



**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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Cohort: 21 onwards

Task 2

Observation of Practice

Guidance:

*A learner must choose an observation of **direct social work practice** with people in need of care and support and/or their carers. The observation cannot be from giving evidence in court, contributing to strategy group meetings, case conferences or tribunals or any other indirect activity. The consent of the individual/s in need of care and support and/or their carers must be sought before the observation is undertaken. The observation must be undertaken by an observer who is social work qualified and has at least 3 years' experience (criteria set out in the Programme Handbook). The observation must be for a minimum of 30 minutes. The observer will gain feedback from the individual/s in need of care and support and/or their carers using either the pro forma below or one of the learner's own design at the end of the visit.*

The learner is responsible for providing a method of gathering feedback for the observer to use. This can be of their own design, and/or adapted to meet the needs of the individual. The provided pro forma can be used where appropriate. The method used will depend on age, ability and language/communication needs of the individuals in need of care and support and/or their carers.

This section will include examples of the ways in which effective communication impacts on practice in relation to language use, language needs and cultural sensitivity. You must demonstrate the principles of the "Active Offer" and make reference to "More than Just Words" (Welsh Government, 2012).

Please ensure you meet the Learning Outcomes for this task (See appendix 5 of the handbook).

Please answer the questions below.

Observation Summary

Please include name of the expert witness observing in learner's details section of the portfolio.

Date of observation: **07/05/2025**

To be completed by learner.

Question:**Context**

Set out the social work objectives and give a brief description of the situation including geographical and legislative contexts and any relevant cultural, ethnicity and language issues, including how consent was gained and how you have considered the impact of the observation on the individual in need of care and support and/or their carers.

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

This task will examine a home visit during which I conducted a pathway assessment with a 16-year-old looked after child, referred to throughout this task as **3**. My role was to gather information to help determine what support, advice, and action is required to help **3** transition into adulthood, and subsequently leave care - as stipulated under section 107 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

3 is a male who regards his ethnicity as white British. He lives in a social housing property in a small rural village with his connected carer, and the carer's two biological children. According to the Office of National Statistics (2021), the county consists of 55.8% of Welsh speakers, and 46% of people are economically inactive. Although service user **3** can speak Welsh, and services have been previously offered through the medium of Welsh - in accordance with the principles of the Active offer, Welsh Government (2022) - he prefers to communicate with me by speaking English.

Prior to the visit, consent was obtained from **3** and his connected carer via a telephone call. It was explained that as part of my continued professional development, I'm required to choose a part of my practice where I'm observed by another social worker. I informed **3** and his carer that they had a choice not to participate in the observation, and that even if they consented, they could still withdraw from the observation at any point.

I tried to consider **3**'s right to privacy, as stipulated under article 16 of the UN Convention on the rights of the child (1989). This involved explaining to **3** that the social worker accompanying me was bound by the same legal requirements and policies on confidentiality as I was, therefore, their personal information would be treated with respect and discretion, as required under section 2 of the code, Social Care Wales (2017).

Word count: 314

References

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UN Convention on the rights of the child (1989).

Question:

Critically reflect on your communication methods and skills during the observation; including how you identified whether you had the necessary communication skills to work with the individual in need of care and support and/or their carers.

You must use a person-centred approach to demonstrate the integration of social work ethics, values and the Code of Professional Practice. This must include culturally and linguistically sensitive practice and the principles of the “Active Offer” and make reference to “More than Just Words” (Welsh Government, 2012).

1300 (+/- 10%: include your actual word count at the end of each section).

This assignment will use the ‘What? So what? Now what?’ reflective model as developed by Terry Borton (1970) and further developed by Rolfe et al. (2001) cited in University of Wollongong (2025). Despite the model being criticized for being overly simplistic, I feel the model fits in well with my current workload and time constraints. As Villeneuve-Smith (2025) quoted in University of Wollongong (2025) points out, to help the student engage in reflection, it’s important to choose a model that doesn’t overwhelm or confuse. On previous use of this model, I’ve found that the reflective prompts that accompany the model developed by Rolfe et al. (2001), are a quick and effective way of instigating reflection. We will begin by critically reflecting on my communication methods and skills used during the observation.

During the observation, **3** seemed shy and slightly taciturn, which got me thinking about his developmental level. Thompson (2011) points out that there are many different strands to development, and that we must be mindful of uneven development. For example, **3’s** physical development demonstrates that he’s reached the expected milestones for his age, and he seems to be physically mature. However, when considering **3’s** emotional and moral development, I felt inclined to adjust my communicative style, so that I could meet his level of understanding. The way I tried to achieve this was by not only avoiding the use of jargon and overly complicated words and phrases, but by providing emotional support and reassurance whenever I felt it was required. According to Sedan (2013), emotional support and reassurance are two of several factors that children most value in social workers. Communicating in a straightforward way also meant that I acted in accordance with section 2 of the code, Welsh Government (2017).

In hindsight, my decision to adjust my communicative style based on **3’s** developmental level alone, in some way limited my perspective, and meant that I didn’t consider other factors that may impact on **3’s** communication - such as anxiety, attachment, and trauma. As highlighted by Lefevre (2010), practitioners need to be sensitive to the child’s past experiences, especially if the child has experienced abuse, neglect, insecure attachment, and trauma. These are factors that can also impact on a child’s ability to engage and communicate with

a social worker. I believe this is something I should have been more mindful of during the observation, especially when taking into consideration **3's** past experiences of early trauma and displacement.

Henceforth, I believe broader issues need to be considered when being mindful of the communication between myself and a young person. As already identified, I will consider other factors that impact on communication such as trauma and attachment. However, studies have shown that children and young people like to be seen holistically and not just by their problems, DH (2001) cited in Beresford et al. (2011). Therefore, one of the ways I might be more holistic is by considering my impact on the service user, as well as the wider context of the visit. Thompson (2011) explains that to understand the circumstances, in which the interaction takes place, it's worth exploring important questions such as: *How does the child see you? Is this the right time and place? What is the emotional context of the situation?* etc. In future, perhaps I need to take into consideration **3's** schedule and not organise a meeting directly after school. Perhaps I need to consider what **3's** relationship was like with his previous social worker and allow time for **3** to develop a rapport with me.

Sedan (2013) highlights miscommunication and misunderstanding is always possible; therefore, it is vital we prepare the means and content of our communication. So, prior to visiting **3** to conduct the pathway assessment, it was important to have a think about the communication and counselling skills I would apply. I concluded that the main skills I would use were active listening, empathy and working with defensive behaviour. I also considered that although **3** has previously spoken with me in English, he is also a Welsh speaker, therefore; services would be offered to him through the medium of Welsh, as in accordance with the principles of the Active offer, Welsh Government (2022)

According to Gerdes and Segal (2011), service users who experience empathy from their contact with their social worker, are likely to have improved outcomes. Therefore, showing empathy to **3** during the visit was an important part of my communication, and to an extent, helped **3** feel at ease. One of the ways I used empathy was by using what Birkenmaier et al. (2011) refer to as *inferred empathy*. This entailed interpreting what **3** was feeling by listening intently to his verbal and non-verbal communication, and by observing his expressions and behaviour. For example, when we discussed **3's** health needs, he disclosed that he had been having difficulties with acne and that he had been seeing a dermatologist. When observing **3's** nonverbal communication, it indicated to me that **3** was uncomfortable discussing the topic. I responded by telling **3** that I recognised how difficult it must be for him and was mindful to maintain an open and positive demeanour.

On reflection, the use of active listening and empathy during the visit, helped invoke a person-centred approach. By listening empathetically to **3**, it provided him with the

opportunity to express his aspirations, wishes and feelings. According to De Marco (2025), the use of empathy helps create a safe and supportive environment where people feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings. One of the core principles of person-centred practice is listening, and that listening and focusing on what people want, should be the key role of professionals, Gardner (2013).

Be that as it may, sometimes I question whether a visit where I conduct a pathway assessment is entirely person-centred. The aim of the pathway plan is to assist the young person with their transition into adulthood and leaving care, Welsh Government (2018). However, it's important to consider that an assessment is not a one-off event, but rather a continuous process, Bolger and Walker (2023). During the visit, I followed the format of the pathway plan and primarily asked **3** the questions set out in the plan. Although on the surface a person-centred approach was applied during the visit, the way in which I carried out the assessment, was more in line with procedural and questioning models of assessment. This meant using a series of closed questions, which limited **3's** ability to provide comprehensive information, Rogers and Allen (2019). For me this raised a slight ethical issue, as it seemed to disempower **3** and meant that he was not a participant but rather a recipient of the process. A key objective of partnership working is open dialogue with service users, Braye and Preston-Shoot (1995), therefore, it's vital that I consider other models of assessment in future.

From now on, to fully promote person-centred practice whilst carrying out an assessment, it will be important to consider the principles behind an exchange model of assessment. This means seeing the young person as an expert in themselves and for the social worker to encourage a two-way flow of information, Aspinwall-Roberts (2016). It also puts emphasis on the service user's agenda rather than the agenda of the social worker or their agency, Postle (2014). Perhaps what this observation shows, is the need for me to familiarise myself more with the pathway assessment, so that I can then be flexible in how I conduct the assessment. By having a better understanding of what is expected from the assessment, I can then rely on asking more open-ended questions and not be so focused on completing my agenda. By developing knowledge in this area, I feel that it demonstrates accountability and responsibility for the standard of my work, which adheres to section 6 of the code, Social Care Wales (2017).

Word count: 1309

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Feedback and comments from individual in need of care and support and/or their carers

Information for the observer

This section of the Observation should not be completed in the presence of the learner.

No formal written feedback is required from the observer on the learner's practice. However verbal feedback should be provided to the learner as soon as possible after the observation. If the observer is not the mentor, then feedback should also be provided to the mentor.

Some or all of the questions below may be used by the observer who can rephrase and add explanations and prompts as required. The observer should record responses from the individual in need of care and support and/or their carers below, or by using an alternative method if required/provided.

Before asking the questions, the observer must explain to the individual comments will be shared with the learner. It may be useful to explain that it is used as a learning tool for the learner to develop their own practice.

If the observer is unable to gain feedback, they should briefly say why.

Was the social worker on time? Or, if delayed, did he or she contact you?	
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Did the social worker get your permission in advance for the observer to be present? Did they explain why they were being observed?	
Were you clear why the social worker met with you today?	He came to see me to talk about the future and moving on and about being an adult. Liam told me.
How well prepared do you think the social worker was for his or her meeting with you?	Yes, he prepared well, but he didn't know as much about me as I thought he would, but he is getting to know me.
How has the social worker listened to you and respected your views and wishes?	Strengths – he gives me detailed information, he knows what to say if I need help. Weakness – maybe to know more about the person he is seeing.
Did the social worker talk to you in a way that you understood? Did the social worker consider your language needs?	
How has the social worker's involvement met your expectations for this visit?	
Are there any other comments or suggestions that you would like to make?	To read up about people when he meets them.

