Reflecting on your practice: how to identify your learning and development needs

Reviewed 25 November 2019

The key points you need to remember about this section are:

- Reflection involves thinking about your practice to identify learning and development needs
- You will need to record your identified learning and development needs
- It is important to devote an appropriate time for reflection.

This section outlines how you can reflect on the quality of your practice in order to identify learning and development needs. Employers may also need to understand the learning and development needs of solicitors they employ as this may help them deliver their business objectives.

What do we mean by reflection?

Reflection means creating opportunities to step back from your practice to consider:

- How you think you are performing
- What you think you have learned from your experience
- What you might do differently in the future.

You can reflect on your practice at:

- A 'transactional' level (i.e. reflecting on the work that you are currently doing or have recently completed), or
- A more general level (e.g. considering your work generally or a particular type of job you do often).

Reflection means that you identify something that is happening or happened during your work that you:

- Think you've done well (and which demonstrates your ongoing competence as a lawyer), or
- You think you could have done better (and which, having reflected on it, you know how to go about doing better next time), or
- You think you could have done better (but which, having reflected on it, you are not sure how to go about doing better next time or that you cannot put right without some work on your own or some external help). Note: In this example, you have identified a 'development need'.

This approach is applicable to your skills (technical and soft) and your knowledge. You can keep your skills and knowledge up to date through a number of ways

To help you think about your practice, you may want to ask yourself the following questions:
• What are my strengths and weaknesses?
• Could I have done that better? If so, what? (And how?)
• Was it to do with knowledge, technical skills or ‘soft’ skills / behaviours? If so, what knowledge, skills or behaviours were lacking?
• In relation to that knowledge, or those skills or behaviours, how would I describe where I am now compared to where I need to be?
• What do I need to do to get to where I need to be?

When to reflect?

We expect you to regularly reflect on your practice and you should dedicate time to do this. You can capture identified learning and development needs in a Development Record.

You can reflect by looking at your performance at scheduled intervals:

• Looking back over the last [3 months][6 months][12 months], where do I think I am at against my development objectives and am I continuing to provide a proper standard of service?
• Looking forward over the next [3 months][6 months][12 months], what do I think I need to do to achieve and/or maintain my development objectives and ensure I continue to provide a proper standard of service?

Scheduled reflection implies you reviewing your:

• Development Plan [solicitors/resources/continuing-competence/cpd/continuing-competence-toolkit/toolkit/planning-learning-development/]
• Development Record [solicitors/resources/continuing-competence/cpd/continuing-competence-toolkit/toolkit/evaluating-learning-development/]

We recommend you regularly undertake scheduled reflection in order to make your Development Plan and Development Record.

Practical approaches to identifying learning and development needs

There are a number of ways to identify your learning and development needs. You may find it helpful to talk with a colleague, manager, client or someone external to your organisation who knows you and your work and can help you obtain an objective view on any learning and development needs you identify.

Appraisal or performance development reviews

Many organisations have performance development reviews. These outline the level of performance you are expected to deliver or the objectives you are expected to achieve during a defined period of time. Performance development reviews offer you an opportunity to think about your practice, your development plan and our Competence Statement to help you identify whether you have any learning and development needs. You may be appraised annually, perhaps with a mid-year review, and this provides an opportunity for scheduled reflection.

The SRA Competence Statement
Our Competence Statement defines what you must be able to do to deliver a proper standard of service. So far as solicitors are concerned, complying with the Competence Statement is necessary to meet the requirements of paragraphs 3.2 and 3.3 of the Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs and RFLs, and is an important tool in helping maintain ongoing competence.

We expect solicitors will use this statement to think about their practice and to identify areas where further learning and development may be required.

The Competence Statement is a generic document, and you will need to apply it to your particular practice area, level of experience and individual role. Employers may want to consider how the content of our Competence Statement aligns with internal competence frameworks, performance development frameworks, appraisal systems and any structured organisational training plans. There should be an alignment between the Competence Statement and the content of your performance development framework, appraisal system or training plan. Where gaps are identified, you may want to consider how you reflect the Competence Statement.

**Monitoring changes in practice, law and regulation**

You can identify learning and development needs by monitoring developments in the legal service market, changes in practice, law and regulation. You can find out about changes from a variety of sources, for example, briefings, electronic alerts and journals.

“After the SRA issued information of the risks associated with financial instability, we carried out a programme of in house training on financial stability”

**Reviewing client feedback**

Reviewing feedback, satisfaction surveys or complaints from clients can help you identify your learning and development needs. You can be proactive about this and ask for feedback or you can assess information as and when it arrives. Information can also be used by employers to identify learning and development needs that require addressing at an organisational level.

In some cases, clients may also request specific types of training for those working on a particular case, for example, data security training.

“We listen to our clients and it is important to us. If we have completed a big piece of work with a client then the key partner in that relationship will meet the client to see what we did well, what we didn’t do well and what we can we improve on”

**File and case reviews**

Carrying out file and case reviews provides an opportunity to identify learning and development needs.

**Wider feedback**

You can identify learning and development needs by seeking feedback on your practice from colleagues, managers or clients. This is often linked to performance management processes where colleagues are asked to comment on your performance. It does not need to be formal; you can ask for feedback at any time.

**Video: How do you identify your learning and development needs?**