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the first year in practice: exploring reflective supervision

a practice toolkit for newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) and line managers – published as a result of a skills for care south west project – 2008

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contents

foreword

I am pleased to recommend this commentary and toolkit to you and hope that you will find it a useful supplement to the materials provided by the national Newly Qualified Social Workers' (NQSW) programmes.

This work was undertaken in 2008 when the Children's' Workforce Development Council (CWDC) and Skills for Care were starting to implement or develop their NQSW programmes, thereby considering the issues and challenges facing newly qualified staff and their managers within this emerging context. The NQSW outcomes for adult services are attached in Appendix 1 for further reference.

The toolkit has been produced as a result of a project that was developed by the regional Post Qualifying Forum, funded by Skills for Care in the South West and delivered by colleagues who are closely involved in the delivery of Post Qualifying learning and development in universities and local authorities in the South West. I would like to thank them for all their hard work in producing this work. They are Karen Jones, Professional Lead for Social Work, University of the West of England, Carole Owens, Independent Social Work Consultant and Helen Donnellan, Project Development Manager, University of Plymouth.

I should like to thank Steven Keen from Bournemouth University for his help in the initial project planning and in co-ordinating and facilitating the focus group activity in the Wessex sub-region.

Thanks must also go to all those who participated in the focus groups for this project. Their honesty, openness and willingness to give of their time to share their experiences has provided the project team with a vivid insight into what it is like to be a newly-qualified social worker and the pressures that exist within large organisations for those line managers who hold supervisory responsibility for them.

John Nash, Regional Development Manager, Skills for Care in the South West

introduction

The project aimed to explore the purpose, process, practice and outcomes of supervision from the dual perspectives of its participants – social workers and line managers, to increase understanding of each other's drivers and imperatives both within the process itself and within the agency. By exploring the practical realities of everyday supervisory practice and suggesting ways forward, our aim has been to enable the experience of supervision to become more mutually satisfying and supportive for everyone involved.

The project comprised eight focus groups with social workers, line managers and staff development managers across the South West region, from a variety of agencies, both statutory and independent/voluntary, and from a range of work settings. Each focus group session was recorded, transcribed and analysed to draw out common themes which were sorted, compared and refined.

In the following pages you will find the primary themes which emerged, applied in Part I to four contrasting practice scenarios in supervision, from the twin perspectives of both newly qualified social workers and their line managers. In each scenario, the key issues, tensions and concerns are identified and there are suggestions for possible ways forward from each perspective in the particular situation described. Part II sets out a number of processes and pro-formas which may be helpful to you as an active participant in supervision.

As this project has progressed, both Skills for Care and the Children's Workforce Development Council have published a Framework, guidance and outcome statements for the newly qualified social worker's first year in practice. Materials aiming to improve supervisory practice have accompanied both sets of guidance. This project, by exploring the practical issues and problems brought to our attention by frontline workers and supervisors, provides the practice context for the implementation of these strategies. It is our hope that our response to the issues raised and the toolkit suggestions provided in Part 2, will increase the practice repertoire of options available to both NQSW's and supervisors, as they work towards evidencing the outcome statements and confirming practice competences.

the practice and policy context

It remains fundamental to professional codes of practice, whatever the recent restructuring of roles and services in social care, that accountable social work is achieved through the structures and processes of good supervision. This is recognised by various government and professional organisations, such as the GSCC Codes of Practice (2002), the BASW Code of Ethics (2002) and the Skills for Care and Children's Workforce Development Council's (CWDC) workforce development tool on effective supervision (2007). The codes of practice state that whilst the provision of "appropriate professional supervision" is required of both employers and managers, social workers have a responsibility to be active in both securing and using supervision, to develop their accountable practice.

The CWDC NQSW pilot programme requirements (Sept. 2008) also place great emphasis on the importance of reflective supervision in promoting learning and development, through the four generally agreed functions of supervision, identified by Morrison (2003), as management (to include accountability), support, personal development and mediation or problem solving between the workplace/organisation and the worker.

The requirements of a government-driven approach to the management of social care services is said to have resulted in undue emphasis on regulation and monitoring, reflected in supervision agendas. For example, the reviewing of workloads with the purpose of monitoring performance targets, the checking of compliance with the results of service inspections, attention to the procedural time frames and requirements of the courts and legal processes, are all said to take a disproportionate amount of supervision time, reducing time available for the other important functions. This has raised the question about whether these functions could be delegated and what resource and accountability issues would be involved. Ruch (2006) has advocated for "new and different, more creative support forums". Peer group support, group supervision, case discussion and consultation all involve colleague networks, which could enhance traditional one to one methods by creating a richer environment for more emotionally informed thinking. The reorganisation of groups of multiagency professionals in restructured integrated teams, has created issues with regard to different understandings of accountability and how best to structure support in practice specialisms.

The outcomes for services arising from substantial investment in information technology software and hardware systems, have yet to be fully researched and evaluated, but the implementation of the Integrated Children's System in children's services, for example, provides the possibility of an information base that could improve the collection and analysis of data from case records to provide an evidence base more closely linked to social work practice than previous social research data bases have been able to achieve. In the short term, there is professional concern that implementation and system design difficulties described by Randall (2008) and White and colleagues (2008) suggest that, to quote Randall "the system deflects professional attention away from the needs of the client family and child."

part i: the scenarios
exploring reflective supervision: 1

the social worker's perspective

Diana

"When I go over my cases in a planned supervision with my line manager, it helps me to know what to do next, and how to do it. I feel very responsible for the children and families that have been allocated to me. Sometimes I feel confused and question the systems and procedures that I am expected to follow. So far, I haven't felt okay enough to share these personal difficulties with my supervisor. I find myself wondering whether I will ever have the confidence and ability to "hang on in", like a real social worker? Other colleagues are aware of my age and inexperience and do not always take me seriously."

the issues

Diana may have found her early experiences in this her first social work job, quite overwhelming. It is not at all unusual for NQSW's to experience periods of uncertainty and poor self-esteem. Supports previously relied upon at university have gone. Some of the knowledge gained, and the skill areas tried and tested in earlier practice, may not seem directly transferable to the workplace. It is easy to feel de-skilled and to question your personal suitability and potential for this challenging new role.

In what ways then could supervision be helpful? We were told that regular sharing and offloading of feelings, together with exploring ways of taking work forward, helped workers to feel confident that they could cope with the demands of the job. A supervisor was helpful who encouraged the sharing of information by using open questions. So were supervisors who took time to really get to know new workers, so that their strengths, vulnerabilities and experience, could be fully appreciated and understood.

"It is hard to admit that you are not coping because if you show signs that you are not managing, your colleagues think you are not working properly."

This was from an NQSW whose experienced team colleagues appear to have forgotten what it felt like to be so new in the job.

For many of the NQSW's we talked with, supportive supervision was about feeling safe and having confidence in your supervisor *"not to pass things on, nor to blame you for your mistakes"*. There are inevitable tensions in supervision, between the workers own personal needs and the needs of the organisation to ensure the quality of work, and to manage accountability. Since the line manager has to trust the worker to report back reliably when important decisions have to be made, supervision must be based on two-way expectations of openness, honesty and trust. Supervisors who build confidence, who reinforce learning and who celebrate worker achievements were all seen as highly effective.

Diana's lack of confidence and feelings of uncertainty, are reflected in her reluctance to raise personal issues affecting her work in supervision. Dilemmas about sharing personal issues were given a high profile in the focus groups' discussion. It was said to be important that there were clearly understood boundaries between what was personal and what was professional. Exactly how much personal information was shared in the professional arena, however, seemed open to some negotiation, as indicated by one NQSW as follows:

"Not too much into personal areas, but my supervisor will ask do I need a break? Am I ready to take on someone else, or did I need to wait because I have some training, or an important out of work event coming up."

Whether personal information was shared, and to what degree, seemed to depend on the personal qualities of the supervisor and the workers' expectation of the supervisor's ability to provide meaningful support. NQSW's considered the style as well as the personality of the supervisor to be important. A *"controlling supervision"* was said to be very disempowering. A supportive supervisor was described as *"leading the NQSW through what has to be done"*, so that *"you feel okay about what is going on"*.

A supportive supervisor was also seen as being helpful when allowing the release of staff for training and learning activities, in recognising areas of special interest and in helping to identify and record learning for GSCC Post Registration Training and Learning. Experienced supervisors, who could

predict what might be coming up next, were applauded. Time was said to be needed for worker and supervisor to build an empathic and supportive relationship. In the next section we consider how Diana can begin to consolidate her professional learning and development in the workplace.

possible ways forward

confirming competence
Diana's personal and professional confidence needs building through careful selection of cases by her supervisor to enable her to provide evidence for the outcome statements of the NQSW first year in employment. Also within the first six months in her first job, she will be providing evidence to her line manager that she has met the national induction standards relevant to her social work role. The signing off of the standards should coincide with the achievement of a satisfactory probationary report evaluating her performance in the first six months in employment.

The configuration of all three processes should ensure that Diana has clear feedback regarding her achievements in her new role and a good understanding of what she still needs to learn and improve. Her manager and team colleagues will be reassured that her competence on the job in this particular work setting, has been thoroughly tested against national requirements.

reciprocal sharing of knowledge and skills
In order to monitor her own learning and development, Diana must access a variety of learning opportunities that will enable

her to obtain feedback on her practice and performance. She could encourage her line manager and other more experienced colleagues to provide role models for her through the joint working of cases and to facilitate shadowing opportunities. She might give and receive feedback on direct observations of her own and others practice, and participate in other learning activities with her peers.

She will need to demonstrate reflective thinking and will keep a learning log and other ways of recording as evidence of these activities.

Familiarity with ICT systems and processes should give Diana an advantage in working with new electronic systems that are now part of workplace practice. Unlike many of her colleagues she will not remember a dependency on paper systems alone. She will be more familiar with techniques for searching the web and with using an evidence-based approach by identifying relevant research. These are some of the skills that Diana could share with other members of her team as she becomes increasingly confident. She should seek out opportunities to share her interests, enthusiasms, research findings and new ideas in a reciprocal way.

supervision agreement

Given time, her relationship with her supervisor should build to become more empathic and supportive, allowing Diana to risk showing more of her real feelings, attitudes and values within supervision. If she is still uncertain about the boundaries of confidentiality around personal matters in supervision, she could ask to discuss and review the wording of the supervision agreement, negotiating the level of sharing, how and with whom, with which she is comfortable. As the focus groups reminded us, however, there can be no expectation of 100% confidentiality in supervision, because of the need for accountable practice.

exploring reflective supervision: 1

the line manager's perspective

Margaret

"Our new social worker seems enthusiastic enough, but very lacking in confidence. The main drawback is her lack of any real hard-end experience. This suggests to me that she is going to need a lot of nurturing and spoon - feeding, if she is ever going to make it in this team. I am not sure how I am going to find the time to give her the helping hand she needs, and will the rest of the team who are already under pressure, be prepared to nurse her along for a while?"

the issues

There has been a lot of discussion about the merits of younger social work degree entrants to the profession. The evaluation of the social work degree (2008) has shown that this group of workers whilst still students, have proved an especially resilient group. In spite of an initial high % withdrawal rate as compared with other groups in the social work student intakes, the younger students who succeeded in their studies had lower rates of both referral and deferral. Further research is planned to show whether this motivation to succeed as a student, can be translated into resilience in the workplace.

Margaret recognises Diana's needs as a younger worker, but seems uncertain as to how she will fulfil her responsibilities towards her. She is anxious about how Diana's lack of experience will impact on the overall performance of the team. There is an underlying suggestion that other team members may have to take on more work because of Diana's inexperience.

Margaret needs to prioritise her responsibilities to Diana, and to be proactive in ensuring that she is fully briefed on her agency's policy commitment to social workers in their first year of employment. This will mean becoming familiar with the CWDC and Skills for Care pilot programmes for NQSW's. She should actively seek to arrange agreed workload protection and to make sure that Diana can be released for the training and learning activities integral to the programme. We were left in no doubt, however, by the managers in the focus groups, of the relentless pressures that first line managers are under. They spoke of the need to continually review workloads and to close cases, to free up space for new work, which can be experienced by all workers as a pressure rather than a support.

Managers and other staff must take care not to make stereotypical assumptions' about the abilities and capacity of younger staff, without first getting to know them as people and workers. There can be a freshness and vitality brought by all new entrants to the profession. Where existing staff are older and more

experienced, new entrants can sometimes be seen as threatening to the status quo. Where patterns of working in a team mirror Banner's (1984) "unconscious expert" method of working, asking questions about and exploring contradictions in, accepted ways of working, may cause some experienced staff to feel uncomfortable.

It will be Margaret's responsibility to work with the whole team (the mediation function of the supervisor), to ensure that Diana is welcomed and feels integrated, and that difficulties of cover or extra workload are voiced and resolved. Diana must feel able to raise issues and to have her questions answered within an environment where learning and development are explicitly encouraged.

possible ways forward

supervisors' own personal development needs

Having informed herself about her agency's policy commitment to NQSW's, Margaret then needs to consider her own role within this and how personally prepared she is to take on the tasks required of her. A workforce development plan should sit alongside the service delivery plan, and should alert her to current development strategies and any training that may be provided or commissioned by her agency. She may need to update her own supervision training to ensure that as a supervisor of front line staff, she is encouraging reflection, self evaluation and growth in those for whom she is responsible. Advanced supervision training may help her to develop qualities and techniques that we know from this and

other research, are helpful and supportive to supervisees.

Acquiring knowledge about team building and leadership techniques may also prove relevant. A discussion in supervision with Margaret's own line manager is indicated.

informal and formal support mechanisms for staff

Not all ways of supporting staff outside of supervision are resource hungry, but often they have to be informally created, rather than centrally provided or externally commissioned. A critical friend or "buddying" system can be relatively easily set up within a team or wider area. Participants do not necessarily need to meet face to face especially if travelling is involved, instead an online relationship could be built.

Professional development discussion groups, possibly inter-professional, need more time to plan and require a commitment of time and resources if they are to be successful. More informally, a journal or lunchtime club might transcend management difficulties regarding staff release and cover. The availability of scarce resources such as mentoring or coaching, are usually linked to specific awards, requiring some expert knowledge often from those who have previously undertaken the award themselves. Some performance management schemes do allow for mentoring/coaching provision and sometimes corporate schemes offer the possibility of mentoring as part of a corporate continuing professional development strategy, or integral to corporate leadership and management training. Enquiries can be made of senior operational managers

or the workforce development team for your service or its corporate counterpart.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Some of the detail of the above may be set out as part of an Agency's Continuing Professional Development strategy, but sometimes, a formal written strategy is not available. This should not prevent Margaret questioning managers about how the workforce development cycle works in practice, i.e. the links made in an agency between supervision policy and practise, systems of staff appraisal, the provision/ commissioning of training and development identified as needed in the annual service delivery plan or in the overarching workforce development strategy and plan. The evidence requirements of the GSCC for the re-registration of the qualified social work workforce assume that reflective learning will be recorded in a way that is continuous and integrated through routine workplace tasks and systems, as well as through specific training and development events.

the social worker's perspective

Laura

"I'm really enjoying my first social work job. I love the work, the team are very supportive and I'm getting regular supervision from my line manager. The only thing I'm disappointed about is that supervision seems to be entirely about getting the work done. Perhaps I'm being unrealistic, but I thought supervision would also be a place where I could explore my professional development and learning needs."

the issues

In this scenario, there is clearly a difference between the expectations Laura has of supervision and those of her line manager. Most writers agree that supervision in social work has three key functions. Kadushin (1992) calls these: "administrative", "educative" and "supportive" while Brockbank and McGill (1998) talk about overseeing, "counselling" and "learning". It sounds as though Laura is experiencing her supervision as largely "administrative" and focussed on "overseeing" her practice rather than her individual learning or support needs. This was a common issue amongst the newly qualified workers we spoke to. One person said:

"The vast… the overwhelming majority of the time is spent talking about cases and that's sort of ok because I want to get it right. Then we go through any training I might want to go on. She's good at telling me what's available, but there's something missing about where me and the training and the cases all come together…something missing."

Several newly qualified workers talked very favourably about the supervision they had experienced as students on placement, with its strong emphasis on learning and support and wished that their current experience could be more like this. At the same time, there was a taken for granted assumption amongst some, that this was an unrealistic expectation:

"It's all about service users isn't it? So the priority has to be what you're doing on your individual cases."

A number of managers and newly qualified workers however, shared the belief that an overwhelming focus on the administrative aspects of supervision can be a way of avoiding more challenging areas and does not ultimately benefit the agency or the service user. One first line manager told us:

"Of course it's much more demanding and time consuming as a manager to really engage with what a new worker is learning and how they're responding."

Another manager said:

"I don't really buy this idea that there's no time to discuss anything but where they're up to with their cases. Yes - we're all frantically busy, but in the end what you want in your team, is confident, autonomous practitioners and the only way to get that is to make sure they're learning and understanding as they go along not just doing as they're told!"

Some of the newly qualified social workers in our sample groups did feel that supervision offered them substantial opportunities to gain support and reflect on their learning. The social workers and the managers, for whom supervision seemed to be working well, consistently expressed the importance of effective communication. This was overwhelmingly seen as the key to negotiating diverse expectations and establishing a balance between the different functions of supervision that satisfied everyone.

It can be easy to forget that supervision is a two way process, within which both the supervisor and the supervisee have responsibilities. This is reflected in the supervision literature, where much has been written about how to give supervision, but very little about how to receive it. As a newly qualified worker, Laura is probably keen to make a good impression on her manager and to show that she is 'up to the job'. This is entirely understandable, but it doesn't mean that she has no control over how she wants her experience of supervision to be. The following section contains some practical suggestions about the part Laura might play in ensuring that her personal and professional

development needs are addressed more closely. It also includes ideas about ways in which Laura and her manager can develop a shared understanding and expectation of the supervision process.

possible ways forward

the supervision agreement
Most agencies have some sort of supervision agreement or contract. These can be largely tokenistic or they can be genuinely meaningful, creative documents. There was much agreement amongst both social workers and managers in our sample groups, that supervision agreements should be 'live' documents which are regularly revisited, rather than put in the back of a drawer and forgotten about. Laura should have the confidence as a co-signatory to her supervision agreement, to suggest to her manager that they review their agreement together.

learning styles
It may be that the apparent incompatibility between Laura and her line manager in supervision is a result of their different learning styles. This is no-one's fault; it's just part of the way in which human beings differ from each other. Laura's manager may have a very practical style of learning for example, whereas Laura might be more theoretical or reflective in her approach. Several different learning styles questionnaires and classifications are easily accessible on the World Wide Web. Laura could suggest that she and her manager look at these as a way of achieving a better understanding of each other and clarifying the approach to supervision that Laura is most likely to benefit from.
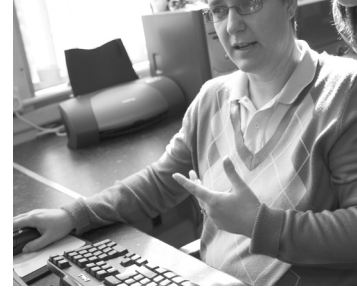
college or university transcript or 'professional development plan'

Most newly qualified social workers leave college or university with a transcript of their learning and some sort of reflective account of their strengths and learning needs at the point of qualification. Laura's line manager may not even realise that she has a Professional Development Plan (PDP). Laura could share her PDP with her manager if she has not already done so or suggest that they revisit it together.

sharing knowledge

Laura may feel that her manager is the one who holds all the important knowledge about practice. However several of the line managers we spoke to said that it was important for them to learn from newly qualified social workers, who often bring knowledge and ideas to the team and supervision. Laura could be more proactive in sharing the learning about theory and research that she has gained during her training with her manager, linking this to her current cases.

being honest

Laura's line manager may have no idea that Laura is disappointed with the supervision she is receiving. If Laura can have the confidence to raise this as a shared issue and a joint responsibility, she may find her line manager more receptive to the idea of taking a new approach to supervision than she expects.

seeking additional support elsewhere

Laura could look to formal or informal peer support to fulfil some of her needs. Several of the newly qualified workers in our sample groups had found such arrangements very

helpful. With her team managers' agreement, this arrangement could be with a specific team member or a regular group meeting. This is an area where agency supervision policies and workforce development planning should come together. If Laura and her manager decide that this would be helpful, it should be a positive choice, which is seen as complementing and enhancing rather than replacing or plugging the gaps in their existing supervision.

They may find, however, that formal and informal opportunities for continuing professional development of staff are very variable and in some agencies there will not be a formal written policy, as recommended in guidance from Skills for Care/Children's Workforce Development Council (2006). Access to formal opportunities such as mentoring and coaching, group supervision, critical incident analysis and professional development discussions, all require an investment of worker time and resources. For this reason informal opportunities such as critical friends or "buddy" pairings, or extended team meeting discussion, may be easier to set up. Laura's learning and support needs and how they are being met, should be identified in her supervision agreement and monitored through performance and appraisal systems.

exploring reflective supervision: 2

the line manager's perspective

Alec
"I've got a newly qualified social worker in my team who seems quite needy. I've made sure that she has frequent supervision and she knows my door is always open, if she has questions or queries about her cases, but she's always pushing for more. The other day she wanted to talk about how to develop her skills and what reading she should do. I think she feels her practice isn't good enough, but actually she's doing really well. I keep trying to explain to her that she just needs to concentrate on the job she's doing and on learning through practice."

the issues

Some writers argue that the increasing dominance of managerialism in social work has had the effect of emphasising the administrative aspect of supervision (Thomas and Spreadbury, 2008). Alec is clearly concerned about the newly qualified social worker in his team and is conscientious in his approach to supervision. He is supportive and reassuring, but it sounds as though he is prioritising the administrative or managerial functions of supervision to the possible detriment of the educative and supportive dimensions (Brockbank and McGill, 1998). The newly qualified social worker in Alec's team seems to be looking for something more from him and it may be that some movement in the focus of supervision will enable her needs to be met more effectively.

Several of the managers we spoke to talked about being in a difficult position between the demands of the agency and the needs of the team. One talked about being a "buffer" while another saw himself as a "filter". Most

managers felt constrained by the competing demands on their time and some believed that this restricted the quality and scope of the supervision they were able to offer. One manager told us:

"In the end the job we're in means that there are never enough resources to do everything you want to do, but using supervision to make sure that everyone gets through as much work as possible, as quickly as possible is the best way to give a service to as many people as we can. It's all about time."

At the same time, most managers were well aware of the stress placed on newly qualified workers by the practical and emotional demands of the job. There was a strong recognition of the importance of meeting the learning and development needs of practitioners and a commitment to offering effective and appropriate emotional support. The newly qualified workers also highly valued supervision which went beyond the practicalities of the job and enabled them

to reflect on their strengths and needs as practitioners and to explore the emotional demands of their work.

A consistent theme amongst the managers we spoke to was the importance of establishing good communication between themselves and the newly qualified social workers in their teams. This was seen to involve attending to the needs of the social worker in a way in which Alec in the scenario above may not be doing. One manager said:

"You have to establish a good relationship and an ability to communicate. It's no good if you're seen as the one with all the power or all the wisdom or whatever. If they [NQSWs] can't talk to you honestly, it's potentially dangerous for them and for service users. You have to really listen to where they're at and respond to that."

However despite their desire to be responsive, several managers felt that they also had to be realistic about the time they had available for supervision. In some cases this meant delegating some of the functions of supervision to others in the team – typically a senior practitioner. Others had drawn on the expertise of their staff development or training department and one or two had suggested that newly qualified workers seek support from a counselling service. Where this sort of delegation happened, it was viewed as important by managers that they continue to see the emotional wellbeing and overall development of newly qualified workers as their ongoing responsibility.

The next section focuses on some of the things that Alec might do to make supervision a more satisfying experience for the newly qualified worker in his team and also for himself as a line manager.

possible ways forward

the supervision agreement

Alec may find it helpful to re-visit the supervision contract or agreement between himself and the newly qualified worker in the team. Because supervision agreements are often written to a set pro-forma they can be somewhat tokenistic and generalised. It sounds as though Alec and the social worker do not have a shared sense of the content and purpose of their supervision sessions. Alec might therefore suggest that they use the supervision agreement as a tool for negotiating more clearly what they both hope to achieve through supervision.

learning styles

Alec and the social worker may have very different approaches to learning which could prevent Alec from understanding why this particular newly qualified worker often seems to be "pushing for more". A brief exercise or simply a discussion about their respective approaches to learning might be a fruitful way of opening up lines of communication and improving mutual understanding. If Alec doesn't have the time to search the web for information on learning styles, he could indicate that he is taking her learning needs seriously by suggesting that the social worker does this in preparation for their next supervision session.

college or university transcript or 'professional development plan'

Once the demands of full time practice take over from student learning, it can be very easy for newly qualified workers and managers to pay little attention to the years the practitioner has spent in training. Most newly qualified workers will have a Professional Development Plan or some other reflective account of their achievements and future practice development needs at the point of qualification. If Alec spends time with this newly qualified worker, looking at her PDP, it is likely that he will understand her anxieties better and he may even discover some unexpected strengths.

sharing knowledge

Several of the managers we talked to felt that supervision with newly qualified workers was most effective when the managers were themselves open to new learning and ideas. The new worker in Alec's team may feel nervous and disempowered; she may well believe that her supervisor holds all the practice expertise and that she has little to contribute. Alec can challenge this and help to create a more equal relationship by asking her to share some of the learning from reading and research gained during her training.

being honest

Alec seems to have a very clear view of the form that supervision with a newly qualified worker should take. He really needs to challenge his own assumptions about this and question whether there are other approaches that he might take. The different perceptions in this situation about the roles and functions of supervision need to be explored honestly and openly. As Alec clearly has more power

within the supervisory relationship than the newly qualified worker, he has a particular responsibility for facilitating more honest communication.

seeking additional support elsewhere

Several of the managers and newly qualified workers we spoke to had experienced benefits from spreading the functions of supervision through individual or peer group support. This practitioner may not be the only member of the team to be struggling with issues of personal and professional development. Alec could therefore look at working with the team to negotiate informal mechanisms of mutual support, although it is important that he sees this as a way of complementing and supporting rather than replacing existing structures of supervision. He should use his mediation skills to ensure that his team needs for learning and support are fed up to senior managers and into the workforce development strategy and plans.

the social worker's perspective

Ahmed

"This isn't quite what I expected from my first social work job. Supervision was given a higher priority than almost anything else when I was a student and I thought it would be the same when started work. When supervision happens its fine – I get a lot out of it. My manager's really good at helping me to see where I'm going with my cases and he always prompts me to think about my development needs. The trouble is that at least half the time, our planned supervision sessions are cancelled and sometimes not re-scheduled for weeks. He says I can pop in to see him at any time, but he's obviously really busy so I try not to bother him too much."

the issues

The disparity between student and professional supervision was a recurring theme in our interviews with newly qualified social workers. Several of them had found the transition from one to the other difficult:

"When you're a student, supervision is at the centre of your placement – everything revolves around it, but in practice it feels like a bit of an optional extra."

There is of course a difference between supervision that meets the needs of social work students and that which is appropriate for qualified professionals. However new they are to the job, qualified social workers have passed their initial training course and have been judged to be competent. Ahmed's supervision will inevitably focus less on education and more on management and the overseeing of his cases than it did when he was a student.

In this situation however, it seems that supervision itself is being given a low priority and Ahmed may be floundering in terms of both his professional development and the management of his cases. The message Ahmed is receiving about his own value as a worker and the importance his manager places on his work may also be very negative. The experiences and attitudes of the newly qualified workers we talked to about the cancellation of supervision were very varied. One said:

"If it's really busy and your manager has to go to court or to an important meeting, they have to cancel your supervision – that's just the way it is. You have to get on with it."

Another said:

"In my team, supervision is sacred. On the rare occasions that my manager has to change it, it's rearranged - never cancelled."

Ahmed is also struggling to understand his manager's expectations in terms of informal supervision. When the manager says that Ahmed can *"pop in…at any time"*, does he actually mean this or does he have an unspoken sense of how often might be appropriate? Even if Ahmed's manager really doesn't mind being interrupted at any time and with any frequency, his open invitation has confused Ahmed. The mixed message given by the manager that he is both too busy for supervision and always available has left this newly qualified worker afraid to ask for support and therefore potentially very vulnerable.

Some of the mangers and social workers in our study talked about the importance of informal support within their teams. Examples included "ad hoc" supervision, managers' "open door" policies and various systems of peer support. For many, this was highly valued and part of what made them feel they belonged to a supportive and caring team. For some newly qualified workers however, the struggle to get to grips with team cultures and expectations in terms of support systems had been considerable:

"It's hard to know how often you should ask for help and who you should go to. People who have been there for a while know the rules and what's expected, but it takes time to find those things out."

Part of the transition from student to newly qualified worker is about taking on a new professional identity and role within a team. This can be a challenging adjustment and one which needs to be acknowledged and carefully managed if newly qualified workers are not to feel alienated or excluded by those who inevitably know more than they do. The next section looks at some of the ways in which Ahmed might begin to address the difficulties he is facing.

possible ways forward

frequency of supervision
Ahmed is confused by his manager's approach. He needs to seek clarification about what he can expect in terms of the amount and type of supervision he receives. There will almost certainly be written agency guidance about minimum entitlement to supervision and this may include specific reference to new or newly qualified workers. If Ahmed can be clear about the expectations of his agency, he should feel more confident that he is within his rights to open up a discussion about frequency of supervision with his manager.

protocols for re-arranging supervision
It is difficult to be assertive with your manager as an NQSW, but Ahmed has the right to know what arrangements will be made if his supervision is cancelled and he should ask for this. His conversation with his manager may be made easier by the fact that Ahmed can talk about how helpful he has found supervision to be when it does happen. Again agency guidance may be a useful reference point, but an open conversation between Ahmed and his manager is essential. There should already be a negotiated supervision contract or agreement in place. It may be helpful for Ahmed to use this to remind his manager of protocols that have already been agreed or to suggest an addition to the contract.

informal supervision

Ahmed is struggling to understand the culture and expectations of his team as well as having to adjust to his new role as a qualified worker. The sort of informal supervision his manager is offering is outside Ahmed's previous experience and he doesn't really know what to make of it. While Ahmed needs to ensure that he receives regular formal supervision, he should also talk to his manager about what his "open door" policy actually means. Ahmed may also find it helpful to talk about how he is feeling to trusted colleagues, who may be a source of support when his manager is unavailable.

adjusting to the professional role

Making the transition from student to professional involves adjusting to the level of autonomous practice that is expected of a qualified social worker. Ahmed may be achieving this successfully or he may be expecting a level of support beyond that which his manager can reasonably give. Ahmed could raise and explore the distinction between the roles of student and social worker in supervision. He may also want to check that he is able to access any specific support or training offered to newly qualified workers in his agency, or training and development that is provided or commissioned across the service, which will enable him to feel more confident.

the line manager's perspective

Mike

"Staff supervision is a really important part of my job. It can be time consuming, but it's something I enjoy. A lot of the supervision I give is "informal" – my door is always open and everyone in the team knows they can come and talk to me at any time. It's true I quite often have to cancel formal supervision sessions, but that's in the nature of the work – if I have to be in court or at a joint visit, that's where I have to be. The most important thing is that people know they can come and find me if and when they need me."

the issues

Many of the line managers we talked to felt that approachability was an important part of their management style. This was supported by most of the newly qualified workers, who felt that being able to go to their managers informally for help and support was a valuable supplement to formal supervision. One manager told us:

"It's important to make sure that members of the team – especially those who are newly qualified, can come to me for help when they need it, not just when they've got supervision booked. Social work is unpredictable so you've got to be prepared to be flexible."

A few social workers however, found it difficult to know when it was and wasn't appropriate to approach their team managers. The unspoken conventions about ways of behaving in a well established team can be confusing for someone new. These taken for granted ways of being may need to be made explicit if newly qualified workers are to be helped to integrate into teams and make successful transitions from student to qualified professional.

The concept of informal supervision is clearly useful and much valued, but it is important that this does not become a substitute for formal supervision. The scenario above raises the question of whether Mike is taking his responsibilities as a manager sufficiently seriously. It may be to his credit that most of the team feel comfortable about approaching Mike when they need to, but his role as a manager also places a responsibility on him to be pro-active in supervising his team and being accountable to his agency for their work.

Mike admits that he often cancels formal supervision sessions. Like many of the managers we talked to, he may feel that he sometimes has to negotiate difficult and contradictory sets of requirements. This comment was typical:

"First line managers are very much caught in the middle, between senior managers and front line workers. We're under a lot of pressure and we can't always please everyone."

The conflicting demands experienced by managers emerged as a recurring theme in our focus groups. First line managers in particular often feel squeezed from above and from below and say that they constantly have to juggle competing priorities. Within such a context, the question of how to maintain supervision as a high priority is a serious issue. In spite of the pressure he may be under however, Mike has a number of responsibilities to his team. The first of these is to adhere to the minimum standards for supervision set by his agency. Less obviously, this scenario raises an issue about the modelling of good practice. If Mike constantly cancels appointments and fails to re-arrange them, he is communicating a message to the rest of the team that this is acceptable. For newly qualified social workers, who are still learning about the professional role, this may be particularly unhelpful.

It was very clear from talking to managers and newly qualified social workers, that different approaches to supervision suit different people. There are teams where informal supervision plays an important role, but if this is at the expense of formal supervision, not only will it contravene guidelines in most agencies, it will not suit those who need clear, structured support i.e. NQSWs in particular.

possible ways forward

informal supervision
Mike needs to think through his "open door" policy more carefully. Accessibility and approachability are characteristics much valued by social workers in their line managers. They should not, however, be a substitute for regular, formal supervision. It sounds as though Mike could usefully initiate a team discussion about informal supervision to ensure that there is a shared understanding about what this means and how it should be used.

formal supervision
Mike has a responsibility to his team and to his agency to provide regular supervision sessions. It is likely that his agency sets minimum standards about what this should include and how often supervision should take place. There may also be an agency expectation about the use of supervision contracts or agreements with each employee. If Mike does not already have these sorts of contracts with each team member, he could usefully institute them. This will give him an opportunity to negotiate individual agreements about exactly what should happen if he has to cancel a supervision session including the timescale within which it must be re-arranged.

team cultures and the needs of NQSWs
The evidence from our focus groups indicated that newly qualified social workers sometimes struggle to "read" and understand established cultures within teams. NQSWs are in the process of making the transition from student to social worker as well as establishing themselves amongst a new

group of people and adjusting to a new set of professional demands. The team manager has a particular responsibility to ensure that this process happens as smoothly as possible. Mike should therefore make certain that he spends additional time with any newly qualified workers in his team. He should also ensure that he is able to protect their workloads to the agreed level and to allow them agreed release time for NQSW Pilot training and learning activities, where applicable.

team manager workload
Like many of the first line managers we spoke to, Mike sounds as though he accepts the pressure he is under as an inevitable part of the job. This may well be the reality, but if the demands on Mike's time are such that he cannot meet the needs of the practitioners in his team, then he needs to take this to his own manager as an urgent capacity issue, which will impact on his team's ability to provide a sufficient and competent standard of service delivery.

the social worker's perspective

Mia

"I feel like I'm falling apart. I started off really enjoying this job and I thought I was quite good at it, but now everything seems to be getting on top of me. There are so many people with so many problems day in and day out and it leaves me feeling completely drained. I'm not sleeping very well either - I just go over and over the things that have happened during the day. It's like I can't let go. My manager has been quite helpful; she referred me to the employee counselling service, but I'd much rather to talk to her. Surely it's not too much to ask for my manager to give me some time and emotional support in supervision – it would really help."

the issues

It sounds as though Mia is really struggling. There was widespread agreement amongst those we spoke to, that many social workers go through periods when they feel they are not really coping and that this is particularly common during the first year or two after qualifying. Several newly qualified practitioners talked about the emotional strain of the work and the shock of having to confront life's harshest realities. One told us:

"It took the whole of my first year – more maybe to stop taking everything home. You just have to find ways to switch off, otherwise you'd go under and then you'd be no help to anyone."

Another said:

"If things didn't work out for someone, I used to see it as a personal failure…you just can't do that or you'd never be able to carry on."

Mia's view of the kind of help she should be entitled to seems to differ from her manager's idea of what is appropriate. While Mia sees emotional support within supervision as a reasonable expectation, her manager believes that Mia's needs will be met more appropriately by the employee counselling service.

This disparity was reflected in the groups we talked to. Some newly qualified social workers said that they had received a high level of emotional support from their managers, while others had been told firmly that this was not within the remit of supervision. There were differences of opinion within the groups of managers and within the groups of social workers about how far such support was appropriate. Some managers and some social workers felt that referral to a dedicated counsellor was the right thing. It was argued that this would enable the distressed practitioner to talk to someone outside the team, who was likely to be able

to focus specifically on their emotional needs. By contrast, some members of both groups argued that emotional support was clearly part of the role of the line manager – particularly in relation to newly qualified workers.

Part of the issue here is the severity and degree of the individual's emotional needs, and how they have arisen for that worker. Any inexperienced worker may well be affected by emotional difficulties that often arise in the content or context of an area of work generally accepted as stressful and difficult in itself. It would not be unreasonable to expect that line managers would be best placed to help inexperienced workers resolve such difficulties within the constraints of the time available. If, however, such emotional needs, were located primarily in the personal and social circumstances of NQSWs outside of the work setting, then this might be construed as needing exploration and counselling outside of the immediate work context. Similar delegation might be expected to apply where workers needed support beyond that which could be provided in supervision.

Most managers with whom we talked had experienced this kind of situation. What was striking however was the variation as to where each drew the line in terms of the direct support they felt able to offer. Unsurprisingly the social workers we talked to reported correspondingly wide variations in the level of support they had received. It is concerning that, for several managers and workers, it was in informal supervision that much of this emotional support was given. The suggestion made to us was that the emphasis on supportive help had been squeezed out

of formal supervision, and that because of increasing workload pressures, the opportunity for informal support was being squeezed as well. This is very worrying in view of the risks attaching to worker burn out.

Several newly qualified workers would have liked their managers to ask them more about themselves and how they were finding the work. A common theme was regret that in their experience the primary focus of supervision was case review, with anything else seen as an "add on":

"The trouble is we're so busy and so anxious about our cases that we really need every moment in supervision to make sure we're on the right track. I'd love to spend more time on my learning and how I'm finding the work – I think my manager would too, but it's impossible."

For the most part it appeared that newly qualified social workers were looking for more emotional support than they were currently receiving, but not at the expense of opportunities to review and seek guidance on their casework. This raises the question of whether additional support might be provided, elsewhere other than in supervision. It was clear during our discussions, that social work teams operate a range of systems of formal and informal peer support as part of Continuing Professional Development processes. These included individual mentoring, case discussions and simply "looking out for each other". There were also several examples of much valued individual and group support offered at agency level by training and development staff.

Mia and her manager urgently need to find ways of enabling Mia to feel better about work and reduce the stress that she seems to be feeling most of the time. Some of the things Mia may be able to do are explored below.

possible ways forward

being honest
It doesn't sound as though Mia is having too much difficulty being open about how she is feeling, but some of the NQSWs we spoke to had hidden their sense of stress and anxiety from their managers. Several of them said that they felt they needed to be seen to be coping. Hard as it may sometimes be to share difficult feelings, managers cannot help unless they know what is going on. Mia is struggling and this is likely to have an impact on her work with service users. She does therefore have a professional responsibility to seek support (See GSCC Codes of Practice 2002 Section 6.3 Social Care Workers).

alternative sources of support
Mia might have to recognise that it is simply not possible for her manager to give her everything she feels she needs. Perhaps she could suggest some alternative sources of support that she would find helpful. It may be that there is someone in the team who has experienced similar feelings in the past and could act as a mentor or a senior practitioner who could take on aspects of the supervision role.

negotiate a solution
If it is not possible for Mia's manager to provide the amount of emotional support that Mia is looking for, then the reasons for this need to be negotiated as do the possible ways forward. If this does not happen, Mia may be left feeling angry and let down and will perhaps be more likely to think that she has failed. The manager in this situation has a responsibility to explain why there is a limit to the support she can offer. It will certainly help however, if Mia can acknowledge that her manager is also under pressure and play her part in reaching a negotiated solution.

seek professional help
Mia's manager has suggested that she talk to the employee counselling service. Mia should probably accept this suggestion; alternatively she may decide to use a counselling or therapeutic service which is external to the agency. Accepting outside help should not mean that Mia cannot talk to her line manager about how she feels in supervision. This sort of support should be an addition or supplement to supervision rather than a replacement for any aspect of it. Mia could also to talk to her GP who may feel it is appropriate for her to take some time off work. If this happens, it would again be helpful if Mia could be as open as possible with her manager so that her return to the team can be carefully planned and supported.

the line manager's perspective

> **Anne**
> *"I've been really worried about Mia. She has had an NQSW protected workload, but she seems to take everything so much to heart and so personally, that it's getting her down. I want to support her, but not at the expense of the rest of the team, so that's why I decided to refer her to employee counselling services. I am hoping that they will find out what's going on."*

the issues

Most commentators agree that supervision has taken a somewhat managerial turn in recent years. A tendency to emphasise caseloads, planning and practical decision making together with monitoring of legal and court proceedings and protocols, and all within the context of a set agenda, was identified by several newly qualified workers. Many of those we spoke to clearly value the close case supervision they had received from their managers. A point which was raised time and time again was the importance of having someone to talk to about the emotional impact of the work.

There were differences in experience and expectation among managers about the amount of emotional support they felt willing and able to give. Several managers described situations where they believed that too much emotional support had been demanded of them by an individual practitioner. It was argued that this had adversely affected the time they then had available to give to other team members:

"As a manager you have to be careful not to give too much time to the obviously needy members of the team. You've got a responsibility to everyone else as well and you don't want to miss the fact that someone you've marked down as 'highly competent' is beginning to struggle."

A number of managers made the point that supervision should not become "a counselling session" and stressed the importance of taking emotional struggle and distress seriously without feeling that they should be primarily responsible for helping to resolve it.

Managers and social workers described a range of different approaches to helping newly qualified workers and others to manage stress and adjust to the demands of qualified practice. Senior social workers were widely used as a source of support and a number of formal and informal peer mentoring approaches had been found to be effective. The newly qualified workers who had participated in training and support groups organised by their agencies to help them through their first year of practice, seemed to

have found these to be very helpful.

The stress that the social worker in this scenario is feeling may be a symptom of pressure on the team as a whole. The perception that stress is inherent in the activity of social work can mean that unreasonable working conditions are normalised and taken for granted. Some writers (e.g. Knapman and Morrison, 1998) argue that "mediation" between the worker and the agency is one of the core functions of supervision and that the manager has a role in advocating on the team's behalf.

It may be that social work is not the right career for this newly qualified worker. Some of the managers we talked to had supervised workers who made the decision to leave the profession. This seemed to lead to a sense of failure in the managers, even where they felt there was nothing more they could have done. One manager said:

"It's not what you want – young social workers leaving the profession after they've spent 3 years training. We really ought to be able to support them well enough so they decide to stay…"

There was however acknowledgement that some areas of social work are not right for some people and that part of a manager's responsibility in terms of individual professional development could include supporting newly qualified workers to access shadowing or temporary secondment arrangements to explore other areas or to apply for posts that might suit them better, elsewhere in the agency.

The same manager added:

"Of course sometimes you have to be realistic about what's the best area of social work for them – just because you don't like child protection or whatever, it doesn't mean you won't be good in mental health. There's no point encouraging someone to struggle on when you can see they'd do better elsewhere."

For some workers this may mean outside of professional social work altogether, although not necessarily outside of the health and social care professions. It is the view of some senior managers that qualified social workers should be prepared to enter the heat of the kitchen in whichever area of service the need is greatest. This may yet prove a short term view with regard to the continuing retention of staff.

possible ways forward

ensure that reasonable support is provided
The agency has a responsibility to provide reasonable support to its NQSWs and supervision is part of this. Anne needs to think about whether she is the best person to be Mia's main source of support, whether this should come from somewhere else or from a range of sources such as peer support, workforce development team etc that are integral to the workplace, rather than outside of it. This is a matter of Anne's professional judgement as a manager as well as negotiation with the worker herself, as to what is acceptable.

ensure that supervision does not compound the problem

It sounds as though the manager in this situation is in danger of expressing her disappointment with this particular worker and perhaps making her feel that she has not lived up to expectation. This NQSW needs to know both that she is not alone in finding social work an immense challenge and also that she doesn't have to feel like this. It is important that supervision doesn't leave her believing that her feelings are a matter of personal weakness. Instead they should be seen more as a sign of the stage that she has reached in her professional learning and development and will change with time and more experience. Anne as her manager needs to build up and consolidate her professional competence, so that her confidence will grow.

professional development

It might be that this is not the right job for this newly qualified worker. There may be posts she can apply for within the organisation which would suit her better and she is likely to need guidance on this. The issues Anne is working with in supervision may therefore relate to professional development as well as to emotional support.

taking issues to senior managers

Mia's feelings may reflect the high level of pressure on this particular team or agency. If this is the case it will be important for Anne to raise with her own manager, the dangerous levels of stress her team are experiencing. In particular, the impact this could have on the team's capacity because of the risk of high levels of long term sickness and absence, but also the effect on Anne's own ability to function well as an accountable team leader, monitoring and managing overall team performance.

part ii: the toolkit

This section contains some examples of forms and processes as a starting point, to stimulate discussion in supervision and which can be adapted, developed and amended to meet your own particular circumstances.

The section includes:

- A personal development planning cycle based on professional standards specific to your role

- Guidelines for setting up a working supervision agreement

- Suggestions for establishing a reflective journal or learning log

- Adapting a crisis intervention model to explore your own feelings

- A self-reflection on supervision and support

- A personal development planning cycle

The personal development planning cycle suggested here reflects an unbroken continuum from qualifying training into practice, through supervision and into appraisal.

the "learning cycle" in supervision

1. Transfer of PDP/Transcript from qualifying training.
Self assessment against professional standards

2. Supervision discussion to confirm workplace PDP and agree action plan against standards

3. PDP identifying development through:
Shadowing/Joint working
Training
Specific work allocated

4. Review PDP & amend shadowing, training and work allocation

5. Amended PDP to take into appraisal

It takes as its starting point the personal development plan (PDP) or transcript produced at the end of qualifying training for each new graduate. As highlighted by Jack & Donnellan (2009), this provides an immediate link between the national occupational standards assessed on qualification and your new workplace. NQSWs must be ready to produce and discuss their PDP in the early supervision sessions with their line manager. Line managers have a responsibility to familiarise themselves with the standards against which all NQSWs will have been assessed, so that both are in a position to make links between the prior knowledge, skills and experience which NQSWs are bringing with them and the professional standards and requirements of the specific workplace and role.

As suggested by Noakes and colleagues (1998), the cycle in the diagram begins with a self-assessment against some specific professional standards which may be for instance, the national induction standards, or the common core of skills and knowledge for the children's workforce, or NQSW outcome statements, or PQ consolidation requirements. Whatever the setting, you will be working to a number of professional standards or requirements which you should identify in supervision discussions with your manager which will quite naturally form the framework to support your continuing professional development. Whichever set of professional standards is appropriate, the process aims to help you to capitalise on your previous work history, training and placement experiences and to think about how these parallel strands can be integrated and consolidated to meet the demands of your new job.

There are three questions to ask yourself against each professional standard:

What do I already know? What direct teaching have I had in this area? e.g. qualifying training modules, reading, courses
What other experiences have contributed? e.g. work or personal experience; placements.

What do I need to learn? What needs strengthening? Where are the gaps? e.g. frameworks; legislation; IT; time management.

How am I going to learn it? What work or learning opportunities do I need? e.g. types of work; co-working; courses; manuals.

The gaps identified in question 2 above become the objectives to be met in Stages 2 & 3 of the 'learning cycle' diagram which are then evaluated and reviewed in Stages 4 & 5 as part of an on-going cycle of lifelong learning and development.

Once individual objectives have been agreed, other issues that will need to be clarified in supervision discussion with your line manager will include the following:

Timetable: Start date and expected completion date, even if this is later amended.

Resources: Financial support required; release and backfill arrangements.

Support: Additional study days; mentoring; HR or staff development team involvement.

Recording: How and where evidence of achievement will be assessed, recorded and stored.

Remember to make the links between your PDP, the NQSW requirements, and other more formal post-qualifying (GSCC, 2006a) and post-registration training and learning (GSCC 2006b) requirements.

a working supervision agreement

expectations, hopes and fears

We have seen that supervisors and supervisees can have rather different expectations of supervision and if you are to establish a supportive relationship, it is important to be clear about the process and how you will use it. It might also be helpful to remember as a supervisee that not all supervisors are necessarily experienced and confident themselves in that role. Completing the following statements in relation to your new supervision arrangements and asking your supervisor to do the same can be a helpful starting point in clarifying joint expectations.

- I am expecting supervision to be ….. I am expecting supervision to provide…..
- What I fear most in supervision is …. What I value most in supervision is ….
- I hope that supervision will be ….. What interests me about supervision is ….

How similar are your responses? What differences are there? What actions could you take to reach a joint understanding?

a written agreement
All agencies employing qualified social workers should have a formal supervision policy which is regularly updated, in line with the GSCC Codes of Practice (2002) and NQSW requirements. There is a joint responsibility on NQSWs and line managers to actively seek out the policy and make use of any agency guidance to inform the development of their supervisory alliance. NQSWs told us that they valued the written agreements that were part of the practice teaching and learning in qualifying training but the danger in providing any pro-forma for completion is that it will become a mechanical tick box exercise, to be forgotten as soon as it is completed. Having said that, a structure from which to work together can be very helpful and it is in this spirit that the following headings for an active supervision agreement are offered.

- Agenda setting – responsibilities and arrangements
- Frequency, duration and venue
- Permitted interruptions & dealing with changes
- Method of recording
- Confidentiality – what is to remain confidential; what can be discussed elsewhere?
- Expectations and contribution of supervisee / Expectations and contribution of supervisor
- Use of PDP and identification of arrangements to meet any relevant NQSW requirements
- Arrangements for dealing with problems in supervision
- Date for review of agreement
- Signatures of both parties

keeping and using a reflective journal or learning log

By actively using a personal development plan, linked to that from your qualifying training programme, you have already begun the process of personal and professional development which is a fundamental part of your commitment to improving your knowledge and skills. Any future PDP will be influenced by your own reflections in and on practice, how you feel you are developing and the new areas in which you want to develop. The idea of a reflective journal is to enable you to have a place in which to collect some of your reflections and responses to situations or critical incidents that are part of your everyday practice which you can then re-visit at a later date in order to evaluate the changes which will almost certainly have taken place. The aim of the journal is to allow you to reflect on work-related incidents as they occur. These could be service user, colleague or organisation related. However, the primary focus should be on you as practitioner reflecting on the impact of your intervention, rather than on service-user situations.

The following headings may be useful in designing a format for the journal (Donnellan & Jack, 2009):

Key interactions:
> **What happened?**
> **Who was involved?**

Reflection:
> **What issues were generated for you?**
> **How did you use theories/ knowledge/research/skills?**

> **What feelings were engendered and how did you manage them?**
> **What tensions, conflicts and stresses emerged and how well were you able to manage these?**
> **What issues of difference, discrimination or inequality were raised and how did you work with them?**

Future action:
> **What action might you take now?**
> **What might you do differently next time?**
> **What changes might you need to make to your PDP action plan?**

A journal in this format could make a robust contribution to the agenda for supervision. Your reflections should provide you with some concrete examples that will help you to focus discussion with your line manager directly on your practice, with evidence of both successes and challenges. There may be particular issues or incidents that stand out that you would like to discuss, or you might spot a trend or repeating pattern in your responses that might not otherwise have been visible that it would be important to explore, with the benefit of your supervisor's perspective. Some entries might also be incorporated into evidence collected to meet NQSW requirements. In this instance, it would be important to remember to date your entry and to protect confidentiality by anonymising details of service-users and carers.

adapting a crisis intervention model to explore your feelings

Many of the NQSWs who spoke to us arrived for supervision stressed, anxious, angry or afraid. These feelings reflect perceptions of and responses to the experiences of work with service users, with members of the team or other professions and the wider organisation, in which your usual equilibrium has been disturbed in a way with which it has been difficult to come to terms. Although they may be triggered by a particular event, these feelings are more likely to be part of an on-going process of encountering and attempting to resolve crisis situations, which are beyond your previous personal or practice experiences. So what might be helpful? As pointed out by Donnellan & Jack (2009), drawing on familiar knowledge and skills to turn around some of the crisis intervention theory, frequently offered to service users, to illuminate your own situation might offer you some useful insights in to what, in these circumstances, will be most helpful to you in a supervision session. Roberts' (2000) seven stage model of intervention sets out a process which is equally applicable to an exploration of your own feelings, to find the support you need to restore your confidence and build future resilience:

stage 1 immediate response
When you find your balance disturbed and your usual coping strategies have failed, you need an immediate response and here you should make use of informal arrangements or your manager's "open door" policy to begin with.

stage 2 establish rapport
The established relationship, already set out in the written supervision agreement, will be important in providing you with the reassurance you need that help is available.

stage 3 define the major problem
Here you will need to be prepared to be open and honest about the totality of your current situation and exactly what has brought you to this point.

stage 4 explore feelings
Supervision should provide the safe, understanding and empathic environment in which to express your feelings but if another setting would be better for you, for instance in a peer support group, then this must be discussed.

stage 5 consider alternative responses
Alternative responses in this context will involve taking a look, with your supervisor, at your coping strategies and social networks and how and when you make use of them with a view to suggesting different ways in which you can respond or identifying different resources on which you can call to build resilience.

stage 6 make an action plan
Any meeting with your supervisor should end with a review of outcomes and one or two agreed goals. In this context these might include some work on a variety of different coping strategies and how you protect yourself emotionally or some suggestions to improve your work/life balance.
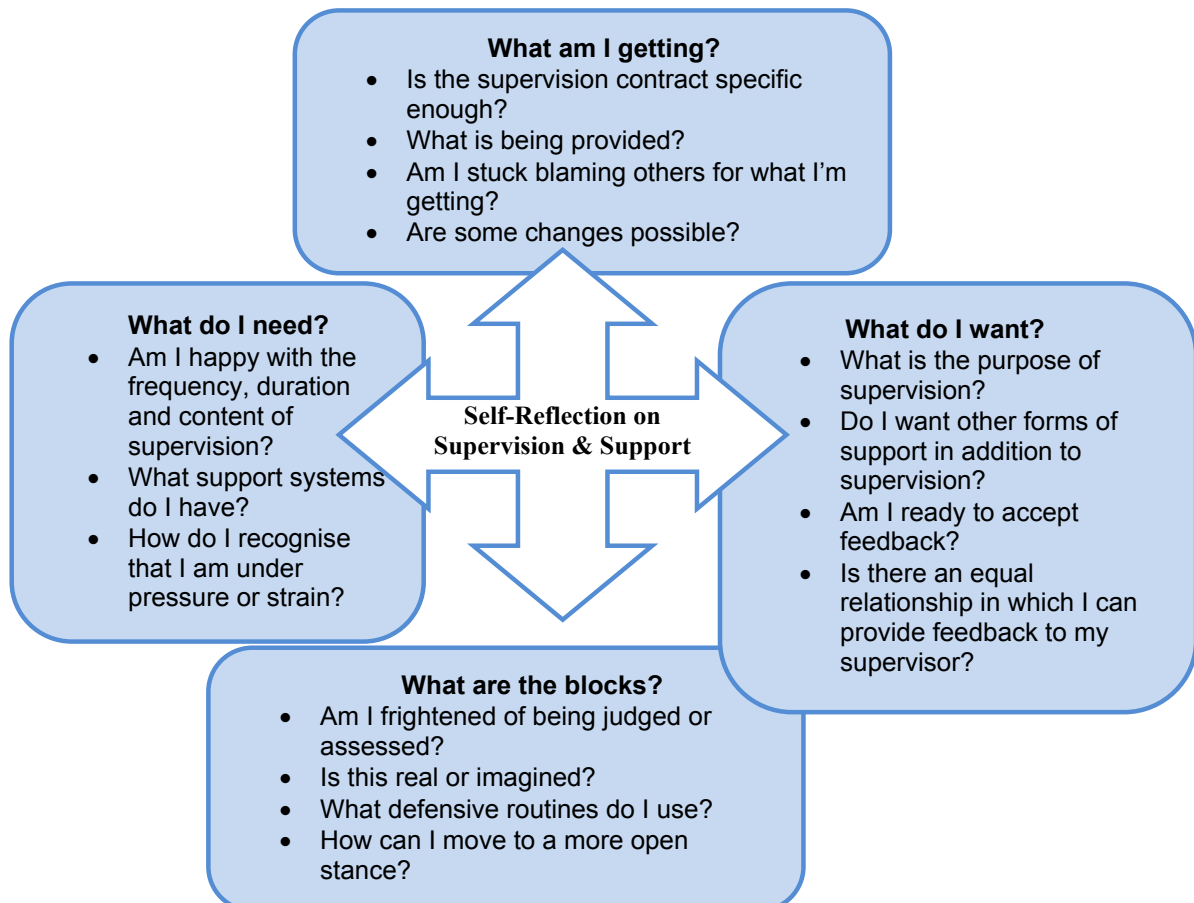
stage 7 review and follow-up support

In line with best practice, each supervision session should conclude with arrangements for the next meeting and a clear understanding of how progress will be evaluated and reviewed.

self-reflection on supervision and support

The following questions could be used as the basis of a regular review and evaluation of your supervision arrangements:

what do i want?
- What is the purpose of supervision?
- Do I want other forms of support in addition to supervision?
- Am I ready to accept feedback?
- Is there an equal relationship in which I can provide feedback to my supervisor?

What am I getting?
- Is the supervision contract specific enough?
- What is being provided?
- Am I stuck blaming others for what I'm getting?
- Are some changes possible?

What do I need?
- Am I happy with the frequency, duration and content of supervision?
- What support systems do I have?
- How do I recognise that I am under pressure or strain?

Self-Reflection on Supervision & Support

What do I want?
- What is the purpose of supervision?
- Do I want other forms of support in addition to supervision?
- Am I ready to accept feedback?
- Is there an equal relationship in which I can provide feedback to my supervisor?

What are the blocks?
- Am I frightened of being judged or assessed?
- Is this real or imagined?
- What defensive routines do I use?
- How can I move to a more open stance?

appendix 1
national nqsw outcome statement 1

professional relationships

Create and maintain appropriate relationships with individuals, families, carers, groups and communities that demonstrate respect for their dignity, diversity, unique qualities and attributes and promote equality and trust. Build safe and supportive networks to meet self care, social, psychological and environmental needs. Balance needs and risks with rights and choices, take account of power differences and promote positive outcomes. Comply with organisational and multi-agency requirements.

national nqsw outcome statement 2

communication

Use appropriate communication methods and techniques to interact (directly, as a team member, alongside others and through others) with individuals, families, carers, groups and communities and support them to express their views, choices and preferences, work towards agreed outcomes and overcome any communication needs and difficulties.

national nqsw outcome statement 3

referral

When you receive a referral, collect, accurately record and critically analyse information and take appropriate actions to fulfil your own and your organisation's responsibilities for safeguarding and promoting the well-being of specific individuals, families, carers, groups and communities.

national nqsw outcome statement 4

assessment

Collect and critically analyse relevant information and maximise the participation of individuals, families, carers, groups and communities (directly, as a team member, alongside others and through others) to negotiate and produce personalised, outcome-focused assessments.

national nqsw outcome statement 5

planning and intervention

Plan, deliver, manage and commission person-centred interventions at different levels of complexity (directly, as a team member, alongside others and through others), which focus on the individual's wishes and preferences, whilst taking into account the wishes and preferences of families and carers. Interventions must, within legal safeguards, impose control – up to and including restrictions on liberty – when behaviour presents a danger to the individual or other people, as well as ensuring equity in the rationing and allocation of scarce resources. They must balance the management of risk with individual dignity, choice and quality of life, encourage self-directed care and maximise the control individuals have over their lives.

national nqsw outcome statement 6

review

Work with individuals, families, carers, groups and communities within organisational and local multi-agency requirements to critically review and evaluate the achievements and outcomes of plans, and to identify and agree changes, and determine responsibilities, for implementation.

national nqsw outcome statement 7

safeguarding

Ensure safeguarding of adults and children, families and carers in ways that balance promotion of well-being, independence, choice and control with the need to protect people from abuse and neglect, and the duty of care.

national nqsw outcome statement 8

recording and sharing information

Record and report practice, service provision and decision making, and access and use management information systems, ensuring compliance with statutory, organisational and local multi-agency requirements.

national nqsw outcome statement 9

service development

Involve and work with individuals, families and carers to develop services, practice, training, recruitment and commissioning, ensuring accurate and timely representation of their views and concerns in discussions and decision-making meetings.

national nqsw outcome statement 10

multi-agency working

Work across organisational boundaries and contribute to the work of continuing and ad-hoc multi-agency teams, applying your skills, knowledge and professional judgement within organisational and local multi-agency requirements, and helping to ensure seamless service responses to individuals with multiple needs.

national nqsw outcome statement 11

community capacity building

Support individuals, families, carers, groups and communities to promote social inclusion and participation, build community capacity, maximise the participation of individuals from diverse and disadvantaged communities and improve life experiences and opportunities, working within organisational and multi-agency requirements.

national nqsw outcome statement 12

professional development and accountability

Improve your social work skills and knowledge through self-reflection, supervision and development activities; and be accountable for your professional judgement, behaviour and the quality of your work, ensuring that you comply with the GSCC Codes of Practice, CPD requirements for maintaining registration, and your employer's expectations for performance and behaviour.

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