summarised here.

Key messages from the SISCo practice audit

+ All the audited social care workplaces operate a formal induction process, often informed by the Common Induction Standards +

+ Social care employers value 'basic skills' – oral communication and report-writing in particular - but do not have systems for specifying the 'basic skills' required for roles +

+ Many expressed a desire to move to a more systematic approach to specifying and assessing 'basic skills' at induction, but had concerns about staff reaction to assessment, as well as the resources and expertise required for systematic assessment +

Table 1: SISCo employer profile

Sector	Size	Services
14 private 5 voluntary 3 public	14 small 5 medium 3 large	13 residential 9 domiciliary 9 day care 5 respite care 4 supported housing 2 supported employment

Table 2: SISCO workforce profile

Age	70% aged 35 years or over
Gender	80% female
English as additional language	18%
Part-time	46%
No qualifications	43%
Level 2 NVQ	28%
Turnover at level 2 NVQ	47%
Previous experience at level 2	80% less than 1 year

About the SISCo audit sample

- The practice audit was conducted in a total of 22 workplaces in five counties in SE England (excluding Greater London). The employers and workplaces making up the audit sample were recruited by the facilitators in their local areas, according to a sample profile reflecting the care workforce nationally in England. See Tables 1 and 2 above for employer and workforce profiles.

- For more information on the make-up of the adult social care workforce nationally in England, see the Skills for Care annual workforce intelligence data at www.skillsforcare.org.uk

Induction practices
+ Workplaces reported that a lack of resources (financial and human) presented the biggest barrier to achieving the outcomes they desired from induction +

- All 22 workplaces operate a formal induction process that applies to all new appointments. Induction is most likely to begin on the inductee's first day at work, although many workplaces see it starting at recruitment. Induction is mostly seen to end when probation ends.

- Induction tends to cover terms and conditions, organisational structure, history and values, health and safety, role requirements, and physical orientation. Skills assessment and personal development plan (PDP) formulation, on the other hand, were included in only about 50% of workplaces.

- The standards most likely to inform induction were the Common Induction Standards and National Occupational Standards. These standards were reported in just over half the sample. In all but four of the workplaces,

achievement of standards is assessed by observation supported by questioning and a workbook.

- Employers appear to use induction principally to ensure the inductee understands the requirements of his/her new role and circumstances. There appears to be less emphasis given to skills assessment and PDP formulation. Workplaces reported that a lack of resources (financial and human) presented the biggest barrier to achieving the outcomes they desired from induction. This problem was at its most acute for remote workers.

- Limited English, limited literacy, attitudes to learning and limited ability generally were cited as impediments by some organisations, as was a lack of managerial expertise.

Skills assessment
+ Assessment of skills and/or knowledge seems to be largely informal, based on management observation of performance at application, interview and probationary period work behaviour +

- The data suggests that less than half of the workplace sample have produced a local specification of knowledge and skills for all posts.

- Most commonly, skills assessment takes the form of application form screening, recruitment interview questioning (including discussion of scenarios), take-up of references, and observation and discussion during probation.

- Assessment of skills and/or knowledge seems to be largely informal, based on management observation of performance at application,

interview and probationary period work behaviour.

- Assessment of literacy and/or communication skills is reported in 11 of the 22 workplaces, indicating that skills in these areas are valued. Interpersonal skills (i.e. for client care, team-working) are a related concern.

'Basic skills'
+ In only two workplaces was any structured basic skills assessment reported +

- Oral communication is reported as the skill most valued by employers. It is seen as essential to both client care and team-working. Dealing with workplace documentation (both accessing written information and creating records and reports) is widely recognised as a skill required by regulations.

- No workplace reported any systematic specification of the 'basic skills' required for job roles/tasks. Several workplaces expressed the desire to move to a more systematic approach but reported a lack of expertise and resources.

- In only two workplaces was any structured assessment reported, in both cases with a focus on text literacy. Where assessment was reported, it was based on identifying individual skills deficits in the course of normal recruitment and induction procedures.

- Informal assessment of maths skills was reported in about one-third of workplaces, but almost exclusively limited to senior caring and managerial roles. No assessment of ICT skills was reported in any of the workplaces.

- None of the workplaces were reported to be opposed to assessing 'basic skills' at induction, but many had concerns about staff reaction to assessment, resourcing issues and lack of expertise. There was evidence that managers understood 'basic skills' as an academic (as opposed to vocational) skill set.

- In all cases an individual-skills-deficit model of 'basic skills' was evident: 'basic skills' become visible only when an individual evidences a 'problem' that the employer associates with 'basic skills' (as understood by the employer). Employers considered this approach worked on its own terms.

Supporting and improving practice
+ Employers may feel under pressure to deliver induction to the standards to which they aspire +

- When asked to identify ways to better support staff in relation to 'basic skills', employers almost uniformly reported that they required greater expertise and support.

- An assessment tool was identified by eight employers. Employers also indicated a need for guidance and support to respond effectively to the outcomes of any assessment.

- When asked what would help improve induction practices, employers cited more/better resources (e.g. time, funding, facilities, dedicated personnel and materials) for local induction processes. This suggests employers may feel under some pressure to deliver induction to the standards they aspire to.

Next steps for the SISCo project
The full audit report will be published on the SISCo web site shortly. Newsletter subscribers will be notified.

The data from this research and allied pieces of work is being used to develop a set of web-based tools to support social care employers in improving basic skills. The next newsletter will provide information on the tools being developed.

Thanks

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For more information about the SISCo project, see the project web site at www.sisco.org.uk