

Education and Training Committee, 10 March 2020

The role of lay visitors in education quality assurance

Executive summary and recommendations

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Since around 2014, lay visitors have been included as a third member of visit panels for most approval visits. Their inclusion at that time coincided with the introduction of the service user and carer involvement education standard, and followed our commencement of the regulation of social workers in England. Lay visitors are not currently involved in any of the monitoring processes.
- 1.2 This paper sets out plans to review the role of lay visitors in the approval and monitoring processes.

2. Purpose of the review

- 2.1 Based on our experience of working with lay visitors since their introduction, lay visitor involvement in the approval process to date can be broadly characterised as follows:
 - Lay visitors are asked to perform the same role as registrant visitors and receive the same visitor fee as a result. This is despite a clear disparity in the education specific experience between the two roles which impacts on how fully lay visitors can contribute to the breadth of assessment considerations which are common to the approval process.
 - This limitation results primarily from the role's specification, which focuses on utilising traditional service user perspectives, without any additional requirements regarding requisite knowledge or experience of education delivery.
 - In practice, this means lay visitors will in most cases, defer to registrant visitors judgements for most areas of the standards outside of those related specifically to service user and carer involvement and experience.
 - There are no elements of the standards themselves (or for that matter within our legislation), which requires lay involvement to enable a visitor panel to effectively establish whether regulatory thresholds are met for certain standards.

2.2 Within this context, it is an appropriate time to review this role to ensure lay and service user perspectives are being effectively embedded into this regulatory function.

3. Review proposal

3.1 On this basis, we propose to commit resource into exploring more effective models for the lay visitor involvement. These could include (but are not limited to):

- Lay / service users acting in an advisory capacity to visitor panels, to inform their considerations during different phases of the approval process, perhaps based on a documentary review of specific elements pertaining to service user / patient safety issues regarding the programme being proposed.
- Institution wide assessment of service user and carer involvement through targeted risk based monitoring activities.
- Lay / service users acting as advisors to inform standards and process development, and to keep the Executive apprised of relevant patient experience and safety issues to consider in the education context.

3.2 We propose undertaking focused work with our lay visitors to explore these opportunities and others in more detail, alongside reviewing other organisations' approaches in the sector, with further options being presented to the Committee in the autumn.

3.3 This work will also consider Policy & Standards' work to form a dedicated service user consultative group to inform a range of regulatory activities, which may influence our approach to this specific area in the future.

4. The current involvement of lay visitors in the approval process

4.1 In considering the role of lay visitors going forward, the Committee is also invited to consider in the interim, whether the current arrangements remain suitable to delivery of this statutory function.

4.2 Taking the premises set out above together (paragraph 2.1), we conclude that whilst lay visitors provide valuable perspectives to inform a narrow scope of the education standards, their overall contribution (as it is currently designed) to the approval process is difficult to rationalise going forward, in terms of cost and effectiveness.

4.3 On this basis, we believe it is appropriate to pause lay visitor involvement for new allocations and existing ones going forward from April 2020 (where costs are yet to be incurred), whilst a review under the terms set out above in section 3 is carried out.

Decision

The Committee is asked to discuss and provide direction based on the proposals put forward in this paper:

- That different models of lay / service user engagement should be explored, with further options being brought back to the Committee in the autumn.
- That lay visitor involvement in the approval process should be paused from April 2020 whilst the review is carried out.

Appendices

- None

Resource implications

- Interim FY saving – resources required to facilitate and manage lay involvement in the approval process, primarily impacting Administrator and Officer roles
- Manager and Officer resource to explore further options, included as part of department work plan commitments in 2020-21 financial year.

Financial implications

- Interim FY saving – lay visitor fees and related activity costs saved in the 20-21 financial year (approximately £100k, factoring in direct and indirect costs).
- BAU project costs to explore further options – included within department budget for 2020-21 financial year.

Date of paper

31 January 2020