



**GRADUATE CERTIFICATE in Consolidation  
of Social Work Practice  
LEVEL 6 - 60 Credits  
BMPF6044**

**LEARNER PORTFOLIO  
(PORTH AGORED and UNIVERSITY OF WALES  
TRINITY SAINT DAVID)**

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## Task 3

### Safeguarding and working in complex situations – Case Study

#### Guidance;

*Please ensure that you meet the National Occupational Standards and assigned Learning Outcomes for this task (see handbook).*

#### Question:

Complete a critically reflective case study based on an assessment that you have undertaken with others, in your own area of work, concerning the safeguarding of either an adult or a child. You must demonstrate how the case relates to or could relate to safeguarding legislation, policies, strategies and procedures (including demonstrating an understanding of the interface between social services provision in Wales with the United Kingdom, the European Union (EU) and outside the EU). You must demonstrate your understanding of the integration of analysis in assessment, collaborative working and professional judgements in increasingly complex situations and the use of social work theories. You must refer to the specific dimensions of working in Wales.

*4000 words (+/- 10%: include your actual word count at the end of each section).*

The purpose of this assignment is to critically reflect on an intervention where I've undertaken an assessment concerning the safeguarding of a child. According to section 3(3) of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, a child is defined as a person under the age of 18. However, during this assignment the child will be known as a *young person*, which according to Citizens Advice (2025), means someone over the age of 14 but under the age of 18. The young person will be referred to as service user **4** - and measures will be taken to ensure the individual remains anonymous - in compliance with the confidentiality requirements of the Programme Handbook, Prifysgol Cymru Y Drindod Dewi Sant (2025).

**4** is a 16-year-old white male living with his grandfather and is on the child protection register. **4's** preferred method of communication is through the medium of Welsh. He is estranged from his mother and has an on-and-off relationship with his father. At the time of registration at the age of 15, he was living with his father and was being exposed to regular drug use and police callouts. After being placed on the register, **4** decided to move in with his grandfather, who even though ensured **4's** basic needs were met, lacked the parental oversight to ensure **4** attended school. Concerns also grew over **4** displaying harmful sexual behaviour towards his peers and younger teenagers. As we navigate through the three learning outcomes of the assignment, we will gradually learn more about **4** and the circumstances surrounding the intervention.

Some consideration has been taken to decide which model of critical reflection is to be applied in this assignment. I'm drawn to two very similar types of reflective models - with one having an influence over the other, as we'll soon discover. Jan Fook's model of critical reflection, which is based on the following three

stage process: describe the narrative – deconstruction – reconstruction, Fook (2002), is sometimes criticised for representing one form of critical reflection to the exclusion of others, Pockett et al. (2011). However, Fook is clear that her process of reflection is based on Donald Schon's *Stages of reflection*, especially his focus on querying assumptions, The Conversation Lab (2022). Schon's Stages of reflection is primarily based on two stages of reflection: reflection in action and reflection on action, Schon (1983). Fook's explanation of critical reflection and issues of power is what essentially drew me to choosing her reflective model over Schon's. Fook claims that critical reflection is a process of *unsettling the assumptions* inherent in individuals and wider society, Pockett et al. (2011). I hope to embed this ethos into how I critically reflect the following case study.

The first part of this assignment will focus on *applying analysis in assessment to inform intervention*. One of the ways of doing this is by outlining the legislative framework that underpins the assessment. Statutory guidance here in Wales, states that all local authorities are at duty to record a child's name when they are placed on the child protection register and subject to a care and support protection plan, Welsh Government (2018). It is important to note that a child can only be placed on the register because of a decision made at a case conference, with the exception being - if a child moves to the local authority and is already on a child protection register from the previous local authority, North Wales Safeguarding Board (2025). As already established, **4** was placed on the register when he was 15 years old, which was before his transition to the 16+ team where I am based. This meant that I wasn't part of the initial decision making set out in section 47 of the Children Act 1989, nor was I a part of the initial case conference, where it was decided that **4** had suffered from emotional abuse and neglect. Interestingly, when comparing the section 47 process with the equivalent investigatory process of New York State in America, despite slight differences in professional language, overall, there seems to be a similar approach. In New York, the Child Protective Service has 60 days after receiving the initial report to determine whether the case is 'indicated' or 'unfounded', New York State (2025) - whereas in the UK the section 47 enquiry must be completed within 45 days.

Nonetheless, whilst **4** remains on the child protection register, I am responsible for coordinating the care and support protection plan. This entails visiting **4** every 10 days, as well as assembling a core group every six weeks with the agencies involved in developing and delivering the care and support protection plan, Social Care Wales (2025a). It is essential to have a basic understanding of the legislative framework because it complies with professional standards set out in The Code, such as *working in a lawful, safe and effective way*, Social Care Wales (2017). The law can also be an aid for decision-making and a way to establish priority of interests, Brammer (2013). During the first core group meeting I facilitated, **4's** father was present, and he became very belligerent and difficult. He still felt aggrieved that **4** was placed on the child protection register, and that the local authority were putting pressure on his father, who **4** was currently living with. Even though it's important to promote engagement and co-production within the context of the core group, it's even more vital that we prioritise achieving child-centred outcomes, Social Care Wales (2025b). Therefore, during the meeting I had to remind **4's** father of the aims and objectives of the meeting and what was expected of him as **4's** parent. Still, when deconstructing this scenario further, it's important to consider what Dumbrill (2006) cited in Mellon (2017) refers to as the strong power differential between

the professionals and parents. In future, one of the ways I can try to redress this power imbalance is to be less focused on the procedures, and instead, concentrate on building strong and compassionate relationships with children and families, Munro (2011).

Understanding and applying the law is also a way of promoting the rights of the child. For example, international law states that governments must use legislative measures to protect children from violence, abuse, harm etc, while in the care of their parent, guardian or carer, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). This is closely affiliated with the duties specified under section 130 of the Social Services Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, and section 47 in the Children Act 1989. Whilst working with **4**, I've sometimes found it difficult to apply authority, and at the same time, promote his rights and take an ethical based approach. For instance, there were one or two occasions where **4** avoided statutory visits by either cancelling prior to the visit or purposely not being at home at the scheduled time. One of the ways of deconstructing this is by reflecting on the core components of the *legal literacy* model by Braye and Preston-Shoot (2016). This means bearing in mind what was legally required (doing things right), what **4's** rights were (rights thinking), and what were the ethical issues (doing right things). On reflection, it was clear that I needed to reorganise a statutory visit as soon as possible, and that I also needed to maintain a written account of the unsuccessful visits on **4's** file. This ensured that I didn't breach any legal duties and, in a way, upheld **4's** right to be protected from harm. However, when considering the ethical dimensions of the statutory visit, **4's** wishes and feelings seem to come second to the legal obligations.

Another way of informing assessment practice is by exploring theoretical perspectives. As a social worker in the 16+ team, it is seldom we work with child protection cases, therefore using an empowerment perspective seems appropriate - and in a way, aligns with the values and philosophies of the 16+ team. Recent data from 2023/24 shows that 132 children were placed on the child protection register in our local authority, however, only one young person between the age of 16 to 18 was registered, Welsh Government (2023). It's not difficult to imagine that being a 16- or 17-year-old on the child protection register will feel stifling for some, especially at a time in their lives where they're starting to transition into adulthood. Under the Mental Capacity Act 2005, as soon as a child reaches 16 years old, he or she are deemed to have mental capacity. Yet, some children's charities caution against viewing young people as adults, because it risks overlooking their vulnerabilities as a child, NSPCC (2001) cited in Martin (2024). Furthermore, it's worth noting that someone with PR for a young person can still make decisions on behalf of the young person up until the age of 18, House of Commons (2025).

According to the Children's Commissioner for Wales (2025), children in receipt of social services will feel empowered if they feel decisions are made with them, as opposed to being made about them. Empowerment is essentially about supporting people to build autonomy and control in their own lives. That said, it's worth reflecting on the 'PCS' analysis model by Thompson (2016) – and the structural challenges that **4** faced as a young person on the child protection register. According to Bilston (2006) cited in Hanson and Holmes (2014), the child protection system is mainly designed to support younger children experiencing maltreatment within their family. Wise (2018) even argues that the procedural elements to child protection

such as timescales, core groups and conferences, don't suit the day to day lives of adolescents, because it doesn't consider the various influences at play such as identity, education, employment, sexuality, gender, and social network. Considering this, it could be argued that **4** was disadvantaged and oppressed on a structural level, hence, the importance of using empowerment within this intervention.

As **4's** social worker, one of the ways I tried to promote empowerment was by applying a child-centred approach. Despite **4's** occasional non-attendance at statutory visits, when we did manage to see each other, this provided an opportunity to see and speak with him and build trust. It was also a way to capture **4's** experiences, wishes and feelings about their situation, Social Care Wales (2025c). Generally, **4** expressed his wish to remain living with his grandfather. Despite **4's** father not being completely happy with the arrangement, **4's** grandfather on the other hand agreed to it. On reflection, I feel it was a good thing to listen to **4** on this because it was a way of supporting **4** to reach a solution and achieve change. Living with his grandfather safeguarded **4** from his father's drug use and helped reduce altercations between them. Supporting this outcome was also a way of maximising **4's** participation in his care, which demonstrated my ability to meet the professional standards identified in section 3 of The Code, Social Care Wales (2017).

One thing I've come to learn about this situation is the need to be more mindful about adverse childhood experiences - and how this may impact on my attempt at empowering a young person. For instance, **4's** occasional avoidance of me at statutory visits might be because, as a trauma experienced young person, he may find it difficult to establish trust with others. It could also mean he feels unsafe around me due to developing an overactive stress-response system because of trauma, Penna (2014) cited in MacFarlane (2023). Therefore, in future, learning more about trauma informed practice would be a massive help, as it would give me a better idea of when to recognise the need to prioritise trauma-informed principles such as safety and trust.

We will now explore the next learning outcome: *working collaboratively with people in need of care and support, their carers, and other professionals*. Co-production and multi-agency working are two of the five principles of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. Therefore, involving people in the design and provision of their care and support, as well as integrating with other agencies, has become fundamental to my social work practice. One of the ways of trying to promote **4's** participation was by constantly observing the communication between us. For example, effective practice requires acknowledging the impact a parent's behaviour has on a young person, Social Care Wales (2025d). In this instance it was **4's** grandfather. During statutory visits to the house, **4** would often be quite disagreeable when his grandfather was in the room with us. On some occasions, they would even start arguing with each other and the objectives of the visit were never really met. Therefore, some of the statutory visits were conducted at other locations, such as the public library, which **4** suggested and I agreed to. On reflection, this provided the opportunity for **4** to engage in a more productive conversation away from his family and enabled **4** to contribute what Bruce (2014) refers to as the '*direct view*' of the young person. Perhaps in future, the use of a public library to hold a meeting with a young person may again be useful. Intriguingly, according to the Whole Person Librarianship website cited in Gross and Latham (2024), in the United States one hundred

and seven public libraries employ a social worker and eleven libraries have a part-time social worker. Garner and Sturt (2025) claim that social work and libraries even share the same core values: *committed to social inclusion, community development, and equitable access to resources*.

Since registering as a social worker nearly 2 years ago, I've gained a better understanding of multi-agency working and when to utilise the support of other agencies. For example, when **4** informed me that he had been self-harming and felt depressed, it was important to recognise the limits of my responsibilities, and to refer to an agency such as CAMHS. Prior to qualifying, I would've fallen into what Miller and Rollnick (2013) describe as the 'expert trap' and would've attempted to explore this further by asking a series of questions to come up with a solution for the service user. By referring **4** to CAMHS, I was not only recognising **4** as an expert in his own life, but it also meant that I took steps to reduce the risks of **4** causing further harm to himself, as prescribed in section 4 of The Code, Social Care Wales (2017). By contrast, there were instances during the intervention with **4** where multi-agency working didn't work. For instance, a referral was made to a local service provider who agreed to my request to support **4** with engaging in the community and support with medical appointments. **4** was allocated a support worker who I spoke with over the phone once to explain the nature of the support **4** required. After this, no communication occurred between me and the service provider. On reflection, I should've done more to promote this integration by being more transparent with the support worker. As the coordinator of the care and support protection plan, I should've requested weekly updates from the support worker, as this would've promoted ongoing dialogue and joint ownership of safeguarding responsibilities between agencies, McManus et al. (2022). This was something I was able to reflect on through supervision with my manager, and eventually concluded that acknowledging this mistake demonstrates accountability, and highlights an area of my practice in need of developing.

The third learning outcome focuses on *applying professional judgement in increasingly complex situations*. As part of the child protection process, a conference review usually takes place every 6 months - apart from the first one, which is scheduled 3 months after the initial conference. A significant factor of the review conference is that whatever decision is made, the outcome is dependent on the social worker's completed assessment, Social Care Wales (2025e). According to research by Nhlanganiso Nyathi (2018) cited in Taylor and Whittaker (2018), the role of professional judgement within the child protection decision making process is just as important as adhering to the threshold guidelines. An important aspect of applying professional judgement in my assessment of **4**, was how to prioritise, understand and summarise the complexities of the case, especially within the imposed timeframe and workload constraints.

The use of *heuristic models* in child protective decision-making is a way of helping a social worker to make skilled and accurate decisions, Kirkman & Melrose (2014). This involved choosing how much information and which information is collected and used for a particular decision, i.e. Simplifying information to manage complexity, Taylor (2017). For example, to help me in making an evidence-based decision in preparation for **4's** review conference, the use of feedback via supervision was crucial. The use of supervision provided me with an opportunity to receive accurate and timely feedback on my decision making, which Klein (1998) cited in Kirkman & Melrose (2014) identifies as being a key element in developing expertise and skilled

intuition. Supervision helped prioritise the most important risk factors such as issues surrounding **4** displaying harmful sexual behaviour and the lack of parental oversight. On reflection, the main issue of using heuristic models of decision-making is the risk of confirmation bias, Taylor (2013) cited in Taylor (2017). By not weighing up all the factors and choosing certain information, a social worker may be inclined to search for information that confirms the judgement they've already made. To help redress this, it's important to consider the use of theoretical perspectives as a way of gaining a holistic understanding of the intervention.

Applying an ecological perspective was a way of looking beyond any bias, because it ensured I considered the multiple layers of influence on **4's** life. To explore this further, we will use the ecological systems theory designed by Bronfenbrenner (1979). **4's** immediate settings such as home and school life (micro-systems) are all major factors in the assessment. As already identified, **4** lives with his grandfather, who struggles to ensure that **4** attends school. When considering the interaction and relationship between the grandfather and the school (meso-system), it became clear that the lack of communication between them allowed for inconsistency in support for **4**. The communication chasm between the school and **4's** caregiver, meant that **4's** emotional and mental well-being was overlooked by the school. This violates a key value of the whole-school approach here in Wales, where according to the Welsh Government (2021), schools should provide a place for adults and young people to work together to overcome challenges.

On reflection, using the ecological perspective to gain understanding of the influences in **4's** life, helped identify gaps in support, as well as issues with communication that were impacting on **4's** well-being and education. However, it could be argued that the ecological perspective doesn't consider **4's** online interactions and activities. Therefore, in future, to help promote a more targeted and holistic intervention, it would be important to consider the neo-ecological theory - as coined by Navarro & Tudge (2022). They describe the neo-ecological theory as a modification of the ecological perspective which reflects the *"virtual and technological context in which we communicate, learn, play and work"*. If we consider the issues surrounding **4's** harmful sexual behaviour, this mainly occurs virtually and involves **4** sending pictures of his private parts to younger teens. A vital aspect of the neo-ecological theory is the idea of *permeance*, and the notion that virtual micro-systems are not confined by geography and time, Navarro & Tudge (2022). In other words, pre internet, teenagers were at liberty to behave in an embarrassing or antisocial way yet were able to outgrow and forget their teenage behaviours. However, in the digital age, reminders of our former selves can be easily found, which takes away power from young people to edit or erase their former self-narratives, Granic (2020). With all that said, **4's** online behaviours are illegal and rightly need to be dealt with by the police. However, from my point of view, getting a better understanding of how the digital age impacts on **4's** development is important, because it not only informs my judgement, but also highlights the support **4** needs to navigate online environments in a safe and healthy way.

The last part of the assignment will critically reflect on the Welsh context. Thompson (2011) argues that a person's language is an important factor in the make-up of a person's ethnicity. This demonstrates the importance of offering Welsh language services in social care because it can help affirm a person's cultural

identity. By offering **4** services through the medium of Welsh, it not only promoted and respected his rights and interests, Social Care Wales (2017), but also meant I complied with the standards of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measures 2011. The importance of delivering services through the medium of Welsh is emphasised by Judge Edwards in a recent hearing involving an 85-year-old woman referred to as TE, who wanted to move from the care home back to her home. Judge Edwards pointed out in her judgement that she was concerned that due to a lack of Welsh speaking psychiatrists, elements of what TE wanted to say was lost, because she couldn't use her mother tongue - *TIRE v Carmarthenshire County Council* [2024] EWCOP 81 (T2) (02 December 2024). This highlights an issue where if a person can't communicate through their chosen language, it raises questions on whether someone can express their needs accurately and feel understood. **4** is of course able to speak English as well, and on occasion **4** and I will do what Trudgill (2000) cited in Thompson (2011) refers to as code-switching (switch between Welsh and English). However, this was mainly because **4** and I speak different dialects, and he seemed to be bemused by some of the words and phrases I used.

Another aspect of the Welsh context worth examining is the geographical area in which **4** resides. **4** lives in a busy market town that is divided into four wards. According to the Office for National Statistics (2021), the neighbourhood **4** resides in, 88.2% of young people between the ages of 16 and 19 speak Welsh. White is the main ethnic group of the neighbourhood at 96.7% and 49.6% of people live in social housing. Within the county, child poverty rates are estimated to be at 30 to 31%, Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2025) and according to the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (2019) cited in Data Unit Wales (2025), **4's** ward is in the 10% most deprived areas in Wales. To help us gain a better understanding of this varying data and how it impacts on **4's** life, it might be worth applying intersectionality to the intervention. The Social Workers Union (2022) describes this as recognising how factors such as language, class, ethnicity and so on - combine and intersect, to either marginalise or privilege us. Cedeno (2023) even argues that no one is ever truly excluded, because we all have some characteristic that is potentially acknowledged by society. For instance, **4** is a white male Welsh speaker in an area predominantly white and Welsh. However, living in a disadvantaged area where poverty and inequality is prevalent, puts **4** at risk of being marginalised and discriminated against. The Strategic equality plan produced by Social Care Wales (2022) stresses their commitment to tackle and oppose discrimination, however, unfortunately without further devolved powers and budget, children will continue to be discriminated against, as child poverty in Wales sadly continues to increase, Sefydliad Bevan (2025).

In conclusion, the assignment has critically reflected on an assessment undertaken concerning the safeguarding of a young person. The aim of the assignment was to apply Fook's ideology of *unsettling the assumptions*, as a way of gaining a deeper understanding of the intervention with **4**. The assignment demonstrated the skills, values and ethics that have developed in my practice since graduating and showed my ability to apply appropriate theories as a way of expanding my perspective. The assignment highlighted areas of my practice in need of developing such as my knowledge on trauma and the difficulty I find in balancing power with a person-centred approach. Lastly, the assignment reveals how I'm beginning to

develop a healthy need to scrutinise and address the macro-systems in place that contribute, either covertly or indirectly, to the disadvantages and inequalities young people face today in Wales.

**Word count:** 4048

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