

Family Services

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1. Introduction

All staff are responsible for achieving a high level of quality in their own work and for assisting their colleagues to do the same. The policies, systems and processes in place in our practice reflect our professional and legal responsibilities and follow recognised standards of good practice.

Consistent, high quality assessments and regular reviews are fundamental to the process of supervising young people who offend, managing the risk of harm they may present to the public and keeping them safe. At the same time, the YOS has a responsibility to enforce court orders effectively, using this opportunity to create positive change for this cohort of young people.

Quality assurance of ASSET, managerial countersigning of Risk of Serious Harm assessments, Vulnerability Management Plans and Risk Management Plans are critical in managing risk, protecting young people and in providing a bench mark of good practice.

Regular reviews of assessments, particularly during times of significant change, are also equally critical to an effective QA process.

2. Self QA

Quality assurance begins with the individual. Everyone is responsible for producing a piece of work which is of a consistently high quality and which is based on accurate, evidence based information and includes critical reflection, professional judgement and analysis. As a minimum, written work should be spell-checked and grammatically correct. Staff should read through their work and correct typos and other mistakes before it is presented to the quality assurer.

3. Peer QA

Barnet YOS would like to move to a process which includes a regular peer QA process. However the current process involves a considerable investment of time and it is acknowledged that peer QA cannot take place under the current process on a regular basis. One proposal is to hold QA workshops from time to time which enable peers to conduct dip sample reviews of each other's work and which will generate case discussions. Case discussions can also take place at fortnightly Team Meetings. This is an area for further development.

4. Manager QA

Barnet YOS has three QA Managers who are responsible for the quality assurance of all statutory orders. Some of these QA Managers are also line managers for certain staff. These consist of the Senior Practitioner, Principal Practitioner, Operational Team Manager. The Youth Justice Manager will support with QA when required. Managers are on a QA rota which means there is an even distribution of QA and management oversight and all cases receive oversight from all managers. This promotes managers' understanding of a multitude of cases and also ensures that staff and young people benefit from different managerial views and approaches which will enable them to reflect and evaluate their work in the widest context.

The investment in QA at the PSR/Referral Order Report stage is important. Accurate and full assessment at the start of the young person's contact with the youth justice system not only influences effective sentencing decisions but it also lays a firm foundation upon which to build an effective plan of intervention and signposts which partner agencies need to be involved. Effective assessment is also critical in identifying and managing risk of harm and vulnerability.

5. PSR/RO Assessments

The YOT Officer completes the ASSET and any other assessments or plans (ROSH, RMP, VMP) in advance of preparing the report and then applies the scaled approach which determines the reporting requirements. These documents will be sent to the QA manager at least 48 hours prior to the court hearing date.

The QA Manager will read the PSR request form, CPS documents including PNC and any other relevant associated documents e.g. psychiatric reports. The Manager will also look the young person up on Careworks and read any other helpful documents e.g. previous ONSET, ASSET, CPS papers, SEN, before moving onto the new assessment.

The QA Manager will review the PSR ASSET and associated risk documents and provide written feedback in relation to the evidence which has been provided and the scores. The feedback will highlight any omissions to the indicators of vulnerability and harm to the public and it will go on to give feedback in relation to the ROSH, RMP, and VMP. It will both concur with the author's assessment of the level of risk, or offer guidance and challenge in relation to the professional judgements contained in the assessment. The QA Manager is also responsible for identifying good practice. Examples of good practice identified through the QA process can be shared with the wider service. Throughout the above process the QA Manager will raise whether the author has given due consideration to any diversity issues and whether the needs and perspectives of the victim have been addressed. In more complex cases, or where there is disagreement between author and QA Manager, a case discussion should take place.

The QA Manager will request that the author make the amendments within a given timeframe. The author must confirm the amendments have been made. The QA Manager is responsible for confirming that amendments have been made and outstanding actions completed.

The QA Manager will record the ASSET QA feedback on the case file through an entry in Contacts on Careworks. The date that the ASSET review is due will be added as a future appointment to serve as a reminder to YOT Officer, specialist staff and Managers.

6. PSR Reports

The YOT Officer should submit the report at least 24 hours prior to the hearing; this document needs to be spell checked in advance of submission and completed in full. The PSR author and the QA Manager should discuss the sentencing recommendation in advance of the report being written.

The QA Manager will go through the report in each section to ensure that the report is analytical, that it highlights all the risk and protective factors and that it leads logically to the risk assessment and the subsequent conclusion and recommendation.

The QA Manager will make comments, suggestions and request amendments as necessary and these will be highlighted on the PSR document and then sent to the author. The PSR author is responsible for ensuring that the amendments are made and that the report is fit for purpose.

The QA Manager will attach a copy of the QA'd version of the PSR onto the paperclip on the case file for future note. The original un-QA'd version should also be saved by the QA Manager. The amended and final version should be attached to the file by the YOT Officer.

7. Assessment Reviews (Start/Mid/End)

Due to the volume of reviews the Managers will not QA in the same depth as at the PSR stage unless there is a significant change which impacts upon the risk assessment. Therefore the Start and Mid assessments will be dip sampled only with the review ROSH/RMP/VMP being the main focus of attention to facilitate managerial countersignature.

The End ASSET in all cases will be QA'd in full as it is important that it is an accurate assessment and that it highlights the young person's progress as well as any outstanding issues. The young person's progress or lack of progress must be accurately reflected in the scores. It will also allow for scrutiny of the exit strategy to the CAF/Family Focus Team.

8. Intervention Plans

Intervention Plans must be completed within 15 days in line with National Standards. The IP must be SMART and prioritised using the highest scores in ASSET as a guide line. The main risk of harm and vulnerability factors must be included and prioritised accordingly.

The IP will then be quality assured by each YOT Officer's line manager during their monthly supervision and any discussion or required amendments should be recorded in the case file and on the YOT Officer's supervision notes. The review dates for the IPs will also be recorded as a future appointment on Careworks.

9. Line Manager Oversight

The small size of the YOS makes it likely that the QA Manager and the Line Manager will often be the same person. It is therefore difficult to separate the two distinct processes in Barnet. However, in the event that the QA Manager identifies recurring issues, these will be brought to the attention of the Line Manager for further discussion in supervision as they may highlight a training or developmental need. The difficulty in separating QA from Line Manager Oversight also raises the question of 'who QAs the QA'er?' and an additional challenge and oversight is required to maintain integrity of the process.

10. Audit of QA Process

- team to participate in whole team themed audit workshops twice yearly
- regular dip-sampling of cases including QA and managerial oversight by Youth Justice Manager
- monthly case audit of HMIP long list sample cases by Operational Manager and Youth Justice Manager
- audits of YOS cases by CSC audit team where YOT and CSC are both involved
- Serious Case Reviews/Critical and Extended Learning Reviews are conducted by the Youth Justice Manager or Operational Manager and QA'd by the Head of Safeguarding
- Quality Case Audit feedback provided to YOT Management Board and to Senior Managers in the Council at quarterly intervals
- Barnet YOS to enter into a shared peer review arrangement with a neighbouring borough, e.g. Enfield, Harrow or Brent.