BARRIERS TO LEARNING FROM SERIOUS CASE REVIEWS

This DfE report looks at how front-line practitioners and partner agencies use findings from serious case reviews (SCRs) within policy and practice, and what barriers prevent some recommendations from being carried out.

The ICCP Serious Case Review (SCR) multi-disciplinary team are working at national, regional and local levels towards developing an action plan for England on how to enhance and embed learning from serious case reviews more effectively. This report, *A Study to Investigate the Barriers to Learning from Serious Case Reviews and Identify ways of Overcoming these Barriers*, outlines how we engaged with frontline practitioners, partner agencies and other sectors in the process of collection and dissemination of views, opinions and strategies in a changing workforce landscape.

Barriers to learning from SCRs

**SCR processes and publications**
- The length, time and content of SCR publications create an ethos of ‘blame’, avoidance, apathy, defensiveness and increased workload. This is exacerbated by media coverage. The number and dispersal of SCRs nationally means it is difficult to give them all local attention, and what gets attention is then skewed and determined by national media selectivity and coverage.
- The number of recommendations that generate new policies and procedures is overwhelming.
- The SCR reports are not accessible in terms of length and common language to make them meaningful and manageable to all users across different sectors, professions and agencies. Key themes and learning are not adequately identified nationally.
- The SCR process is itself costly in terms of finance and capacity and may not generate the most useable or interpretable learning for local practice.
- There is concern about publication in full and how this relates to transparency and confidentiality.

**Learning culture and training**
- There is insufficient regular, appropriate and purposeful training across and within disciplines.
- Not all training is appropriate for different roles and responsibilities of staff within and across different disciplines and agencies including the private, voluntary, independent sector of private, community and voluntary organisations.
- The learning from SCRs is repetitive and can lead to lack of attention and engagement.
- Front-line staff have limited involvement in the generation of learning and ensuring its relevance and applicability.

**Policy and procedures**
- Policy and procedures development and implementation are not proportionate or sensitive to the scale, locality and context of the case.
- Rapid policy and procedural change and implementation impacts significantly on frontline staff creating confusion and tensions relating to workload, roles and responsibilities, and accountability.
- Change takes time to embed and too much change nationally and locally is destabilising and undermining.
- Policies and procedures do not always recognise the human and emotional aspects in terms of interpretation, judgement and decision-making.

Raspal Singh-Chima summarises the surveys, reports and government policy changes you need to brief yourself on in every issue of Every Child Journal.
Developments/reports

Every Child Journal

- Policies and procedures may not be sensitive to what is able to be actioned by practitioners with large workloads and who are already very busy.
- Communication systems are currently ineffectual in ensuring that learning from SCRs informs practitioners within and across disciplines, agencies and sectors.

Actions:
- The SCR processes should be less resource-demanding, more timely, and more engaging of frontline practitioners.
- SCR reports should be more succinct and shorter.
- Reset the process to promote learning rather than blame.
- Reset the process to promote reflection and analysis rather than primarily description and hindsight judgments.
- Key themes and learning should be identified within the reports and highlighted locally and nationally.
- There should be national, themed repository of reports, with some targeting at different professions, practitioners and management roles, agencies and sectors. (Since the initial first draft of this report the DfE have initiated a national and themed repository of all SCRs.)
- There needs to be a continuing programme of training at strategic and operational levels to reinforce and embed learning and practice change.
- Training should develop knowledge and skills for practitioners to understand thresholds, supervision requirements, effective record keeping, risk, referral systems and to develop effective communication skills with all stakeholders and partners.
- Interagency relationships need to be built in order to support the emotional impact of learning and decision making from SCRs (threshold decision making under pressure).
- The value of the ‘child’s voice’ needs to be understood within the context of the family (background, culture and history).
- A new reporting system needs to be developed that captures learning from smaller incidents as well as major emergencies to better reflect the typical context of working practice (incremental and regular learning).
- There needs to be more regular and focused training appropriate to different levels and engagement in SCRs (including scenario and case study approaches).
- The importance of learning should be recognised by senior leadership and champions to ensure engagement with and relevance for practice and practitioners.
- A stock of lessons learned for ongoing incremental learning needs to be developed.
- A new evidence-based process of learning is needed that will directly begin to positively shape and transform services in order to promote an effective safety culture.
- There is a need to create an organisational and cyclical ‘learning culture’ within and across the services.
- The integration of an inter-professional learning ‘tool’ into the culture needs to be developed to ensure sustainability of a positive organisational transformation.

Recommendations:
- To review the appropriateness of Serious Case Reviews as a process for embedding learning across disciplines
- To develop an ongoing accessible database of national and regional incremental learning over time to identify emerging key themes and recognising there is a continually changing workforce landscape.
- Design and develop evidence-based learning ‘tools’ applicable nationally to facilitate collective but also targeted and tiered learning.
- Develop a national accessible database for all practitioners to access SCR ‘Executive Summaries’ with on-going key themes identified for learning. Dissemination of regular themed reports in a variety of formats to facilitate different professional and agency audiences.
- Ensure clear accessible guidelines to enable confidence across all disciplines in information sharing, thresholds and systematic recording systems and measuring impact.
- Develop a continuing professional development (CPD) programme for all practitioners to enable deeper learning to overcome obstacles to good practice by developing and consolidating ‘hidden’ interpersonal skills as well as legal and work-based requirements in all forms of learning environments, supervision and professional development.
- Cross disciplinary course development from initial training for all practitioners in the future to include reflection on the drivers that impact on different professional groups for example, health, education, social care and the private, voluntary, independent and third sectors.
- Develop nationally learning and auditing tools which can be used locally to increase awareness of the key themes emerging for SCRs and to promote practice enhancement and impact.
- Capture within local and national reporting structures the recording of how the learning and practice changes following SCRs are being taken forward.
- Integrate within existing and planned inspection processes the assessment of the impact of the key themes identified through SCRs.
MENTAL HEALTH AND BEHAVIOUR IN SCHOOLS

All pupils will benefit from learning and developing in a well ordered school environment that fosters and rewards good behaviour and sanctions poor and disruptive behaviour. This guide helps schools in England better spot pupils with mental health issues. Published by the Department of Education, it sets out the powers and duties for school staff and approaches they can adopt to manage behaviour in their schools.

Certain individuals and groups are more at risk of developing mental health problems than others. Risk factors are cumulative. Children exposed to multiple risks such as social disadvantage, family adversity and cognitive or attention problems are much more likely to develop behavioural problems. Longitudinal analysis of data for 16,000 children suggested that boys with five or more risk factors were almost eleven times more likely to develop conduct disorder under the age of ten than boys with no risk factors. Girls of a similar age with five or more risk factors were nineteen times more likely to develop the disorder than those with no risk factors.

Seemingly against all the odds, some children exposed to significant risk factors develop into competent, confident and caring adults. An important key to promoting children’s mental health is therefore an understanding of the protective factors that enable children to be resilient when they encounter problems and challenges.

The role that schools play in promoting the resilience of their pupils is important, particularly so for some children where their home life is less supportive. School should be a safe and affirming place for children where they can develop a sense of belonging and feel able to trust and talk openly with adults about their problems.

Key points:

- In order to help their pupils succeed, schools have a role to play in supporting them to be resilient and mentally healthy. There are a variety of things that schools can do, for all their pupils and for those with particular problems, to offer that support in an effective way.
- Where severe problems occur, schools should expect the child to get support elsewhere as well, including from medical professionals working in specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), voluntary organisations and local GPs.
- Schools should ensure that pupils and their families participate as fully as possible in decisions and are provided with information and support. The views, wishes and feelings of the pupil and their parents should always be considered.
- Schools can use the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to help them judge whether individual pupils might be suffering from a diagnosable mental health problem and involve their parents and the pupil in considering why they behave in certain ways.
- MindEd, a free online training tool, is now available to enable school staff to learn more about specific mental health problems. This can help to signpost staff working with children to additional resources where mental health problems have been identified. Counselling MindEd, which is part of MindEd, is also available to support the training and supervision of counselling work with children and young people.
- There are things that schools can do – including for all their pupils, for those showing early signs of problems and for families exposed to several risk factors – to intervene early and strengthen resilience, before serious mental health problems occur.
- Schools can influence the health services that are commissioned locally through their local Health and Wellbeing Board – Directors of Children’s Services and local Healthwatch are statutory members.
- There are national organisations offering materials, help and advice. Schools should look at what provision is available locally to help them promote mental health and intervene early to support pupils experiencing difficulties. Help and information about evidence-based approaches is available from a range of sources.

Mental health and behaviour in schools Departmental advice for school staff June 2014

BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

This research by the London School of Economics, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, revisits the contested issue of ethnic minority access to higher education. The research Black and Minority Ethnic Access to Higher Education A Reassessment asks: are candidates from black and minority ethnic groups less inclined to apply to higher status institutions than white British candidates? And are candidates from black and minority ethnic groups less likely to receive offers from university than white British applicants?

The research revisits the contested issue of ethnic minority access to higher education. It is well established that candidates from black and minority ethnic groups go to university in good numbers, but we also know that candidates from some minority groups tend to be concentrated in less prestigious institutions.
Access to high status institutions is important for several reasons, not least because it is likely to affect candidates’ subsequent destinations and their ability to access elite professions.

The researchers looked at 50,000 university candidates provided by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) covering the 2008 admission cycle. It is ‘plausible’ that the differences between ethnicities could be down to direct racial discrimination by universities, the London School of Economics study concludes.

**Main findings:**

- University applicants from black and ethnic minority backgrounds are less likely to receive conditional offers than comparable white British applicants according to research from LSE.
- Applicants from non-mixed ‘race’ minority groups were significantly less likely to be offered a university place even after taking into account academic attainment, family social class background, sex and the type of school attended.
- The researchers estimated that, on average, Pakistani candidates received seven fewer offers for every 100 applications than equivalent white British applicants. Bangladeshi and black African candidates received five fewer offers for every 100 applications compared with equivalent white British applicants.
- Applicants from other groups including Indian, Black Caribbean and Chinese were also less likely to receive offers than white British candidates. However, mixed race groups did not appear to be disadvantaged compared to white British candidates.
- The researchers found that Chinese candidates seemed just as likely to receive a conditional offer as white British candidates before controlling for academic factors, but were less likely to do so when these factors were taken into account. This suggests that Chinese students’ high levels of attainment mask their reduced offer rates.
- The probability of receiving an offer was significantly linked to the type of school candidates attended and their A level subjects as well as their academic attainment. Having attended an independent or grammar school – rather than a non-selective school – increased students’ chances of receiving an offer.
- Although the study was principally focused on ethnicity, it also showed that candidates from lower social class groups were less likely to receive offers than their more privileged counterparts.
- The key finding from the analysis is that ethnic and social class differences in offer rates could not be fully explained by differences in academic attainment or patterns of application.

*Black and Minority Ethnic Access to Higher Education A Reassessment* by Dr Michael Shiner, Dr Philip Noden, London School of Economics and Professor Tariq Modood, University of Bristol is published by the Nuffield Foundation.