Evaluation of the Implementation of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (the ASYE) for Skills for Care

Revised Final Report November 2013

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Executive Summary

Skills for Care commissioned HOST Policy Research (HOST) to independently evaluate the implementation of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (the ASYE).

Views were sought from Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) working in Adult Services and their employers, a sample of employers who had not engaged with the ASYE and a Virtual Reference Group (VRG) representing stakeholders from across the sector. Nine case studies highlighting emerging good practice were also completed. The evaluation was informed by a review of reports relating to the previous NQSW programmes.

The evaluation of the implementation year of the ASYE in Adult Services presents an encouraging picture of a real commitment by staff and NQSWs to embed the process and ensure it reflects local practice as well as national professional standards. There are still issues to be resolved largely connected with workload management and the availability of suitably experienced supervisors/assessors to facilitate the process. There is evidence that successful and sustained delivery of the ASYE is most likely to be achieved when all stakeholders work in partnership to ensure that communications and delivery are cohesive. The evaluation highlights the importance of NQSWs taking some responsibility for their own development in order that their future professional capability reflects personal needs as well as the vision of the organisation in which they work and service users.

It should be borne in mind that the evaluation was based on the implementation year of a new framework and as such it would be expected that there would be lessons to be learned. Recognising that, the evaluation interim reports outlined a number of early formative recommendations that Skills for Care were able to action. The recommendations contained in the main body of the report are written for Skills for Care but it is expected that, where appropriate, they will be delivered in partnership with other key agencies.

Communication about the ASYE and provision of support materials

Key findings from the evaluation include:

Just over a half of NQSWs initially found out about the ASYE from their employer. The other main source of information was their university.

The majority of NQSWs got involved in the ASYE initially because it was an employer requirement.

Almost a third of supervisors/assessors were involved in the delivery of the previous NQSW Programme.

Almost two thirds of supervisors/assessors had received training for their role in the ASYE. At the time of the interim questionnaire, just under a third had received further training, and by the final questionnaire a half had received further training.

Where supervisors/assessors had seen the supporting documents available from the Skills for Care website, the vast majority had found them very or fairly useful, particularly the Learning Agreement. However, there were large numbers of supervisors/assessors who had not seen the documentation. However, it should be noted that many organisations had downloaded the materials and adapted them for local use so in some cases the individual would not know the origins of the document.
Over a third of supervisors/assessors and just under a fifth of NQSWs had not used the Skills for Care website. Where they had done so, just over a tenth of both NQSWs and supervisors/assessors found the website not easy to navigate.

The main initial source of information for NQSWs was Skills for Care, but well over a half of NQSWs were dependent on information on the ASYE from within their work setting. Following the completion of their learning agreement this work-based focus increased.

The main initial source of information for over a half of supervisors/assessors was from within their work setting. By the time of the interim questionnaire the main source was Skills for Care.

Approximately a third of NQSWs and their supervisors/assessors felt the scheme and its benefits had not been very clearly described by their employer.

Initially two fifths of NQSWs and a fifth of supervisors/assessors indicated that they did not have enough information on the ASYE and at the time of the interim questionnaire just over a quarter of NQSWs and just under a fifth of supervisors/assessors still required further information on the ASYE.

**Delivery and assessment**

**Key findings from the evaluation include:**

Just over half of NQSWs felt reflective supervision had met their expectations but just over a quarter stated not always. At the time of the initial questionnaire, almost all NQSWs had agreed the frequency and duration of their supervision sessions. The vast majority of supervisors/assessors confirmed overall supervision sessions were being delivered in accordance with those agreements and this was confirmed by NQSWs.

Halfway through their ASYE, just under two thirds of NQSWs said they were receiving sufficient feedback on their progress.

The vast majority of NQSWs stated their supervision was supporting their reflective practice either very or quite well.

Midway through their ASYE just under a third of NQSWs were not clear what they had to do to meet the standard and pass the final assessment.

The majority of supervisors/assessors were very or fairly confident in their ability to provide reflective professional supervision. At the time of the interim questionnaire almost a half felt they were not receiving enough supervision and support from their employer to help them deliver reflective professional supervision. By the final questionnaire, just over two fifths felt the support received for their supervision/assessment activities did not meet their expectations.

The majority of NQSWs found their experience of workload management to be positive initially though this had dropped slightly by the time of the interim questionnaire. For most, their experience was how they had expected workload management to take place. By the final questionnaire only just under a half said their workload management was conducted as set out in their learning agreement.

For just under three quarters of supervisors/assessors workload management was proceeding as they had originally anticipated and in the final questionnaire over three quarters of supervisors/assessors stated the workload management was either very or quite effective.
The majority of NQSWs and supervisors/assessors stated protected development time was as set out in their Learning Agreement.

The vast majority of NQSWs and supervisors/assessors were aware of the Professional Capability Framework (PCF) and standards described for the ASYE and consider the Capability Statements as either very or fairly suitable. The vast majority of supervisors/assessors confirmed progressive assessment against the standards described in the PCF is taking place and were also very or quite confident in their ability to assess against the standards and to provide holistic assessment.

Just over half of NQSWs and three quarters of supervisors/assessors had found it very or quite easy to change from a competency-based assessment to holistic assessment for capability. Just over three quarters of NQSWs and the majority of supervisors indicated that that in the development of professional judgement and confidence a holistic rather than competency-based assessment is preferable.

Almost three quarters of supervisors/assessors considered their employer’s arrangement for assuring the quality of assessment decisions worked very or quite well.

**Benefits and issues**

**The key findings from the evaluation include:**

NQSWs and supervisors/assessors identified a range of benefits for the NQSW in taking part in the ASYE, the main one of which was ‘Development of professional confidence’.

The main benefits for supervisors/assessors were identified as ‘Continuing professional development’ (CPD), ‘Learning to provide reflective supervision’ and Learning to provide holistic assessment’.

Both NQSWs and supervisors/assessors saw the ASYE as supporting CPD.

By the final questionnaire, over two thirds of NQSWS would recommend the ASYE to other NQSWs. The vast majority of supervisors/assessors would recommend the ASYE to other organisations.

For NQSWs the main messages to sell the ASYE to another NQSW included that there is time for reflection, receiving structured support and guidance and the importance of peer support.

For supervisors/assessors the main messages to sell the ASYE to another organisation were that the ASYE helps to develop the NQSW into a competent social worker, that it provides a good probationary period and that it provides opportunities for CPD.

The case studies provide clear indicators of the keys to good practice.

**Recommendations arising from the evaluation**

1. Skills for Care contact the universities and make sure that they are aware of the available materials and will communicate that information to their students as part of the transition process.

2. Employers review the information they hold internally on the ASYE and how that information is presented to NQSWs, their supervisors/assessors and line managers. This should include links to sources of information including the Skills
for Care and The College of Social Work (TCSW) websites. The case studies have provided examples of how this might be approached.

3. Employers who work closely with each other and local agencies consider the co-ordination of the information and general support provided. This recognises that some NQSWs and their supervisors/assessors may work across several organisations.

4. There is a need for Skills for Care to develop a formal dissemination strategy to ensure that the individuals involved in the ASYE are told about the website and the materials that can be accessed there, especially the case studies, when they register for the ASYE. This could be by means of a ‘sources of information’ document signposting the available materials. Such a direct method is likely to be more effective than relying on a cascade effect from the employer which does not appear to have been an efficient method in the implementation year.

5. Skills for Care conduct a professional review of the website. This should include the way the material is presented and the signposting of materials to appropriate individuals such that there is clear indication of the intended audience (NQSWs, supervisors/assessors, employers and more general enquirers). This might be achieved, for example, by regrouping and rebadging materials according to the intended audiences, such that the initial ASYE screen starts with a simple menu choice according to the person viewing. Then the selection takes an individual again to an uncluttered screen with clearly named documents.

6. When the website has been reviewed/reconfigured it might be appropriate for a website guide/toolkit to be produced to make navigation easier for each of the main ASYE audiences. However, if the website is reconfigured and properly tested for ease of use then there may be no need for this.

7. The establishment of an Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feed just for the ASYE pages of the Skills for Care website so that individuals receive up-to-date information that is directly relevant to their situation.

8. Employers take steps to ensure that NQSWs and their supervisors/assessors have all the information they need throughout the different stages of the ASYE, not just when they register. This should reflect the fact that they have different information needs at individual points in time (eg on registration, prior to three and/or six month assessments, in preparation for final assessment, etc).

9. Skills for Care issue further guidance in relation to what constitutes effective workload management and what protected development time should entail. This should be linked to our later recommendation on the training and development of supervisors/assessors.

10. Employers should ensure that workload management is regularly reviewed internally to ensure caseloads are manageable and that NQSWs feel able to take their protected development time.

11. Skills for Care review the Learning Agreement template and the guidance notes to ensure these issues are adequately covered within them. The importance of the Learning Agreement needs to be further stressed in communications with key audiences.

12. In order to develop a solid approach to holistic assessment, guidance is developed to facilitate the gathering of service user feedback. This should
contain the types of approaches that could be used and also exemplar pro formas for gathering consistent information.

13. Employers review their approach to obtaining service user feedback to ensure it is fit for purpose and supports holistic assessment.

14. Skills for Care review the guidance on training provision for supervisors/assessors to ensure it allows for further development and support for those with less experience and/or new to that role, including an understanding of how to support the development of reflective practice. There also needs to be explicit guidance for employers on providing support to supervisors/assessors to enable them to do their supervision/assessment duties effectively.

15. Employers, recognising the central role of supervisors/assessors, ensure that sufficient support is in place to enable the effectiveness of that role. This includes providing supportive management, but also a review of training needs which will vary according to the individual experience of the supervisor/assessor. Where employers work with others locally, the provision of training might be developed and delivered cost-effectively across the organisations.

16. Building on the evidence from the evaluation, Skills for Care work with key stakeholders to develop, monitor and support a nationally consistent approach to the assessment process.

17. Employers should have a clear plan and procedures in place for ensuring the quality of assessment. The case studies have suggested that where local employers work closely together this could be achieved as a group approach such as a local assessment panel.

18. Skills for Care conduct a review of the benefits of participation in the ASYE highlighted in this report and develop a dissemination strategy to present them in an appropriate form to employers, supervisors/assessors, NQSWs and stakeholders more generally.

19. Employers clearly set out the benefits of participation in the ASYE to all those involved in the process.
Chapter 1: Introduction and Background to the Evaluation

1.1 Introduction

Skills for Care is part of the Sector Skills Council responsible for improving qualifications, learning and development for social care workers in England. Skills for Care is committed to ensuring that the sector has appropriately skilled people in the right places working to deliver quality social care, supports over 48,000 employers to develop the knowledge and skills of nearly 1.56 million workers, and assists in the development of effective tools and resources that meet the workforce development needs of the sector. Skills for Care also supports employers to set standards for qualifications and provides data in order that the sector is informed about current and future supply and demand issues, and the implications of those issues.

In March 2012 the Social Work Reform Board (SWRB) approved proposals for the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (the ASYE) one of the recommendations from the Social Work Task Force (SWTF) in 2009. The ASYE involves assessment against capability statements in the new Professional Capability Framework (PCF). Together with the Department for Education (the DfE), Skills for Care is charged with supporting employers and Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) as the latter move from student to qualified social work professionals all within the context of the ASYE.

In September 2012, following a competitive bid process, Skills for Care appointed HOST Policy Research (HOST) to independently evaluate the implementation year of the ASYE for Adult Services.

This is the third and final main reporting output from that evaluation.

1.2 Evaluation objective

The primary objective of the evaluation was to evaluate the implementation of the ASYE during its first year (September 2012-August 2013). The views of employers and NQSWs were sought. It should be borne in mind that the evaluation was based on the implementation year of a new framework and as such it would be expected that there would be lessons to be learned. Recognising that, the interim reports outlined a number of early formative recommendations that Skills for Care were able to action.

Whilst the ASYE is designed for NQSWs in for both Children’s and Adults Services the evaluation relates solely to those delivering Adult Services.

1.3 Background and policy context

The evolving nature of social work as a profession, and the need to be responsive to the cultural, political, social, professional and economic context in which it operates, has resulted in a number of new developments and reforms throughout the UK in the past decade. Central to these developments has been the importance of moving to systems that promotes sound professional judgment and capability competence, and multi-agency systems that are more effective at monitoring, learning and adapting professional practice.

The aim of the ASYE in England is to ensure that NQSWs receive consistent support in their first year of practice so that they are able to become confident and capable professionals, underpinned by a robust assessment that is designed to assure
professional standards. The ASYE was a recommendation from the SWRB which was set up in January 2010 to drive recommendations for a comprehensive reform programme set by the SWTF. The Board collaborated with partners, drew on feedback on draft proposals, evidence from test sites and the recommendations of Government reviews,¹ to develop a process in order to bring about whole system improvements for the continuing professional development (CPD) of social workers and of social work delivery.

The ASYE is being implemented alongside other reforms, such as the PCF (of which the ASYE forms part), Standards for Employers and Supervision Framework and proposals for partnership working and CPD. The ASYE builds on the previous NQSW framework whose structure featured the gathering of a large portfolio of evidence which was measured against outcome statements² which described what a social worker should know, understand and be able to do by the end of their first year in practice. The ASYE differs in that it leads to a final holistic assessment against the PCF and includes regular formal observation by experienced Managers/Practice Educators and feedback from people who use services. The timescale for completion of the certificate is given as 12 months and is designed to provide clear evidence for an employer of a social worker’s ability to apply their learning and knowledge in a working environment.

The ASYE is open to NQSWs employed in both Children’s and Adult Services in the statutory, voluntary and private sectors and certification is by The College of Social Work (TCSW). The Government announced funding of £2,000 per NQSW for the ASYE programme in 2012/2013 and this funding was to assist employers of NQSWs to plan and to implement the ASYE. The timeframe for introducing the ASYE however was brought forwards for, although the SWRB recognised that this could create difficulties in preparing and planning, it was felt that the reform was so critical that an early implementation was needed.

In the first round of registrations (Cohort One) during September/October 2012, 373 NQSWs were registered for the ASYE with Skills for Care. The second round of registrations (Cohort Two) during January-March 2013 resulted in a further 442 NQSWs being registered for the ASYE.

1.4 Overview of evaluation methodology

Figure 1.1 below sets out the key categories of information for review with an indication of the directly relevant element of the evaluation methodology that provided the evidence for each.

¹ Among them The Monroe Review of Child Protection.
² Heavily criticised by those undertaking assessment under this framework.
Figure 1.1: Categories of information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Discussions with Virtual Reference Group (VRG)</th>
<th>Desk Research</th>
<th>E-survey</th>
<th>Case Studies of employers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Quality and perceived usefulness of support materials</strong></td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The perceived usefulness of the ASYE information and support issued by Skills for Care and the DfE</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The range, suitability and level of the capability statements describing the standards for the ASYE</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The perceived usefulness of the additional resources and information issued by Skills for Care and TCSW to support the ASYE implementation</td>
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<td><strong>2. Communications</strong></td>
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<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The communications process (ie did they receive enough information? Was it clear which organisation/s was/were responsible for providing what kind of support? Did they receive clear ‘joined-up’ messages from Skills for Care, the DfE and The College for Social Work?)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3. Implementation - delivery and assessment</strong></td>
<td>√</td>
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<td>• How the implementation of the ASYE differed from the implementation of the previous NQSW Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Details of how the assessment process is being delivered/received</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Details of how reflective professional supervision is being delivered/received</td>
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<td>• How organisations are supporting the development of line managers/supervisors and assessors for the ASYE.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Details as to how employers are informing judgments and processes for the ASYE assessment</td>
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<td>• How well the expectations of employers and NQSWs were met in relation to: supervision; workload management; dedicated professional development time</td>
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<td><strong>4. Overall success</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Issues which were explored include:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The success or otherwise of partnership working in supporting the efficient and effective delivery of the ASYE, including those funded through the Skills for Care Employer Transition Fund in delivering the ASYE.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Other factors helping/hindering the implementation process</td>
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<tr>
<td>• How well it is contributing to the overall Reform Board’s objectives</td>
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The methodology comprised a combination of staged approaches, as set out in the flow chart below (Figure 1.2).
A detailed review of methodology is presented at Annex H to this report.
1.5 Structure of this report

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 sets out the findings from the desk research. Chapter 3 considers the results from the evaluation thus far in relation to Communications and use of Support materials and Chapter 4 looks at Implementation, Delivery and Assessment. Chapter 5 sets out overall achievement to-date and looks at the benefits of involvement in the ASYE and evidence of best practice. The final chapter describes areas for consideration and recommendations arising from the research findings.
Chapter 2: Secondary Research

2.1 Introduction

This chapter records findings from the following sources:

- Summary review of past policy related to social work improvement and reform activities.
- Review of empirical evidence which underpins the concept of supporting the first year in social work practice.
- Analysis of published research studies and evaluations commissioned by Skills for Care and that undertaken by Bristol University related to the Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) Programme and the most recent (April 2013) report on the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (the ASYE) in Children’s Services from The Department for Education (the DfE).

The results from the early available evidence informed our approach to the evaluation. In this chapter, we have focused on an analysis of the core information, the key findings, relevance and implications for the current evaluation.

2.2 The context of reform

In March 2012 the Social Work Reform Board (SWRB) approved proposals for the ASYE for NQSWs which was one of the recommendations from the Social Work Task Force (SWTF) in 2009. The ASYE replaces previous programmes for NQSWs and involves assessment against the new Professional Capability Framework (PCF) and the defined support for the ASYE incorporated in the Standards for Employers and Supervision Framework (SWRB, 2012).

2.3 Development of the ASYE

Skills for Care and the (then) Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC) were tasked in 2009 to create a single framework for the ASYE in collaboration with The College of Social Work (TCSW), universities and employers (both private and public sector) who employ social workers. The chief differences between the ASYE and the original NQSW Programme are that it is an assessed year, and the assessment of capability is holistic rather than competence-based, that it is a single process for all social workers irrespective of their work setting and that this will be the first time the PCF has been used to describe and assess standards - the latter is considered pivotal to ensuring the reforms outlined by the SWTF are achieved.

The ASYE and its forerunner programme were predicated on a number of factors that had previously been identified by a body of research in the past decade, which includes evidence that:

- NQSW’s need support in their first year in the workforce to help them apply their knowledge in a practise setting.

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3 With separate programmes for Adult and Children’s Services.

4 The Social Work ASYE, Skills for Care, November 2012.
• Good quality induction is crucial both to staff retention and individual confidence and effectiveness.

• Access to the correct type and quality of supervision and assessment is vital to the long-term health of the profession.

• Critical reflection both informs and provides a rationale for professional decision making.

Recent research\(^5\) has indicated that the greatest area of weakness in the development of NQSWs under the previous framework was the level of critical reflection and analysis, the ability to think back deeply and connect experience with underpinning knowledge and make judgments based on expertise. Reviewing and reflecting on practice are also seen as important for developing capability\(^6\) and for continuing professional development (CPD). The latter is an important strand of the ASYE which was designed as a two-sided reform where employer responsibilities are clearly defined, but where the responsibility for achieving and maintaining standards also forms the basis of individual CPD responsibility.

Two important areas of the ASYE are firstly the **Learning Agreement** completed at the start of the assessment process, and reviewed on a regular basis. This helps to establish how support and assessment will be undertaken and also sets out the framework for future regular review. The other is **holistic assessment** which itself signals a shift from a competence-based approach. Holistic assessment is considered especially suitable for social work where the development of professional judgement and practice requires an interplay which reflects the complexity of social work practice.\(^7\)

There have been some concerns expressed about the move from a competence-based model to one of holistic assessment and what this may mean in practice in terms of quality assurance, assessment training and possible tension between the roles of line manager and assessor. TCSW\(^8\) has likened it to a meal where ‘one part of the preparation, or if one ingredient is missing or below standard then this will impair the quality of the final product’. There are principals of assessment TCSW have indicated that they will include in the pending quality assurance process they are developing for the ASYE the most important of which are:

• Observation in a range of practice.

• Observation at different times and in different settings.

• Observation by different observers.

### 2.4 Transition and induction

The ASYE has been developed as an employer-led process that requires assessment of NQSWs to be justifiably and vigorously supported with supervision in their initial year in the workforce (during the transition from Student to Professional Practitioner). There is

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no short cut. The assessment was designed to take one year although part-time practitioners can take two years.  

Many people find transitions difficult and the transition from student to Social Work Practitioner is acknowledged within the profession as one that can be both unsettling and stressful. Primarily it involves a process of moving from: "the culture of the educational establishment to the organised culture of the workplace" a process of awareness and one of understanding the expectations of others - colleagues and employers and of those who use services. Most importantly perhaps for the NQSW this transition requires them to address any mismatch in the expectations of others at the same time as coping with their own expectations of themselves.

Research into the transition for a NQSW suggests that graduates enter employment quickly and with at least half indicating that practice was very different from their pre-qualified expectation. Research undertaken in the last four years at Plymouth and Durham Universities has indicated that most NQSWs struggle with the duality of their roles and need support in establishing coping mechanisms and work life balance.

While there are significant differences between social work and roles and contexts in the health sector, it is reasonable to draw on the experiences of nurses as indicated by the published research to better understand the impact of transition from student to practitioner. Newly qualified nurses reportedly often feel unprepared when first entering the workforce proper and have many concerns about increased responsibility and accountability. Mismatches between the expectations of employers and Practitioner Speech Therapists have also been reported in literature.

Some published research has suggested that there are very good reasons for viewing the whole induction process as chiefly the responsibility of the newly qualified practitioner primarily because induction needs to respond to individual needs, although the general view is that this is the responsibility of an employer. Where there is total agreement is in viewing this period as crucial in determining rules, expectations and identifying future learning needs.

There is also a considerable body of evidence that suggests that the quality of support and supervision during the induction process in the initial year in the workforce of NQSWs varies considerably but there is a clear consensus within the published literature that practitioners ably supported in their first year allows them to:

- Become effective more quickly.
- Settle in a team more readily.
- Have reduced levels of anxiety.
- Have less misunderstanding and grievances.

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9 Where an NQSW was appointed between April and September 2012 it was possible to have been started on the NQSW Programme and transferred onto the ASYE in September, the timing overall for these social workers is still one year.
10 Schrader, Hitchhiking across Cultures - From Classroom to Workplace, Feliciter, 2008.
11 Newton and McKenna, 2006.


- Have more realistic expectations of job and organisation.

Until the publication in 2007 of the Effective Supervision Unit by Skills for Care/the Children's Workforce Development Council (CADS) there had been no national framework related to the supervision of social workers.

2.5 Lessons from the previous NQSW framework

The benefits both to employers and individuals of the previous NQSW frameworks have been identified by independent evaluations. The key messages from these are:

- Substantial increases in confidence and self-efficacy.
- That structured supervision has improved the quality of practice.
- High levels of satisfaction with overall training and support.
- That the overall quality of practice had improved relative to the quality of supervision and management of NQSW’s.
- That staff retention appeared to improve following programme implementation.

Identifying these benefits has ensured that the ASYE has a solid foundation of empirical evidence to support its introduction and implementation and will help to make certain its coherence with the changes proposed by SWRB. The evaluations and recent research has also strongly emphasised that the sustainable delivery of the ASYE is most likely to be achieved if ALL stakeholders - statutory, voluntary and independent in partnership with universities - adhere to the vision for a nationally consistent process

The previous research has identified some key areas to take note of for the current evaluation. These include:

- High workloads and the availability of good supervision - two issues that dominated findings of the year 2 programmes.
- Some evidence that that those organisations running the programmes for the second year of NQSWs delivered more successfully. This could have implications for the ASYE and needs careful monitoring.
- There was evidence of some improved retention but the (then) evaluators were not able to determine if this was as a direct result of the NQSW framework.

There were differing experiences according to background and job role of NQSW and the experience of those making judgements on their professional capability.

2.6 More recent research about the ASYE implementation

In April 2013, the DfE published a report of a commissioned study which examined the early months of the ASYE implementation in Children’s Services through in depth interviews within ten local authorities. The approach involved collecting information on each authority introducing the ASYE, as well as on the challenges and issues they were

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17 Skills for Care and Carpenter et al, 2011.
18 Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE): the experience of ten local authorities, DfE, 2013.
facing. The authorities were sampled to represent both a geographic spread across the country and the different types of authority.

A number of issues were identified from this study and most notably perhaps was a strong request for standardisation of assessment linked to the ASYE being transformed into a Licence to Practice. Other issues included:

- Concern about the speed at which the ASYE had been introduced and the late publication of guidance, process and details of funding were recurrent themes that were felt to have had a significant impact on the implementation of the first year of the ASYE.

- With just one exception all authorities credited the forerunner of the ASYE - the NQSW Programmes - for the fact that they were able to develop their ASYE programme reasonably rapidly. For some it had made the task relatively painless.

- All the authorities had offered various introductory training for managers and others with responsibility for NQSWs and/or involvement in the ASYE. In addition there were examples of regular meetings for these groups.

- In five of the ten authorities NQSWs were receiving the recommended level of supervision. In the other five there appeared to be instances where flexible arrangements were in place.

- In six of the ten local authorities all NQSWs who were interviewed considered they had a reduced caseload, while in the other four it was a more mixed picture.

- Discussions with managers in most areas highlighted the fact that many were still confused about what could be considered as assessment evidence.

- Most of the authorities that were visited were talking to their counterparts in neighbouring authorities to try to establish some degree of consistency.

2.7 Overview

Research indicates that the period of induction in any practitioner’s life is crucial in determining roles responsibilities and expectations. Within the ASYE process employers may choose to link the probation period to the ASYE and will expect individuals to complete both in order to continue to be employed. This in itself offers an opportunity for NQSWs to check what is expected of them in terms of professional conduct and the support and supervision they should anticipate receiving and that the methods of assessment used are accurate, valid and robust. Research has also suggested that there are lessons to be learned from the previous NQSW Programmes and from those who have already established systems and processes for NQSWs and for the supervisors and assessors who will support them. The most recent research calls for the ASYE to become effectively a Licence to Practice with standardisation of assessment to underpin this.
Chapter 3: Communications and Support Materials

Key findings from this chapter include:

Just over a half of NQSWs initially found out about the ASYE from their employer. The other main source of information was their university.

The majority of NQSWs got involved in the ASYE initially because it was an employer requirement.

Almost a third of supervisors/assessors were involved in the delivery of the previous NQSW Programme.

Almost two thirds of supervisors/assessors had received training for their role in the ASYE. At the time of the interim questionnaire, just under a third had received further training, and by the final questionnaire a half had received further training.

Where supervisors/assessors had seen the supporting documents available from the Skills for Care website, the vast majority had found them very or fairly useful, particularly the Learning Agreement. However, there were large numbers of supervisors/assessors who had not seen the documentation.

Over a third of supervisors/assessors and just under a fifth of NQSWs had not used the Skills for Care website. Where they had done so, just over a tenth of both NQSWs and supervisors/assessors found the website not easy to navigate.

The main initial source of information for NQSWs was Skills for Care, but well over a half of NQSWs were dependent on information on the ASYE from within their work setting. Following the completion of their learning agreement this work-based focus increased.

The main initial source of information for over a half of supervisors/assessors was from within their work setting. By the time of the interim questionnaire the main source was Skills for Care.

Approximately a third of NQSWs and their supervisors/assessors felt the scheme and its benefits had not been very clearly described by their employer.

Initially two fifths of NQSWs and a fifth of supervisors/assessors indicated that they did not have enough information on the ASYE and at the time of the interim questionnaire just over a quarter of NQSWs and just under a fifth of supervisors/assessors still required further information on the ASYE.

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter we consider how individual Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) first became aware of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (the ASYE) and the sources of information they and their supervisors/assessors used. This includes the training supervisors/assessors received to support their role, the use of the Skills for Care website as a source of information, the supporting documentation and whether the individuals feel they had sufficient information about the ASYE.
The findings in this chapter are based on the results from the initial, interim and final questionnaire surveys with both NQSWs and their supervisors/assessors from Cohort One, and the results from the initial and final questionnaires completed by those in Cohort Two. It also draws on evidence from the case studies of good practice and a report written for the evaluation by the Practice Learning Consortium (PLC), using illustrative vignettes, and the interviews with non-participant employers.

For the remainder of the report, owing to the fact that responses in some cases are small numbers (ie less than 50) results are provided with both percentages and the actual number of responses.

3.2 How did NQSWs find out about the ASYE

According to responses from the initial questionnaire, just over a half of NQSWs from Cohorts One and Two (57 per cent - 38; 56 per cent - 29 respectively) found out about the ASYE from their employer. The other main source of information was their university (37 per cent of respondents from both Cohorts).

Ninety one per cent (61) of NQSWs from Cohort One and two thirds of those from Cohort Two (67 per cent - 35) got involved in the ASYE initially because it was an employer requirement. In Cohort Two just under a third (31 per cent - 16) became involved through their own choice.

3.3 Previous supervisor/assessor experience with the NQSW Programme

Just over a quarter (26 per cent - 9) of Cohort One supervisors/assessors were involved in the delivery of the previous NQSW Programme, with a slightly higher proportion in Cohort Two (41 per cent - 9). Skills for Care have supplied statistics that show 67 employing organisations have been involved in all four years of NQSW Programmes including the ASYE and 15 who were involved in both the previous NQSW Programme and the ASYE.

The initial questionnaire asked how the implementation of the ASYE differed from the previous NQSW Programme. The responses are summarised below with selected quotes to illustrate:

- Clearer/better structured than the previous NQSW Programme (6 respondents). For example:

  'Is more structured'.

  'ASYE seems to be a little more straightforward and less time consuming for Managers'.

  'ASYE process is easier to understand and much clearer for the NQSW. It adopts a holistic approach rather than ticking boxes. Much better in my opinion'.

- Promotes a unified structure (2 respondents). For example:

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19 Cohort One comprises the first round of registrations on the ASYE during September/October 2012.

20 Cohort Two is the second round of registrations during January-March 2013.

Detailed statistical tables for all results are provided at the annexes to this report.
'I believe that ASYE will provide an opportunity for consolidation of learning. Employer and universities jointly engaging in assessment is an efficient and effective way of ensuring fitness to practice. ASYE through structured supervision are helped to become reflective practitioners. A unified national structure is promoted through ASYE’.

‘Identical in Adults and Children’s, more partnership working re training and support of ASYE and Supervisor’.

- Holistic assessment compared to competence-based (2 respondents). For example:

‘The ASYE requires an holistic assessment, whereas the previous NQSW required individual competencies being evidenced’.

Some individual supervisors/assessors suggested that there was a more informed introduction to the ASYE, there was more partnership working and it involved measurement over a year instead of NQSWs being asked to submit three pieces of evidence.

Others were not sure how it differed (three respondents) and one suggested it didn’t seem any different. For example:

‘An improving picture, but role of supervisor/assessor and how the whole programme will work has been unclear. This is compounded by staff who were involved and running the NQSW Programme having left and it taking time for a new worker to be appointed, etc. Meetings are being held to help support and recover the situation, but face-to-face meeting with those organising training have not yet taken place, scheduled for later this month. Senior Manager did meet with us before to outline the process, but no one knew the detail, so we are waiting to see what the outcome will be. Training has been organised and is being rolled out over the year, so not a simple yes or no really’.

‘The implementation of both programmes has felt disorganised, with late information, no clear direction on how the programmes should look, what is expected other than assessment against criteria’.

Two respondents were candidates in the earlier NQSW Programme and assessors in the ASYE so they felt they didn’t have the relevant experience to comment. For example:

‘I actually participated in the NQSW Programme as a candidate and so do not have experience of that programme from the point of view of a supervisor/assessor. Therefore it is difficult to compare the two programmes. What I have been able to detect up to now is that the roll out of the ASYE continues to build upon the learning from the last few years of delivering the NQSW Programme’.

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**Evidence from the case studies in relation to experience of the previous NQSW programme**

**a) Ease of implementation compared to the previous programme**

Implementing the ASYE has differed in Poole from the previous programme in that it is more focused on capabilities, on working satisfactorily with partners in the same area of work and is more centred on self-management and critical reflection. Co-ordination has been relatively straightforward and mentoring assisted by being delivered by a
consultant not salaried to the Authority. NQSWs feel more able to be open with the co-ordinator about the organisation and how their work is supervised and managed because she is unlikely to have any direct influence on their working lives on a day-by-day basis, and because she is perceived as being more objective than would a member of staff co-ordinator and offers additional expert guidance.

b) Working with both the previous NQSW Programme and the ASYE in parallel

The induction of newly qualified staff has always been very thorough in Cumbria and personalised as far as possible yet with stress on the need for the individual to shape and determine their own first year pathway. The previous framework for NQSWs was viewed as effective but with some reservations that its competence-based approach was too rigid, and therefore the ASYE was welcomed with its greater emphasis on practice capability. There are some NQSWs still enrolled on the previous programme but this has not presented any real challenges for Cumbria as the two frameworks have been separated for both administrative and assessment purposes. This separation will offer the opportunity for the County to compare and contrast subsequent performance and career paths of those who have taken alternate routes. Cumbria has additionally developed a Personal Development Record (PDR) for those on this programme which is based on the Professional Capability Framework PCF for each level.

3.4 Training of supervisors/assessors

From the responses to the initial questionnaire, over two thirds of supervisors/assessors in Cohort One (68 per cent - 25) and a half in Cohort Two (50 per cent - 11) had received training for their role in the ASYE. At the time of the interim questionnaire, just under a third of supervisor/assessors overall (32 per cent - 14) had received further training for their role. This still leaves significant numbers of supervisors/assessors who had not received training for their role in the ASYE at that point.

The additional training that had been received at the time of the interim questionnaire predominantly consisted of half day briefings and workshops, including introductions to the ASYE, information on requirements needed for portfolios, expectations of Managers and supervisors in supporting the ASYE staff and in-house reflective supervision training. Four respondents mentioned undergoing training at their local university. Skills for Care workshops are also mentioned by four respondents (‘the ASYE and Beyond’ being mentioned specifically by two respondents).

The final questionnaire (Cohort One only) asked if further training had been received since completing the interim questionnaire and half of supervisors/assessors (50 per cent - 11) indicated they had. The training they said they had received was (in their own words):

‘Half day session to discuss evidence required for submission’.

‘Further workshop for Assessors; workshops around QA; Skills for Care events’.

‘Practice Assessors feedback workshop and HR-Implementing ASYE workshop’.

‘ASYE Co-ordinator attended progress review and provided guidance on next stage’.
'Various online and attended course training’.

'Training in relation to direct observations and completing the portfolio’.

'Discussion sessions with colleagues and representative from our Organisational Development session’.

'PGC assessing professional practice - second module assessing practice’.

'Mangers’ awareness session’.

'Session on reflective supervision and useful tools’.

'A briefing to ensure clarity on roles’.

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**Evidence from the Case Studies in relation to the training of supervisors/assessors**

**a) Developing good quality supervision**

Norfolk County Council provided training for supervisors at the start of the programme, with additional training provided by the University of East Anglia (UEA) linked to the three-monthly milestones. The training sessions focus on supervision and assessment skills, the expectations of each stage and the evidence requirements, including guidance on completing the paperwork. UEA also provide supporting material and guidance. Supervisors have the option of submitting a reflective essay exploring how their involvement with the ASYE has improved their own practice, which attracts 20 credits towards a Masters degree. The UEA training and materials are closely linked to the PCF expectations. Norfolk believe strongly that good quality supervision is central to the ASYE process, as well as being fundamental to professional practice for experienced social workers, yet the skills needed to be a good supervisor do not come naturally to everyone. Consequently, Norfolk are currently exploring introducing a professional development pathway for supervisors.

**b) The importance of training provision**

In Lewisham, Practice Educators and line managers were offered training to familiarise themselves with the ASYE and this was welcomed in part because the post qualification world in Adult Services is not seen as well developed as in Children’s Services and so this has allowed a clearer professional identify to be established. Line managers interviewed felt that because of the support and information they have received about the ASYE they have become better supervisors and now able to see the value of well conducted supervision for an NQSW within the induction year.

**c) Providing support for assessors**

In Redcar and Cleveland, all of the assessors are Practice Educators and either Team Managers or Practitioners so all had a good skills base for their assessment role. The assessors and ASYE leads had monthly support sessions and also attended assessor development sessions with the Tees Valley Partnership. In addition, a half day Development session was facilitated by the Tees Valley Partnership for assessors across the five local boroughs to clarify expectations/responsibilities of assessors and look at the consistency of final holistic assessment reports.
d) Ensuring there are opportunities for supervisors/assessors to develop their skills

At Sutton, supervisors (who act as assessors) were given the opportunity to go to four workshops run by Kingston University (St George’s campus) which took them through the stages in the ASYE process, including assessment which they found very useful. In addition, the Learning and Development Manager provided some in-house training on what makes good evidence and she and the NQSW specialist provide on-going support on supervision and assessment when needed. Supervisors also meet up with each other on a regular basis to offer each other support and advice and peer review examples of work.

3.5 Attendance at presentations on the ASYE

Not all NQSWs or supervisors/assessors would have been invited to attend presentations on the ASYE, it would have been their lead officers who would have attended. However, from the responses to the initial questionnaire, just under two thirds (61 per cent - 41) of NQSWs in Cohort One and just over half (52 per cent - 27) in Cohort Two attended a presentation on the ASYE and of these the vast majority (95 per cent and 96 per cent respectively) were local events.

The majority of supervisors/assessors from both Cohorts did not attend the given list of The ASYE national information events and large numbers did not answer the question.

Evidence from the case studies in relation to cascading information about the ASYE through the organisation

a) The importance of internal communications

On the whole, staff at Blackburn and Darwen feel that communications have been very strong at a local level. The workforce development team have been proactive in providing Practice Educators with relevant information on the ASYE and they, in turn, filter this and pass it on to NQSWs and/or their managers either using the regular development meetings or through group e-mails. In addition, the workforce development team have put on training sessions and are happy to answer questions or provide individual support when needed. Issues that come up through supervision have been passed on to the training team who have then ensured that the areas are covered in subsequent development meetings. Topics have included the Learning Agreement, writing up case studies, dealing with difficult clients, preparing for hearings. Practice Educators and managers also attended a Lancashire-wide training event on the introduction of the ASYE earlier in the year.

b) Central co-ordination for the ASYE

A critical feature of the success of the Local Authority’s approach in Southampton was the establishment of central coordination for the programme. In practice this is shared by the Service Manager (Adults) and the learning and development lead. Several respondents identified the coordination function as pivotal, particularly as this was a new and potentially complex development programme. The hands-on model of the coordinators afforded a rapid response to questions - as one assessor noted: ‘I always got an answer within 24 hours’.
Operationally, the learning and development lead planned, coordinated, arranged workshops advised the Practice Assessors, delivered reflective practice support and conducted second marking. Everything was clearly documented including session handouts, assessment documents, due dates, handbooks and ASYE files. Having clear lines of responsibility was viewed very positively in that it simplified communication and eased implementation. As a result, all participants knew who to contact if issues arose.

3.6 Support documentation available from the Skills for Care website

From discussions at the Skills for Care regional workshops, the responses to the questionnaires and the case study interviews, it is clear that many organisations are downloading Skills for Care materials, adjusting them for their own purposes and then re-branding them. This means that the individual NQSW or supervisor/assessor wouldn’t necessarily know who had produced the document originally. This is a pertinent point and directly relates to comments on supporting documentation.

In relation to the supporting documents available from the ASYE pages of the Skills for Care website, responses to the initial questionnaire from NQSWs varied, but of those who had seen the various content most had found the documents useful. Not all the documents were directly relevant to NQSWs (for example, the information on the Employer Transition Fund); however, even allowing for that, large numbers of respondents had not seen the individual documents that were mentioned in the questionnaire as directly relevant to them. This varied from 11 per cent (7) from Cohort One and 16 per cent (8) from Cohort Two who had not seen the Learning Agreement example on the website, up to 28 per cent (16) from Cohort One and 34 per cent (17) from Cohort Two who had not seen the six case studies and examples of evidence.

In relation to supervisors/assessors, where individual respondents had seen the individual supporting documents available from the Skills for Care website, the vast majority had found them very or fairly useful. For example, 83 per cent (30) from Cohort One and 80 per cent (16) from Cohort Two found the Learning Agreement example very or fairly useful, with only three individuals overall saying they were not useful.

However, there are large numbers of supervisors/assessors who had not seen individual documents including 53 per cent (19) from Cohort One and 40 per cent (8) from Cohort Two who had not seen the six case studies and examples of evidence (and slightly higher numbers had not seen the real case studies from employers).

In the initial questionnaire, supervisors/assessors were asked to identify which of the support materials they had downloaded for reference. The ‘Learning Agreement’, the ‘Learning Agreement information and notes’, the ‘Direct Observation Template’ and the ‘Assessor Report Template’ were downloaded by around a half of all respondents. The case studies varied between 17 per cent of individuals overall (across both Cohorts) who downloaded ‘Lisa’ and ‘Roy’, up to 30 per cent overall who downloaded ‘Isabella’. The initial questionnaire also asked supervisors/assessors how those who had downloaded it made use of the Learning Agreement Template. The responses included:

- Used in support sessions (10 respondents).
- Adapted for own use (8 respondents).
• Acted as guidance on how to complete (5 respondents).
• Used as a working document (3 respondents).
• Shared with NQSWs, supervisors/assessors, line managers (3 respondents).

Comments in relation to the Learning Agreement Template included:

‘The university has provided these. They are similar to the Skills for Care templates but not identical. We have to use the university systems’.

‘Used notes to establish national expectations around case load protection and development time. Use template personalised to the NQSW to get management and candidate ‘sign up’.

‘The Learning Agreement format was pretty self-explanatory although long-winded’.

Where people had issues with the Learning Agreement this seemed to relate to still requiring further detail, for example:

‘These were helpful to a point, but an example would have been of more use. We were not quite sure how to fill them in and I am not entirely confident with what we ended up putting on the form’.

‘Found the template fairly helpful although not as detailed or structured as I was expecting. I did not find the notes helpful at all as they did not clarify the questions that I had although I am not completely certain that I have all the information as what I was given was very basic’.

‘Yes, fairly useful but also a bit confusing as simpler layout might help and further guidance on what to complete for the three, six and nine month assessment stages’.

The interim questionnaire asked further detail about how useful some specific downloaded documentation had been to supervisors/assessors. Ninety three per cent (28) of those who had downloaded it found the ‘Direct Observation Template’ very or quite useful, the remainder had not used it.

Ninety five per cent (17) of those who downloaded them had found the case studies on Simon, Isabella and Joanne very or quite useful.

The final questionnaire also asked about materials downloaded from the Skills for Care website since the interim questionnaire was completed. Over four fifths of supervisors/assessors (83 per cent - 15) had downloaded the ‘Direct Observation Template’, almost three quarters (72 per cent - 13) the ‘Assessor Report Template’ and half (9) the ‘Learning Agreement Template’ and ‘Examples of Assessor Reports’.

Of those who had used the ‘Assessor Report Template’ almost two thirds (62 per cent - 13) had found it very or quite useful. Similar numbers had found the ‘Examples of Assessor Reports’ very or quite useful.

Eleven individuals had used the six case studies and the majority of them (91 per cent - 10) had found them very or quite useful, with similar numbers in relation to ‘Examples of Evidence’.
Three respondents indicated that there were things missing from the case studies as follows:

'I think they were quite good at being prepared in advance but some were a bit odd - one report seemed very harsh in not recognising any positives in the NQSW'.

'Decision making processes - eg panels, portfolio presentation, feedback to assignments/written work. We also do presentations as evidence - these are not covered'.

'In my own opinion it would have been helpful if the case studies cover broader issues including how NQSW struggles with issues such as some organisational constraints, bureaucracy, issues with multi-agency work, etc'.

**Evidence from the case studies in the practical use of support materials**

**a) Making good use of the available support materials**

In Cumbria, the ASYE support material initially available from Skills for Care was viewed as very informative, simple to comprehend and enabled both NQSWs and those that are mentoring, assessing and supervising their work, to understand what was required within the ASYE. This material continues to assist individuals and their line managers with the transition from qualifying to the workplace, and NQSWs are actively encouraged to look at the case studies and determine how the experience of others can be transferred to their situation and assist their professional development. Stemming from reading this, NQSWs report they have been able to better understand the PCF Capability Statements and what they, as individuals, should be able to accomplish in the short, medium and long term. Skills for Care are seen as very much the drivers of the ASYE and good use has been made of the various templates available which have been adapted to fit with the local needs.

**b) Overcoming initial confusion**

Initially Poole found the available support material confusing and the Authority and partner agencies in the area requested a visit from Skills for Care to discuss what was seen at that time as a very challenging exercise. Discussions at this meeting helped to allay concerns about, for example, the amount of paperwork involved, and the interrelationship between the ASYE and other aspects of reform such as the CPD framework. Skills for Care offered a model that they considered to be good practice at this meeting and while the Poole co-ordinator did not accept this model in its entirety as being appropriate for Poole because it was too complex and did not fit with existing workplace development systems, it did offer a starting point from which she produced a similar model that was locally acceptable.

Following the meeting with Skills for Care, Poole set up a series of meetings with partner agencies and surrounding boroughs to help ensure that the ASYE processes and procedures were understood. This was especially helpful as the social worker population is quite transient between the boroughs and consistency of approach is considered to be crucial.

**c) Developing support materials**

The Workforce Development Team at Blackburn with Darwen have put together a portfolio of resources to support the ASYE implementation that are used by Practice Educators, NQSWs and their managers. To do this, they have used much of the
guidance and background material available on the Skills for Care website, some of which they have contextualised to meet local needs and circumstances.

In addition, the University of Central Lancashire, who are accrediting the reflective essay that NQSWs in the authority are required to complete, have provided a lot of support material that is being used by those leading the development sessions who also use Inform, a section of the Community Care website, for resources.

NQSWs and their managers feel that pressures of work mean that they do not have the time to explore websites but have found the content on the Skills for Care website useful when they have a particular query.

d) Adapting templates to fit local needs

In Lewisham, the co-ordinator worked with line managers and Practice Educators to adapt the templates to fit local needs and circumstances but to some extent this is still an evolving exercise. The co-ordinator, for example, is currently redesigning the process for the final assessment after evaluating the midpoint review exercise and appraising the shortfall. The support from Skills for Care was and continues to be seen as excellent and the information on the website very useful. Practice Educators who were interviewed also mentioned the website of The College of Social Work (TCSW), and in particular their guidance on integrated critical analysis and reflective practice, as especially helpful.

e) Presenting key documents in an accessible format

In Southampton, to facilitate access to key documents a local ASYE handbook was produced. This captured, in one place, all key aspects of the programme and explained how it was to be delivered. It included the Learning Agreement, details and dates of the support available, contact details of key personnel, protected time, assessment requirements and frequently asked questions (FAQ). Similar handbooks were produced for assessors, line managers and supervisors and all were well received.

f) Available resource materials and a systematic approach

In Redcar and Cleveland, it was felt very strongly that the Skills for Care materials brought a more systematic approach to the development, assessment and review process of NQSWs than had hitherto existed. By using the same materials, and with the support of the Tees Valley Partnership, employers are interpreting assessment requirements in a more consistent way. This has real benefits to employers and to staff who may wish to transfer from one authority to another.

The perceived quality and usefulness of support materials, particularly those downloaded from the Skills for Care website was good, particularly the Learning Agreement and the exemplar completed agreement. These helped clarify the management and timing of the support which was to be provided to the ASYE candidates. In addition, its use enabled emerging problems to be identified and addressed at an early stage through the review process.

3.7 Navigating the Skills for Care website

NQSWs and supervisors/assessors were asked how easy it was to navigate the ASYE section of the Skills for Care website. Over a third of supervisors/assessors overall (33 per cent - 18) had not used the website and that was also true of just under a fifth of NQSWs (19 per cent - 22). Given that where supervisors/assessors had accessed key
documentation via the website, for example in relation to the Learning Agreement and
the majority had found it very or fairly useful, it is a concern that over a third of
supervisors/assessors have not used the website.

Seventy per cent (80) of NQSWs had found the website very or fairly easy to navigate
compared to 56 per cent (30) of supervisors/assessors. Eleven per cent of NQSWs and
supervisor/assessors overall found the website not easy to navigate.

Those NQSWs who had indicated it was not easy to navigate were asked for the reason
for their comment and how it could be improved. Their responses included:

- Difficulty in finding information on the website (4 respondents). For example:

  'I’m still trying to find useful examples of the reflective practice reports as there
  are some examples of what not to do, and it’s hard to find one that’s an example
  of what to do’ and

  ‘Finding templates is difficult’.

- The website is too ‘busy’/complex/needs a clearer structure (4 respondents). For
  example:

  ‘I have found the website very complex with too many links and the expectations
  not laid out very clearly. Some of the links take you round in circles and are not
  easy to navigate. There are also too many organisations involved with too many
  external links, including HCPC, Skills for Care and TCSW’.

- There is difficulty in navigating between pages (2 respondents).

  ‘I would prefer it when you clicked on a topic it took you to a new page, and
  would prefer the options to be on the left’ and

  ‘Things are not clear enough and it’s tricky to navigate between the different
  pages. You get confused. There’s too much information which needs to be
  broken up more’.

- Files need to be put together in a more easily accessible format (2 respondents).
  For example:

  ‘It would be useful to keep documents and downloads together in folders so that
  they are more easily accessible. For example, the assessment page is a block of
  text with embedded links to case studies, etc, it would be better if a list of
  documents was available down the side so that they can be readily accessed’.

Comments from individual NQSWs included:

‘There are too many links it seems to jump about all over the place’.

‘Huge quantity of information to be absorbed in a short space of time. Could be
made more succinct’.

The website is not easy to navigate to the specific areas you require. Example, I
have just completed the three month review and was really unsure which
document to complete. I had researched that specific issue and was unable to
find the answer’.
‘Difficult for people not familiar with the Skills for Care website to find the ASYE element - when on the right page some of the terminology is confusing - eg Holistic Assessment is titled Assessor template’.

‘As I am visually impaired the reader I use does not work well with the website’.

Supervisors/assessors were also asked, in the interim questionnaire whether there was information that would be particularly useful to them that was missing from the Skills for Care website the ASYE topic pages and 19 per cent (8) said there was, specifically:

‘I would like to see examples of a Practice Learning Agreement and a Professional Development Plan’.

‘An overview of what documents are available and a simple flow chart of what needs to be completed at which stage’.

‘A summary of research on the needs of NQ professionals and what is proven to help best in transition to practice’.

What happens when you have a candidate refusing to undertake the programme once started. What are the implications for contracts - should the ASYE be on an employment contract? Do we refer them to HCPC for refusing to comply with CPD and social work values and best practice? Should we hold ’suitability/fitness to practice/readiness to practice’ processes?’

‘Completed examples of three month and six month reviews’.

‘I would find it useful to see a completed ASYE report. I am aware that there are reports on the website but having looked at them, it didn’t seem to fit with the templates we are expected to complete’.

‘Examples of progress from beginning of the ASYE to the end will be helpful’.

### 3.8 Main sources of information on the ASYE

According to the initial questionnaire the main source of information on the ASYE for NQSWs was ‘Skills for Care’. This was higher in Cohort Two (35 per cent - 18) compared to Cohort One (21 per cent - 13). For a further quarter of NQSWs overall, the main source of information on the ASYE was their ‘Workforce Development Manager’. This was higher in Cohort One (36 per cent - 22) compared to Cohort Two (18 per cent - 9).

Overall, well over a half (59 per cent - 62) of individual NQSWs were dependent on information on the ASYE from within their work setting, including Workforce Development Managers.

In terms of other sources of information, one respondent mentioned information from the local university, and another a local seminar. Seven respondents additionally mentioned other internal sources of information from within their employing organisation and four mention regular meetings with other NQSWs/peer support.

The interim questionnaire asked NQSWs what had been the main source of information on the ASYE since they completed their Learning Agreement. For 21 per cent (19) it had been their Assessor, followed by Skills for Care (18 per cent -16) and for 14 per cent (13) their Workforce Development Manager. A further 14 per cent (13) mentioned ‘other sources of information’. These other sources included ASYE groups, mentoring sessions and Learning Sets as well as training sessions/workshops.
According to the initial questionnaire, the main source of information on the ASYE for supervisors/assessors was the ‘Workforce Development Manager’ (35 per cent overall - 19) though this varied between Cohort One (28 per cent - 10) and Cohort Two (47 per cent - 9). ‘Skills for Care’ was the main source of information on the ASYE for just over a quarter overall (27 per cent - 15).

Again, including the ‘Workforce Development Manager’, over a half (51 per cent - 28) of individual supervisors/assessors were dependent on information on the ASYE from within their work setting.

At the time of the interim questionnaire for supervisors and assessors the main source of information was now ‘Skills for Care’ (68 per cent - 30) followed by ‘Colleagues’ (39 per cent - 39), their ‘Workforce Development Manager’ (36 per cent - 16) and ‘TCSW’ (32 per cent - 14). Other sources of information were mentioned by 25 per cent (11) and included internal training sessions, booklets and local procedures and information.

3.9 How clearly the scheme and its benefits have been described

In terms of how clearly the scheme and its benefits have been described by given organisations, from the initial questionnaire three quarters of NQSWs (76 per cent - 86) considered the description from Skills for Care to be very or fairly clear. Two thirds overall (66 per cent - 75) also thought that the description from TCSW was very or fairly clear. For both Skills for Care and TCSW, around 10 per cent (9 per cent Skills for Care, 12 per cent for the TCSW) thought the information was not clear. In both cases there were large numbers of those who ‘don’t know’ which was consistent with earlier findings of individuals who have not used the Skills for Care website.

In comparison, whilst 68 per cent of NQSWs overall (77) thought the scheme and its benefits had been described very or fairly clearly by their employer, almost a third of NQSWs (31 per cent - 35) thought the information from their employer was not clear.

According to supervisors/assessors overall in their responses to the initial questionnaire, 70 per cent (37) indicated that the ASYE and its benefits had been described very or fairly clearly by Skills for Care and 53 per cent (27) by the TCSW. As with the NQSWs, significant numbers stated they ‘don’t know’ and eight per cent for Skills for Care and 18 per cent for TCSW indicated the description is not clear.

Whilst 73 per cent overall (38) felt the scheme and its benefits had been described very or fairly clearly by their employer, it should be noted that 27 per cent overall (14) felt it had not been clearly described by the employer.

This lack of clarify from their employer is important when considering the earlier finding that the majority of both NQSWs and supervisors/assessors were reliant for information on the ASYE from sources within their employing organisation.

Evidence from the case studies in relation to how well the benefits of the ASYE have been described

The important role of Universities in preparing student social workers

In Redcar and Cleveland there was evidence that Universities are playing a key role explaining the ASYE to their student social workers. One assessor commented on how well informed their ASYEs had been by their Universities:
'Every applicant knows and asks about ASYE - they now come to us expecting quality support and commitment. This can only be a good thing for the service.'

3.10 Having enough information about the ASYE

In the initial questionnaire responses, 40 per cent (46) of NQSWs overall indicated that they did not have enough information on the ASYE and there was little difference between the two Cohorts. The information they required at that time is summarised below:

- Guidance on completing the portfolio/required pro formas/other documentation (11 respondents). For example:

  'How to evidence/what is classed as evidence. Pro formas that my employer want us to use'.

  'Pro formas and requirements from my employer'.

  'More information on what exactly is required in the portfolio'.

- More structure/clarity on the process/simpler guidelines (8 respondents). For example:

  'A simple guide is needed with a check list of what is actually required, with step by step instructions. An on-line assessment tool listing requirements, that can be submitted during and at the end would also be useful' and

  'I would just like it to be more structured. Children’s services have training outlined through the ASYE but there seems to be little put in place in regards to Adult services'.

- Guidance on the actual requirements/what is actually expected of NQSWs and their supervisors on ASYE (7 respondents). For example:

  'What the actual requirements are - what things are national requirements and what things are local to my organisation. Clearer guidelines on what needs to be done for the ASYE as some of my NQSW friends in other councils are doing completely different things to me’ and

  'What is expected of both NQSW and their supervisors during the ASYE programme'.

- Clearer guidance from their employer in general (7 respondents) for example:

  'Anything!! I am five months into ASYE and have not been provided with any information on what I am actually supposed to be doing, what evidence I should be collecting, what should be contained in my portfolio and what support I am actually able to have under ASYE’.

  'Employers need to be better informed about the requirements and processes. It has felt more like I’m supporting my organisation through the process than them supporting me'.
There has been little information from our employers about how to complete the portfolio, so we are left with little clarity about what is expected of us. When we ask, it appears that our managers do not know either. I take responsibility for not doing research on ASYE, but I was not even aware that there was a website/on-line resource.

- Guidance on what has to be produced at the end/what happens at the end of ASYE (4 respondents). For example:
  - ‘Further information regarding exactly what is required, format in which work is to be submitted and clearer guidance around the final assessment’ and
  - ‘Whilst I appreciate this is the first year of the ASYE programme, I am still unclear on the work I need to produce at the end’.

Other individual NQSWs would have liked more information on the amount of study time an ASYE should receive, guidance and descriptors for the interim reviews, examples of completed reflective supervision/direct observation reports, whether the ASYE is nationally recognised and will increase job prospects, and guidance on observations involving vulnerable individuals, e.g., the terminally ill. One individual ended a negative statement on a positive note:

- ‘I have answered no as when I initially started my job the ASYE was just about to be implemented so was confusing initially to the expectations of the ASYE student and the assessment process/evidence requirement. However, in the last few months both the supervisor and Skills for Care have improved the information available in these areas’.

At the time of the initial questionnaire, 22 per cent (11) of supervisors/assessors overall felt they did not have enough information on the ASYE to fulfil their role. The additional information they would have liked is:

- Criteria for assessment and completion of the portfolio (3 respondents).
- Clarification on what is required because the employer and university want two different things (2 respondents).
- General clarification on what is expected (2 respondents).

And from individual supervisors/assessors:

- Further support sessions internally.
- More guidance on how to document individual supervision sessions.
- What information is required for holistic assessment.
- Further guidance on what is expected of a Reflective Supervisor.

By the time of the interim questionnaire 30 per cent (27) of NQSWs and 18 per cent (8) of supervisors/assessors overall still required further information on the ASYE.

For NQSWs the information they would like is:

- Clarification on the portfolio, what is required and how it will be assessed, what is a pass or fail (8 respondents).
• Consistency in the rules that are applied (3 respondents).
• Clarification on the reflective essay (2 respondents).
• More discussion/further guidance around the PCF (2 respondents).

And from individual NQSWs:
• Guidance on completing the four reflective practice documents.
• Accurate information on what is required for templates.
• Implications for the NQSW of failing the academic or practice element.

For supervisors/assessors the information they would like is:
• Guidance on the process and outcome if a candidate withdraws themselves from the ASYE.
• Indications of where candidates should be at certain points.
• Current research/practice issues relevant to PCF.
• Information on how the university assesses the academic component and how the local authority (LA) is to assess the practice component.

One supervisor/assessor said:
‘I would like the agency I am working for to be clearer about their ASYE processes, procedures and timescales’.

The experiences of the Private, Voluntary and Independent Organisation (PVI) sector indicate that engaging managers was problematic within the original NQSW Programmes. According to the report prepared for the evaluation by The PLC, managers rarely attended briefing sessions and were often ‘hard-to-reach’. This is not intended as a critical observation but recognition of the multiple demands on managers’ time especially in small agencies. This has improved with the ASYE for several reasons.

First, there is a clearer role for managers within the monitoring and review process. Secondly, the PLC Co-ordinator attended the initial Learning Agreement meeting and established a robust relationship with managers, supervisors and NQSWs. A PLC representative also attends all review meetings which ensures a continuity of dialogue with managers. It is important to engage line managers in the process as a strong three-way relationship between the line manager, the NQSW and the supervisor would appear to provide the best possible foundation for successful implementation of the ASYE framework.

Supportive line managers can ensure that there is agency-wide support for NQSWs and that opportunities for shadowing and mentoring are provided. They can also play a key role in protecting workloads and allocating study time to newly qualified workers.

3.11 Interviews with non-participating employers

The last part of this chapter looks at the results of a series of 12 telephone interviews conducted with a mixture of employers who, at the time of interview, were not
participating in the ASYE. Interviews included five local authorities, and a mixture of PVIs and health settings. The aim of the interviews was to determine the reason why these employers had not participated in the ASYE, whether they had seen the various communications and supporting materials and what would persuade them to become involved.

**Reasons for non-participation in the ASYE**

Four of the local authorities had NQSWs registered in Children’s Services but not Adult Services, one had not become involved because they have no social workers in Adult Services.

A specialist health organisation involved in the interviews has only just found out about the ASYE and that they could register individuals on it - they stated:

> 'We did not know that we could access this as we are in the voluntary sector’.

Two other specialist organisations interviewed, including a specialist hospital, had never heard of the ASYE but do employ social workers.

A social enterprise interviewee stated that although they had previously employed many social workers in the adult sector in recent years these numbers had reduced significantly. Many of their social workers are on short term contracts and work also for other agencies. Business margins are tight and the benefits of the ASYE do not seem to them to warrant the additional costs in the current financial climate.

A Primary Care Trust (PCT) interviewee (who would be leading on assessment) confirmed at interview that currently they had no ASYE registrations though they have a considerable number of social workers. Towards the end of the interview a colleague interrupted the interviewee to point out there actually were ASYE registrations - a surprise to the interviewee who is supposed to be co-ordinating the ASYE internally. Whether they are registered or not is still unclear.¹¹

The three other interviewees state that the ASYE is not relevant to them, in spite of the fact that two of them employ social workers.

**Attendance at any of the communications events relating to the ASYE**

Four of the local authorities had attended information events, but none of the other interviewees had done so.

One interviewee said:

> 'I attended two Skills for Care events...They were very useful and the information was cascaded through the organisation through our Social Work Reform Task Group’.

And another:

> 'I attended various events and discovered quite a bit of new information - but it made me feel a bit confused, especially around the link with the licensing of social workers and the down grading of this'.

¹¹ This is an interesting reflection on awareness about ASYE within an organisation that has been repeated throughout the evaluation with others, particularly when pursuing the local research governance approvals necessary to conduct the fieldwork.
Awareness of the Skills for Care website section on the ASYE

Seven of the interviewees had looked at the Skills for Care website and the available materials. Comments included:

'I used the website but found it confusing. I kept being pushed from one link to another'.

'I enjoyed the case studies; they are useful'.

'The website is generally good, but it can be difficult to navigate. Sometimes links do not work. It takes perseverance'.

'The website is quite useful and was a timely resource. The Learning Agreement and information on registration and funding is quite good as is the material on assessment. I thought that the case studies were useless; they did not reflect the way in which we would handle things'.

One found the website very difficult to navigate: 'I can usually find what I want eventually, but it takes a time. I've now put shortcuts to the pages I use most frequently on my computer desktop to save time'. This interviewee also felt that the FAQs, though helpful, can be a bit vague at times - in particular about whether or not more experienced social workers should be included.

The interviewee at the specialist health organisation commented that they get lots of bulk e-mails so it is easy to miss things. In relation to the website:

'Yes, I am aware of the resources on the site. I have looked at everything (I think) but the problems with the information are the fact that it seems to be written from a 'social worker perspective'. I am an employer, not a social worker, so some of the knowledge base, although fine for social workers may not work for others'.

The interviewee went on to say:

'I also found it a problem that material was scattered in different places. What I'd like is an Employers guide of how to get involved and make ASYE a success'.

Main sources of information on the ASYE

Seven interviewees were able to respond to this area of questioning and Skills for Care features in all of their responses along with a mixture of other organisations including TCSW, local ASYE Implementation Group (which is attended by Skills for Care), the Social Work Action Network (SWAN) and others in neighbouring organisations who are involved in the process. Comments included from local authority interviewees:

'The big push for this comes from NQSWs - they are increasingly expecting employers to be offering ASYE. For us the benefits are that it makes us more attractive as an employer. For the NQSWs it enhances their progression. However, I think that the benefits to employers need to be more clearly presented'.

'We would have been lost without them (Skills for Care Officers)'.

'Not enough has been made of the benefits of the ASYE and of its effects in raising standards'.
‘More could be done in terms of stressing benefits to employing organisations; this scheme can have a major impact on the Line Managers of NQSWs so the benefits must clearly be seen to outweigh these’.

Other interviewees commented:

‘It would be helpful if there could be more joining up in the messages between the Department for Education and Health - especially around funding’.

‘The local learning and development lead from the local authority was very helpful. I also got good support from Skills for Care, but I felt that knowledge was often held by different people so I went from one person to another. What I needed was a straightforward guide - to make me feel confident that we could implement this scheme properly. What I needed was: What’s in it for me? How to implement - step-by-step. This could be usefully placed in an employer pack in a prominent, easy to access location’.

For another interviewee, still at the exploratory stage with the ASYE, having been tasked by her line manager to look into it, the concerns she would like answered in particular were:

- What are the benefits to social workers, their organisations and clients from participating?
- What is expected of mentors/assessors (time especially)?
- Are there exemplar forms available, eg completed Learning Agreements and assessor reports?

**Awareness of the PCF and the standards it contains for the ASYE**

Seven interviewees were aware of the PCF, but some were not familiar with the detail and so could not comment further. One interviewee commented:

‘Yes, very aware. This is very relevant but there are things missing. I believe that there should be more information on guidance of responsibility to the organisation - absence, punctuality, acting as an ambassador for the organisation and so on’.

Another interviewee liked the statements and thinks they are relevant on the whole; the main issue is that they are quite high-level and generic so they need to develop examples and clarifications to show how they work in their own particular context. However, they recognised the need to create a common language across the profession.

**What would make them participate in the ASYE?**

Six of the interviewees confirmed their intention to register on the ASYE. Another organisation stated that inspection pressures and/or pressure from NQSWs would make them participate. One who is undecided said:

‘I need to see a compelling business case for my organisation; what’s in it for us and our customers and is it worthwhile - this is especially important when resources are limited’.
Amount and quality of information on the ASYE

Some interviewees referred interviewers to their responses to the earlier question. Comments from others include from local authority interviewees:

'We have enough information but I’d like a recipe to help me cut through the information. I feel overloaded - there is too much unfocussed clutter’.

'The main deficit is QA and standardisation - partnership working is helping but there is still some way to go. It would be good to have a document which specified the ‘musts’ from the ‘nice to do’”.

'We just need to train our line managers. We will start with NQSWs who have permanent posts - because managerial resources are a constraint on implementation. A guide to cost-effective implementation would be useful’.

'We have enough information as we have built up a strong base using our Children’s Service experience’.

3.12 Overview

In this chapter we have examined the views of NQSWs and supervisors/assessors in relation to how the ASYE was introduced to them and their views on the documentation and supporting communication that was designed to illustrate the ASYE process. We have also described the responses from those that are currently not engaged in the ASYE and detailed some of their comments and reasons for non-participation. Examples of good practice from the case studies have also been included in this chapter.

The next chapter sets out the evaluation findings on implementation, delivery and assessment.
Chapter 4: Implementation, Delivery and Assessment

Key findings from this chapter include:

Just over half of NQSWs felt reflective supervision had met their expectations but just over a quarter stated not always. At the time of the initial questionnaire, almost all NQSWs had agreed the frequency and duration of their supervision sessions. The vast majority of supervisors/assessors confirmed overall supervision sessions were being delivered in accordance with those agreements and this was confirmed by NQSWs.

Halfway through their ASYE, just under two thirds of NQSWs said they were receiving sufficient feedback on their progress.

The vast majority of NQSWs stated their supervision was supporting their reflective practice either very or quite well.

Midway through their ASYE just under a third of NQSWs were not clear what they had to do to meet the standard and pass the final assessment.

The majority of supervisors/assessors were very or fairly confident in their ability to provide reflective professional supervision. At the time of the interim questionnaire almost a half felt they were not receiving enough supervision and support from their employer to help them deliver reflective professional supervision. By the final questionnaire, just over two fifths felt the support received for their supervision/assessment activities did not meet their expectations.

The majority of NQSWs found their experience of workload management to be positive initially though this had dropped slightly by the time of the interim questionnaire. For most, their experience was how they had expected workload management to take place. By the final questionnaire only just under a half said their workload management was conducted as set out in their learning agreement.

For just under three quarters of supervisors/assessors workload management was proceeding as they had originally anticipated and in the final questionnaire over three quarters of supervisors/assessors stated the workload management was either very or quite effective.

The majority of NQSWs and supervisors/assessors stated protected development time was as set out in their Learning Agreement.

The vast majority of NQSWs and supervisors/assessors were aware of the PCF and standards described for the ASYE and consider the Capability Statements as either very or fairly suitable. The vast majority of supervisors/assessors confirmed progressive assessment against the standards described in the PCF is taking place and were also very or quite confident in their ability to assess against the standards and to provide holistic assessment.

Just over half of NQSWs and three quarters of supervisors/assessors had found it very or quite easy to change from a competency-based assessment to holistic assessment for capability. Just over three quarters of NQSWs and the majority of supervisors indicated that in the development of professional judgement and confidence a holistic rather than competency-based assessment is preferable.

Almost three quarters of supervisors/assessors considered their employer’s arrangement for assuring the quality of assessment decisions worked very or quite well.
4.1 Introduction

In this chapter we look at the area of implementation, delivery and assessment of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (the ASYE). This encompasses reflective professional supervision, workload management, protected development time, the Professional Capability Framework (PCF), holistic assessment and quality of the assessment decision.

The findings in this chapter are based on the results from the initial and interim questionnaire surveys with Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) and their supervisors/assessors from both Cohorts, the results from the final questionnaires completed by those in Cohort One, the case studies and the report written for the evaluation by the Practice Learning Consortium (PLC).

4.2 Reflective professional supervision

A list of topics was established that might be expected to be seen in reflective supervision. They were:

- Review and reflection one each of your/their cases.
- Advice and guidance on more difficult cases.
- Workload Management.
- Discussion of your/their training and development needs.
- Provision of support to ensure emotional well-being and resilience.
- Provision of constructive challenge.
- Models for developing reflection during practice and following practice.
- Help in applying theoretical approaches or explanations to your/their practice.
- Agency policies and procedures.
- Your/their performance against the PCF and progress in assessment.
- Evaluation of feedback from people who use services and carers.

Initial questions were asked of both NQSWs and supervisors/assessors in relation to this list. These were then followed up in the interim questionnaire.

In the initial questionnaire, NQSWs were asked which of the list of given topics they anticipate would be included in their reflective supervision.

All of the topics scored highly 'Discussion of your training and development needs’, ‘Advice and guidance on more difficult cases’ and ‘Your performance against the Professional Capability Framework and progress in assessment’, (91 per cent, 87 per cent and 79 per cent respectively) being the most anticipated inclusions by NQSWs in reflective professional supervision. Other individual NQSWs also mentioned application of legislation, detailed records of cases discussed, external reflective practice, opportunities to supplement sessions to enable them to develop and occasional workshops.
This question was asked again in the interim questionnaire. ‘Provision of constructive challenge’ had gone down from 72 per cent at the time of the initial questionnaire, to 39 per cent and ‘Evaluation of feedback from people who use services and carers’ had gone down from 61 per cent to 33 per cent (Figure 4.1).

**Figure 4.1: NQSWs only: ‘Which of the following do you anticipate will be included in your reflective professional supervision?’ compared to ‘Which of the following has been included in your reflective supervision to-date?’ (NQSWs multiple responses)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review and reflection one each of your cases</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>74</td>
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<td>Advice and guidance on more difficult cases</td>
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<td>87</td>
<td>83</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workload Management</td>
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<td>75</td>
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<td>Discussion of your training and development needs</td>
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<td>91</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>87</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provision of support to ensure emotional well-being and resilience</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>58</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provision of constructive challenge</td>
<td>82</td>
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<td>Models for developing reflection during practice and following practice</td>
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<td>61</td>
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<td>Help in applying theoretical approaches or explanations to your practice</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>62</td>
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<td>Agency policies and procedures</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your performance against the Professional Capability Framework and progress in assessment</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>59</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluation of feedback from people who use services and carers</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Source: HOST Evaluation of the ASYE for Skills for Care, 2013**

In the final questionnaire, NQSWs were asked if the reflective supervision received during their ASYE met their expectations. Just over half (52 per cent - 17) said it had, over a quarter (27 per cent - 9) said not always and 18 per cent (6) said it had not. Respondents were asked to provide what they considered to be a good example of the support they received and most referred to the quality of their supervision or reflection discussion sessions regularity of sessions was also highlighted. Examples of their comments include:
‘Time plus expertise from Supervisor, to discuss cases - to analyse dynamics, identify values involved, to consider theory and stratagems for dealing with the cases, and to reflect back on practice to date in these terms rather than in an organisational/managerial fashion’.

‘Very good quality regular constructive support, couldn’t have asked for better’.

‘Discussion of cases in reflective manor applying theory and research. Open discussion of cases’.

‘My Assessor was able to provide me with space to reflect on issues raised during a piece of practice and its impact upon the service user, carer, myself and to make connections with wider social, political and organisational factors. I was challenged to take on cases which were initially daunting, but with support and guidance I have grown in confidence in my skills and abilities and in relation to organisational protocols etc. I am now much more autonomous and happy to use my professional judgement, knowing I have good back-up’.

For those who said not always the main reasons for their answer was heavy caseloads and lack of time impinging on these sessions. For example:

‘Due to limited time in supervision and high caseload to discuss there was sometimes not enough time for reflective supervision’.

‘Due to team workload, the supervision has had to concentrate on operational advice for cases and therefore has not been reflective. However, the group supervisions that were arranged with (name of supervisor) were very reflective and beneficial’.

‘Quite often it was cancelled and postponed due to mentor’s other commitments and responsibilities as a member of the management team. One session was rescheduled three times’.

In their initial questionnaire, supervisors/assessors were also asked which of the set of given topics they anticipate would be included in their reflective professional supervision sessions with NQSWs, ‘Discussion of their training and development needs’ and ‘Their performance against the PCF and progress in assessment’ again featured highly (85 per cent and 81 per cent overall respectively) but also ‘ Provision of support to ensure emotional well-being and resilience’ (83%) and ‘Provision of constructive challenge’ (81%).

The interim questionnaire asked which of these topics had been included in their reflective supervision to date. The responses suggest that ‘Discussion of their training and development needs’ had gone up from 76 per cent to 87 per cent, and ‘Workload Management’ had gone up from 74 per cent to 89 per cent. ‘Advice and guidance on more difficult cases’ had gone up from 76 to 87 per cent. However, ‘ Provision of constructive challenge’ had gone down from 81 per cent to 68 per cent. ‘ Provision of support to ensure emotional well-being and resilience’ had gone down from 83 per cent to 76 per cent. ‘Help in applying theoretical approaches or explanations to their practice’ from 78 per cent to 63 per cent and ‘Evaluation of feedback from people who use services and carers’ had gone down from 74 per cent to 53 per cent (Figure 4.2).
Figure 4.2: Supervisors/assessors only: ‘Which of the following do you anticipate will be included in your reflective professional supervision?’ compared to ‘Which of the following has been included in your reflective supervision to-date?’ (Supervisors/assessors multiple responses)

<table>
<thead>
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<td>28</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>76</td>
<td>33</td>
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Source: HOST Evaluation of the ASYE for Skills for Care, 2013

The interim questionnaire asked supervisors/assessors whether overall supervision sessions were being delivered in accordance with the agreed frequency and duration. Eighty eight per cent (37) said they were. The main reasons they were not taking place was time and work pressure.

The final questionnaire asked how well the provision of reflective professional supervision worked with their NQSWs. All respondents indicated it went very or quite well. What made it successful was identified as:

- Providing a structure/framework for critical analysis.
- Being responsive to changing needs.
Commitment from both sides to engage in the process.
Good working relationship with line manager.
Time for discussion and listening.
Regular meetings.
Ensuring time was made available.

At the time of the initial questionnaire, 93 per cent (106) of NQSWs overall had agreed the frequency and duration of their supervision sessions, the remainder had not.

In addition to one-to-one supervision, the main other types of support being received by NQSWs at that time, selected by them from an indicative list in the initial questionnaire, included:

- ‘Workshops/professional seminars’ which was indicated by almost two thirds of respondents overall (61 per cent - 69).
- ‘Action Learning Set’ (29 per cent - 33).
- ‘Mentoring’ (27 per cent - 31).
- Buddying (18 per cent - 20), though this varied from 14 per cent (9) in Cohort One to 22 per cent (11) in Cohort Two.

Ten per cent overall (11) indicated they were involved in none of the listed activities. In terms of other things that NQSWs anticipated would be included, eight respondents mentioned team meetings/peer support.

In the Private, Voluntary and Independent Organisation (PVI) sector, The PLC manages an Action Learning Set for NQSWs which provides another forum for critical reflection on practice. It also brings together NQSWs working in very different settings and facilitates the sharing of experiences and good practice in developing reflective practice.

The interim report asked NQSWs whether they were receiving supervision sessions as agreed in their Learning Agreement. Eighty three per cent (73) said they were. The same question was asked of supervisors/assessors and 88 per cent (37) said they were.

Where NQSWs indicated their supervision sessions were not as agreed in their Learning Agreement they were asked why not. All of the responses related to difficulties with supervisors not having the time to provide support and sessions being cancelled. For example:

‘Supervision often gets cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances and other demands placed on the Mentor’s time’.

Another respondent also referred to workload and its impact more widely, not just on supervision sessions:

‘Supervision is infrequent due to assessor’s high workload and my own high workload at times meaning it is difficult for us to always find time to meet. The service is under immense pressure and I do not feel I am getting protected time. For example, I have only been able to take one study day since September 2012’.
One respondent stated it is ‘not team culture to have regular supervision - especially reflective’. Another stated they have received no supervision:

The issue of time constraints was reflected in the responses from supervisors/assessors who stated supervision sessions were not happening as agreed. One stated:

‘Time constraints on both sides. Too much work and not enough staff. Slow systems and overly complicated pathways’.

The interim questionnaire asked NQSWs if they were receiving sufficient feedback on their progress and 59 per cent (75) said they were. If they responded that they were not, they were asked what feedback they would like to receive. Two respondents said ‘any’.

Two respondents had some issues with their supervision:

‘Would like more positive praise, feel supervision is a chore for the supervisor that needs to be done and move on. This partly as supervisor role is so spread she does not have the time or the commitment’.

‘Whether I am on track, it’s not clear. I’m not sure my supervisor knows the criteria we are expected to meet’.

Others would like more formal, regular feedback, for example:

‘Feedback is not formal. I assume that if there are areas of my practice that have caused concerns my assessor will discuss with me, but I am assuming this. I have received some positive feedback but would like more constructive feedback on a regular basis to help me develop in my first year’.

‘Regular feedback from supervisor and Team Manager’.

‘I would like specific constructive feedback that I can use to improve my practice rather than the general feedback that I am doing well’.

‘I would like to receive more critical feedback. It has been hard to improve my practice as the feedback has been so positive.’

‘More constructive feedback on my practice and written reflections would be helpful to me. Sometimes I am unsure if I approach things the right way or am as competent as I should be at this point in ASYE. However, this could be more to do with my own anxieties.’

The interim questionnaire asked NQSWs how well their supervision was supporting their reflective practice. Eighty five per cent (78) said very or quite well. Twelve per cent (11) said not at all well. The main difficulties were in actually getting any reflective supervision or time to engage in it owing to volume of work. Ideas on how this might be overcome include having separate reflective supervision from case load supervision, reflective practice groups within the team and working more closely with their manager.

NQSWs that said their supervision was supporting their reflective practice ‘very well’ provided examples of the reasons for their response:

‘My assessor is very knowledgeable about various aspects of social work. She is keen to discuss wider areas of social work eg carers’ attitudes to their caring role, as well as more specific issues linked to my cases, eg family dynamics in a
complex case. I enjoy discussing these issues too, so it’s very good and very interesting’.

‘Although initially I did not receive hardly any supervision (due to the team’s huge workload) this has now been addressed. I receive two types of supervision - one from in-team supervisor who is very experienced and this is an excellent opportunity to manage and reflect on my case load. The other is group supervision sessions with our assessor. These sessions are ‘highly’ beneficial and concentrate on reflection, theory, policy and procedures. This unfortunately comes to an end after six months’.

‘Time and support to reflect; advice on how to develop skills and allowed time to reflect’.

I have now been allocated an ASYE supervisor. On completion of my last questionnaire I don’t think that this was in place. During our supervision, I am able to reflect on my case work. Rather than just what should be done and other procedural factors’.

‘My professional supervisor is very supportive and dedicating a lot of her time to me. I am allowed time to reflect and feel I can discuss any difficulties in practice with her. My Line Manager is not supportive in this way’.

‘Positive and supportive attitude of professional supervisor (Line Manager) and her own commitment to reflective practice and learning’.

The interim questionnaire also asked if NQSWs were clear about what they had to do to meet the standard and pass the final assessment. Just under three quarters (71 per cent - 65) said they were and 29 per cent (27) said they were not. For those who said they were not clear, the majority referred to the need for more information in completing the paperwork, structure of assignments and portfolio content. Three respondents mentioned the need for more support from their assessor, for example:

‘My assessor has just been trained up on a two day course to be qualified to assess so whilst she is very nice and wants to help, her knowledge and understanding around the expectations and standards of work is limited. It is not her role to help me with that, her only role is to assess me apparently. I need a supervisor to seek guidance about the ASYE. At the moment I ask my other friends who are on ASYE for this guidance’.

At the time of the initial questionnaire, the majority of (80 per cent - 44) supervisors/assessors were very or fairly confident in their ability to provide reflective professional supervision. Eleven per cent were not confident. Of those who said they were very or fairly confident, the main thing enabling them to develop this confidence was their ‘Own experience of supervision/mentoring’ (39 per cent overall - 17), ‘External training’ (32 per cent overall - 14 - but slightly higher for Cohort Two than Cohort One) and ‘In-house training’ (14 per cent - 6).

If they said they were not confident, they were asked what would improve their ability to provide reflective professional supervision. Responses were given by two respondents, both suggesting training and, in one case, further support and guidance from their line manager.

The interim questionnaire asked whether they felt that they were receiving enough supervision and support from their employer to help them deliver reflective professional supervision. Just under a half (46 per cent - 19) said they were not. The reasons for the negative responses were:
• Lack of priority given to the ASYE/knowledge about the ASYE within the organisation (5 respondents).

• Pressures of work prevent supervision and support (3 respondents).

• No training has been given (3 respondents).

• No support available (2 respondents).

Comments include:

'I am not aware of any additional information sessions, workshops, etc to support me in the reflective supervision. I have purchased some books to assist me'.

'No support provided as a supervisor even though supervisions have had to be increased as per Learning Agreement. Extra support has also been provided by me in between supervisions on a regular basis but this is not being acknowledged by (employer). Supervisions often take longer than the recommended time'.

'Probably because I have not asked for this. Supervision does not usually cover any reflective practice or any support to provide reflections sessions with the NQSW'.

'Because no-one really understands ASYE or embraces it in our organisation other than those directly involved such as workforce development, the ASYE project Manager and Project Co-ordinator. I am not directly supervised by these people and am a little isolated'.

'I am relatively new to my supervisory role and have not had detailed specific training in relation to reflective supervision. In addition, I do not feel that I have always had the best supervision and as such do not necessarily have sound role models to draw evidence from'.

And finally:

'I am a freelance worker employed solely as an ASYE mentor/assessor and receive no supervision'.

The final questionnaire asked whether the support received to undertake their supervision/assessment activities within their employing organisation during the ASYE met their expectations. Just under two fifths (38 per cent - 8) said it had, just over two fifths (43 per cent - 9) said it had not and the remainder didn’t know.

Examples of support received to undertake supervision/assessment activities included workshops, sessions arranged by local university, peer discussion sessions, direct support from a line manager and clarification on roles.

For those who said the support did not meet their expectations, the main reasons were lack of clear guidance and lack of support provided. One individual stated:

'Continuous professional development is one of the tools that enhance practice and support for practitioners to keep abreast of the situation as well as enhance capabilities. The organisation is not in agreement to support me with further training at this stage and I find this marginalising'.
4.3 Workload Management

In response to the initial questionnaire, nine per cent (10) of NQSWs stated that their employer was using a specific Workload Management Tool, just over half (54 per cent - 62) said they do not, 37 per cent (42) didn’t know. Eleven per cent (6) of supervisors/assessors stated there was a specific Workload Management Tool used by their employer for the ASYE with 72 per cent (39) saying they do not and 17 per cent (9) said they didn’t know.

Those who indicated ‘yes’ (NQSWs and supervisors/assessors) were asked to name the specific the Workload Management Tool in place. Most were unable to do so. One respondent mentioned MABEL, another Infoview. Two respondents mentioned case load weighting.

In relation to workload management, NQSWs were asked in the initial questionnaire how they expected their workload to be agreed and allocated. Responses were:

- In discussion with either/or both their Manager, supervisor, Practice Educator, allocations lead, team leader or a combination of these (51 respondents).
- There is no set agreement (23 respondents).
- Ten per cent reduction to allow for the ASYE activities (22 respondents).
- Agreed at start of the ASYE and in Learning Agreement (6 respondents).
- Not sure (5 respondents).
- Using Workload Management Tool.

Comments from NQSWs included:

‘Workload was agreed at the start of ASYE and this is protected. Cases are allocated to ensure that I am not taking on more than I can manage. Support is provided as necessary with more complex cases’.

‘Discussed and agreed in my Learning Agreement - slight reduction in cases but with more complex cases to ensure my learning can develop in relation to the service’.

‘10 per cent reduction however it is unclear 10 per cent of what and finding that I still do not have enough time to keep up with ASYE in work time, do a lot at home’.

‘We do not have a set caseload limit that I am aware of, it’s more a case of monitoring how complex the cases are and whether we are coping okay. However, due to pressure on the team we are allocated cases, even when we have outlined that we are struggling. Despite this I feel comfortable enough to inform my supervisor that I am struggling and I ensure that this is documented on my supervision notes’.

‘It is expected that we have a reduced caseload (by 10%). However, in reality this is very difficult to achieve for various reasons. 1. Due to the government cuts, the team that I work in has been reduced and therefore has a very high number of service users per member of staff. 2. It is not clear as to what a ‘normal’ caseload is, and therefore how can this be reduced by 10 per cent. 3. Some cases generate much more work than others, and therefore someone could
have 30 cases that do not need much work doing for them, and someone else could only have 15 that were much more complex and require a great deal of work. Therefore, the 'figures' would show that the person with 15 service users has a 50 per cent workload reduction to the person with 30 service users'.

'My employer is using the agency’s Workload Management Tool which has a reduced caseload for newly qualified social workers'.

The interim questionnaire asked how their experience of Workload Management was to-date. Whilst for the majority (89 per cent - 84) it was very or quite positive, for 11 per cent (10) it was not at all positive.

A further interim question asked if this was how they expected Workload Management to take place based upon their Learning Agreement and 79 per cent (71) said yes, but just over a fifth (21 per cent - 19) said no. A follow up question asked if they responded ‘no’ in what way does it differ? The seven respondents all mentioned issues with workload pressure and/or staff shortages. Examples include:

'There is absolutely 'NO WAY’ that the amount of work that is required on the ASYE...can be completed in the allocated study time of 0.5 days per month’.

'Staff shortages within the team has led to my taking on workload in excess of my capacity (I work part-time)’.

'I have raised on quite a few occasions that I feel overloaded, stressed with my Line Manager. I do not feel my caseload is adjusted sufficiently for a NQSW. I get time off to attend training/CPD activities I just end up with even more work to cram into a shorter working week. I have to do all learning logs/critical reflection at home. I have no time to look at the CPD and the Learning Agreement since it was written. It is not a 'live' document, it is a tick box exercise’.

The final questionnaire asked NQSW’s from Cohort One if Workload Management was conducted as set out in their learning agreement. Just under half (48 per cent - 16) said it was, just under two fifths (39 per cent - 13) said not always and 12 per cent (4) said it was not. Those who said it was conducted as set out in their Learning Agreement suggested that allocation of cases and protected caseload worked particularly well.

Those who said that workload management was not or not always conducted according to their Learning Agreement gave the main reason as being no reduced caseload owing to work pressures.

The interim questionnaire asked supervisors/assessors how they expected workload to be allocated. For the majority this was also through discussion but there were a few respondents who were not clear about how well this had worked in practice.

The interim questionnaire asked supervisors/assessors if workload management with NQSWs registered on the ASYE was proceeding as they had originally anticipated. Just under three quarters (70 per cent - 30) said yes, with 30 per cent (13) saying it was not. Again, the main reason given for saying it was not related to capacity issues and work pressure. For example:

'Due to pressure on the team to allocate work, I have exceeded the 10 per cent protected caseload. There should be a contingency plan to bring in additional staff to cover this effective shortfall in staffing the team during the ASYE’s year’.

'They were loaded with more workload and responsibility'.

"
‘There are too many demands on workers time in their day-to-day work’.

One respondent wrote about the problems NQSWs face in their organisation in which a high workload plays a part:

‘Many NQSWs are struggling greatly with transferring academic skills to the fast pace of adult short term social work. Supervision both formal and informal is very minimal (I don’t directly line manage by candidates so have no sway on this, only my own delivery). The lack of support, feeling deskilled and inability to be concise in assessments gets in the way and slows them down and a number are finding it difficult to keep on top of their workload even protected at 10 per cent less. I think many NQSWs need more handholding than team or Senior Managers think and a bullying culture could develop through their lack of patience - ‘A whole year, if I’d known, I would never have employed a newly qualified’, is a quote I’ve heard more than once. They forget they were once there or say THEY survived so NQs need to get on with it’.

In response to the final questionnaire, over three quarters of supervisors/assessors (78 per cent - 17) stated the workload management was either very or quite effective. For those who said it was not, improvements could be made by:

- A much more robust policy on caseload management for both NQSW and Practice Educator.
- Increasing available resources.
- Making it mandatory for managers to agree time to undertake the ASYE.
- Extra staff.

Evidence from the case studies in relation to workload management

Developing a tool for workload management

In order to ensure that all involved in the process have the necessary time to discharge their professional responsibilities, Norfolk have developed a tool that enables them to quantify the amount of time needed by activity (for example, supervision, assessments, protected time and case work) and to calculate the staffing requirements for each team. This has been in operation for a few months and will be reviewed in the autumn.

4.4 Protected development time

The initial questionnaire asked NQSWs what time was being allowed for protected development time and when could it be taken. The verbatim responses are summarised below:

- Specific details of days/hours and when they could be taken (72 respondents).
- Time was allowed but no specific rules in relation to when it can be taken (16 respondents).
- Discussed and agreed during supervision sessions (9 respondents).
- Nothing (7 respondents).
- Not yet agreed (5 respondents).
- Don’t know.

Where specific information was given it varied for example, one day per month, one day per fortnight, three hours per fortnight, 23 days for the ASYE year, etc. Much depended on whether the person was full-time or part-time, but there was some clear variation.

Comments from NQSWs included:

‘There has been discussions that we are entitled to this and that we can build it into our working week where appropriate, however, due to workload pressures I feel unable to take time out of my working week. Instead I will complete my portfolio in my own time (although this is not easy due to personal commitments)’.

‘As specified by the ASYE programme I am allowed half a day per month. I have been taking this as one day per two months, as half a day is nowhere near enough time to focus properly. However, I have found that in order to produce a reasonable piece of work (notepad, presentation or poster) this is nowhere near enough time. As we have such a high workload it is not possible to complete anything during work time’.

The final questionnaire asked NQSWs from Cohort One if they got Protected Development Time as set out in their Learning Agreement. Eighty four per cent (27) said they had. Where this had worked particularly well, examples were given of flexible arranges, separate learning days/activities and protected study time.

Where this had not worked well, the reasons given were:

‘Again ASYE organisers backtracked- originally they said we could agree it with our managers then we were told that the afternoons of our ASYE group sessions were to be used for our study time’.

‘I was given time off for training and CPD in that I could attend training, but my workload was not adjusted. So I ended up having to work later to try and finish my work if I had training. I wrote the learning log from home at the weekend. I wrote a CPD plan and then did not look at it again for six months’.

‘I have not had the time due to workload pressures to make regular protected time’.

‘Team pressures’.

At the time of the initial questionnaire, the majority of supervisors/assessors (25) were able to give a specific response to the amount of protected time. Two respondents gave a more general response. One respondent said they didn’t know and another that they would have to check.

In the interim questionnaire, supervisors/assessors were asked whether protected development time for NQSWs on the ASYE was occurring as anticipated. Eighty per cent (35) said it was. Where it wasn’t, one respondent referred to the fact that she had breached the 10 per cent protected time. Another stated the ASYEes are prepared to take it on an ‘as needed’ basis and a third said it was a ‘low priority’.
Evidence from the case studies in relation to Protected Development Time

Regular Protected Development Time

To signal the importance Blackburn with Darwen places on supporting the ASYE, one Friday each month an afternoon is set aside for NQSW development. The session runs from 1pm until 5pm, but the senior social workers who deliver training are there only between 2pm and 4pm. The intention is that the first and last hours can be used by NQSWs to work on their portfolios or to discuss issues amongst themselves, offering peer-to-peer support. Any concerns or unresolved issues can then be raised with the senior social workers. It is important that these meetings are ‘off-site’ to ensure this time is uninterrupted by case work.

On the whole, managers have been supportive of the approach but work pressures have meant that NQSWs tend to arrive at 2pm for the formal session, although they do stay on afterwards. An important aspect of the approach is that those leading the sessions are not managers and emphasise that they are all in practice and still learning and developing; this encourages NQSWs to be open about the challenges they encounter. For NQSWs, knowing that they are expected to attend the regular sessions keeps the ASYE process high on their radar and prevents it being sidelined due to pressure of case loads.

As NQSWs join the authority, they join in with the existing group rather than a new group being constituted for them. This enables the new employees to learn from the experiences of others who are slightly ahead of them as well as giving confidence to the more advanced ones who realise how far they have come.

4.5 Professional Capability Framework (PCF)

At the time of the initial questionnaire, 97 per cent (111) of NQSWs and 98 per cent (53) of supervisors/assessors were aware of the PCF and the standards described for the ASYE.

The vast majority of respondents, 97 per cent (108) NQSWs and 98 per cent (52) of supervisors/assessors, considered the Capability Statements for the ASYE as either very or fairly suitable at this stage in their involvement. This was reinforced in the responses to the interim questionnaire and the final questionnaire.

There were a few comments regarding the Capability Statement ‘Professional Leadership’ not being suitable, as it was seen by some not to be relevant to an NQSW. For example:

’It is a bit of a stretch for an NQSW to find leadership opportunities. Although we have talked about taking the lead for the team on certain practice areas it has felt rather patronising to talk about this in terms of leadership rather than in terms of developing expertise’.

The interim questionnaire asked supervisors/assessors whether progressive assessment of the NQSW against the standards described in the PCF is taking place. Ninety three per cent (38) stated that was the case. Two respondents gave explanations for where this was not the case:
‘There has been a large intake of NQSWs and as they will only be assessed by Senior Practitioners there is some mismatch between NQSWs and assessors available. This means that some have not yet signed a Learning Agreement which I treat as the start of the assessed year’.

‘Some delays in arranging the ASYE sessions but now being pursued as I understand’.

The interim questionnaire also asked how confident the supervisors/assessors were in their ability to assess NQSWs against the standards required for the ASYE within the Professional Capabilities Framework. Ninety four per cent (41) indicated they were either very or quite confident. One respondent suggested the following way confidence could be improved:

‘Training and time afforded within my job role to learn and develop skills’.

And another:

‘Having confidence in the validity of the paperwork. It appears like a fancy bureaucratic tool that looks good on paper but has little relevance to the reality of day-to-day practice’.

The interim questionnaire asked both NQSWs and supervisors/assessors what the main strengths were in the way that assessment is being delivered.

NQSW responses are summarised below:

- Applies the framework to all aspects of practice (14 respondents).
- The assessor’s knowledge and skills (9 respondents).
- Flexibility in application (6 respondents)
- Makes the NQSW look at the whole picture (4 respondents).
- Opportunity to review things with other NQSWs/team (3 respondents).

Other individual NQSWs mentioned the non-judgemental approach and the completion of reflective journals/logs.

Supervisors/assessors suggested the main strengths in the way that assessment was being delivered were:

- Allowing the time for discussion and reflection (7 respondents).
- It being quite clear/structured (7 respondents).
- Applying the PCF standards (6 respondents).
- Workshop approaches (3 respondents).
- Building good relationship with NQSW (3 respondents).
- Delivery at team level.
'It is giving more of an opportunity to view the candidate as a whole when making judgements. It doesn’t seem to have become a tick box exercise which sees workers striving to find situations to make their practice ‘fit a box’. The ASYE can be assessed in a more ‘real world’ context as they develop everyday practice’.

Individual supervisors/assessors commented:

'As the ASYE is in practice the combination of practice and learning enables the ASYE to ground their social work practice incorporating models, theory and reflection. This then gives a good foundation upon which to continue their professional development’.

'The staff are having in house flexible workshops, moving to action learning approach; different needs can be catered for and a second group was established for newer starters. A handbook, largely based on Skills for Care and local consortium documents/guidance gives reference and templates’.

'It is a structured approach which I always prefer and it is developmental over time which means that progress can be measured along the way. Our procedures have also put markers down to complement the assessment process which helps’.

In terms of how the assessment process could be improved, some NQSWs commented on specific aspects of the assessment process others made more general suggestions. Individual comments included:

- Instead of completing a table write a paragraph per domain.
- Needs a more structured template.
- Feedback on all notepads.
- Clarity on how many pieces of evidence minimum is required for each domain.
- Clarification on pass or fail criteria.
- More specific learning outcomes and assessment support.

One respondent had very specific views in relation the domains:

'Less parts to each domain. I feel like I am having to flick through a lot to find out how to meet them all. If they were more concise and easier to remember then I would work from them a lot easier.

More general comments from NQSWs included:

- More time to reflect and complete (5 respondents).

And from individual NQSWs:

- More frequent meetings with assessor.
- Choose one subject and cover it in depth.
- More guidance.
- Having an onsite supervisor would be helpful.
A wider knowledge of services and organisations.

For supervisors/assessors, there were some clear messages on how assessment could be improved:

- More time for the supervisor/assessor (5 respondents).
- More clarity on the process (5 respondents).
- Simplify the paperwork (3 respondents).
- The assessment/evidence requirement is too rigorous (3 respondents).
- Need to make it less academic/more practical focused (3 respondents).
- Giving the NQSWs more time by reducing workload (2 respondents).
- More preparation prior to taking on an NQSW (2 respondents).

Individual supervisors/assessors suggested:

- Improving the Skills for Care website to support this activity.
- Need to develop ways to include service users.
- More emphasis on the three and six month reviews.
- Needs to be managed by someone with a background in social work.
- NQSWs need to be better prepared for this at point of employment.
- Time for NQSWs to meet as a group and reflect.
- More training on holistic assessment.

One supervisor/assessor summarised much of this:

'That the role of NQSW is understood and they are supported but not seen as additional hands. That supervision time is protected and models of reflection is encouraged. That agencies policies and procedures are explained at the beginning of ASYE. That progress assessment and performance against the PCF is discussed. Feedback from service users is obtained if possible. By ensuring that Assessors are supported in the process and organisation leaders have interest in the process. Workload is managed by assessor. Advice on day-to-day is available so that NQs does not struggle'.

At the time of the final questionnaire, a third of NQSWs from Cohort One (33 per cent - 11) had completed their final assessment, the majority (82 per cent - 9) had passed and the remainder were awaiting the outcome.

We asked NQSWs from Cohort One how effective the feedback had been that they had received to help them meet the standards for the assessment. Eighty eight per cent (27) said it had been very or quite effective.
Evidence from the case studies in relation to the Professional Capability Framework (PCF)

Integrating knowledge with the PCF

Lewisham were not involved in the previous NQSW process and although this had advantages in that there were not two frameworks being implemented simultaneously, it also meant that they had no experience of managing a formal process for the NQSW’s transition year. The starting point for line managers and Practice Educators was therefore a better understanding of how NQSWs move from Student to Practitioner, how to support NQSWs to establish coping mechanisms and sound post-qualification skills such as record keeping, report writing, case management and time management. They were then able to mesh this knowledge with the requirements of the PCF and their roles and responsibilities within the ASYE. This was underpinned by a two day training course in reflective practice and ongoing and regular meetings with those carrying out a similar role in the neighbouring boroughs of Bromley and Sutton. The latter in particular has enabled Lewisham to exchange effective practice and use as informal moderation which is in addition to the internal formal moderation/quality assurance protocol already established. Lewisham are working with partners to create an overarching moderation which includes an external element but this has not yet been finalised.

4.6 Holistic assessment

In the initial questionnaire, NQSWs and supervisors/assessors were asked what they understood the term ‘holistic assessment’ to mean in practice. Sixty five NQSW respondents gave a general response for holistic assessment, for example:

‘Holistic assessment means looking at the person as a whole and having an appreciation of their position in society as well as understanding culture, ethnicity, economic impact and the impact of systems in society on the individual’.

Twenty seven NQSWs provided responses that related holistic assessment to the ASYE, including:

‘My understanding is using as many different professionals/individuals within a situation to better my understanding and inform my practice further. To see a situation through as many perspectives as possible’.

‘An ‘holistic assessment’ looks at the whole situation, not just the immediate issue. I would be considering the impact the situation had on other members of the family. In a learning sense it means looking at how the nine capability statements are inter-connected and how they should all be covered during every intervention to develop into a confident skilled knowledgeable practitioner’.

‘Understanding and assessing something as a whole and not a sum of its parts - ie the PCF framework should be demonstrated throughout development and across all domains rather than tick box exercises to complete individual domains separately over the 12 month period’.

‘The practice of evaluating ones performance within different domains in order to evaluate ‘overall’ performance. For NQSW’s this involves looking at the way in which we approach and complete casework, the quality and effectiveness of our
interactions and interventions, how we meet our employers expectations as well as those of our registering body. It also evaluates how we reflect on our work and what we continue to learn as we progress’.

Six supervisors/assessors also gave a general definition of holistic assessment. Examples of those who responded in relation to their role in the ASYE stated that holistic assessment was:

‘Assessment of the whole of the worker’s practice which can be supported by evidence related to the particular domains. This is in contrast to a tick box type of assessment which does not look at the whole person’.

‘Ongoing assessment of NQSW in terms of their professional judgement and expertise. Assess individual’s capability to practice in terms of nine domains of PCF and also their ability to critically reflect and also emotional resilience. Assessment is ongoing throughout ASYE and takes into account all aspects of individual and their ability to practice’.

‘A qualified social worker is expected to consistently perform professionally across the nine domains over a period of time, and have the standard of practice expected at this level at the end of the year. It is not a tick box list which is measured in a one off observation for example. The holistic assessment gives an assurance of capability which is measured across all the areas and is embedded in their practice’.

‘It is developed over time, requires sufficient evidence over all nine domains, must evidence ability for critical reflection, the professional judgement of a registered social worker re: assessment is crucial’.

‘Assessment of a social worker is progressive, dependant on the level of the individual and across all nine PCF domains. It is not about pass and fail but identifies areas of development or concerns. It is evidence-based including critical reflection and application of research’.

Eighty one per cent (42) of supervisors/assessors were very or fairly confident in their ability to provide holistic assessment at the time of the initial questionnaire. Again, the main thing enabling them to develop this confidence was their ‘Own experience of holistic assessment in practice’ (60 per cent of respondents overall - 25) followed by ‘External training’ and ‘In-house training’ (each 14 per cent - 6).

Two respondents indicated they were not confident, one saying what would help would be needed to make them confident:

‘Some indication of what is actually expected of me. However, now I am aware that Skills for Care has some information on their website, I am hoping that things will become clearer’.

In terms of how they anticipated obtaining feedback from people who use the service or carers for the assessment process, some supervisors/assessors reported that this was yet to be agreed. One said they were not aware of the need for this. Four reported it was the responsibility of the NQSW to gather this evidence. Otherwise responses were:

- NQSW to provide feedback forms (15 respondents).
- During direct observations of practice (9 respondents).
- Interviews (7 respondents).
• Questionnaire (5 respondents).
• Telephone follow up (4 respondents).
• Direct contact with service users (unspecified) (3 respondents).
• By a combination of methods, verbal, questionnaire, testimonials (2 respondents).
• Complaints process (2 respondents).

And from individual NQSWs:
• Complaint and compliment leaflet.
• Using service users in role play scenarios.
• Templates used previously during NQSW training.

The interim questionnaire asked NQSWs how easy it had been to change from a competency-based assessment to holistic assessment for capability. Whilst 53 per cent (46) said it was very or quite easy, nine per cent (8) said it had not been at all easy and 38 per cent (33) said they didn’t know.

For the NQSWs who said this was not all easy, the main reasons given were lack of knowledge of what is required and how to evidence them, lack of clarity on the domains and balancing commitments and responsibilities of the working role. This could be improved, they suggested, by further advice and guidance and better preparation by their local authority, simpler domains and clearer ways to evidence things and being proactive rather than reactive. Those who said it was very easy did not provide a detailed rationale for their answer, though one respondent did say it was building upon skills developed at university.

The same question was asked of supervisors/assessors. Whilst 73 per cent (32) said it was very or quite easy, 11 per cent (5) said it was not at all easy and 16 per cent (7) didn’t know. For those who suggested it was not at all easy, reasons for their response included that there are no examples of what is expected, it is based on the opinions of each person in the assessment process and that it is initially challenging. One respondent said:

‘Like any changes this was initially challenging. However, the website of Skills for Care and TCSW website were very helpful. Once I got to understand the PCF it was easy to transfer skills. Also recent training at the university looking at coaching and mentoring enhance the process’.

Three respondents thought this could be improved by being given more time and being trained - one also said that later cohorts will benefit from the templates developed earlier in the process.

Figure 4.3 provides a comparison of the responses to this question by whether supervisors/assessors were involved in the previous NQSW Programme (from the initial questionnaire). The results suggest no real advantage here for those who were involved in the previous NQSW Programme, but it should be noted the number of respondents was small.
Figure 4.3: ‘Were you involved in the previous NQSW Programme?’ (initial questionnaire) by ‘How easy have you found it to change? (from competence-based assessment to holistic assessment for capability)’ (Supervisors/assessors)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Were you involved in the previous NQSW Programme (from initial questionnaire)</th>
<th>How easy has it been to change from a competency-based assessment to holistic assessments of capability (from interim questionnaire)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes (13)</td>
<td>Very easy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No (33)</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (56)</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HOST Evaluation of the ASYE for Skills for Care, 2013

The final questionnaire asked both NQSWs and supervisors/assessors from Cohort One if they agreed that in the development of professional judgement and confidence a holistic rather than competency-based assessment is preferable. Just over three quarters (78 per cent - 25) of NQSWs indicated that it was, however over a fifth of respondents (22 per cent - 7) did not know. The majority of supervisors/assessors (91 per cent - 20) also felt it was preferable.

The NQSWs who said the ASYE was preferable were asked to explain the reason for their answer. The majority identified the changeable nature of social work and the complication of different cases and situations such that a more flexible assessment is required rather than ‘tick box’ exercises. For example:

‘Professional judgement and confidence are both elusive and dynamic concepts; on reflection upon the whole ASYE year it is easier to identify in retrospect how these have shifted, grown and developed over the year, however it is not possible to assess this as a ‘snap shot’ exercise’.

‘I think looking at the bigger picture in a holistic way is a far better way of judging a person’s qualities as a social worker than just being able to tick a box. It is no use having all the knowledge around policy and legislation if you have no people skills’.

Evidence from the case studies in relation to Holistic Assessment

a) Holistic assessment in practice

Staff at Poole believe they have developed a sound model for the ASYE which is firmly rooted in holistic assessment, considers examples of professional practice in a range of different settings and contexts, and is undertaken by a number of experienced assessors. This is underpinned by partnership networking and collaboration which reinforces the multidisciplined approach of the Authority and its neighbouring boroughs. The process is constantly evolving and different ways are being identified to ensure that not only are NQSWs being supported, but also those who have line management/assessment responsibilities for the NQSWs such as supervisors and Practice Educators. Any achievement in implementation so far is felt to be because of the balance achieved between reflection and action, and because individuals involved in the ASYE are well
supported. NQSWs report that they are enjoying the ASYE and fully understand its aims and that it is particularly helping them to network efficiently and to monitor their own work.

**b) The importance of regular assessment**

Assessments of NQSWs in Lewisham are conducted regularly with the underpinning theme being to what extent an NQSW is contributing to service quality and development. NQSWs are observed in a range of different settings, at different times and conducted by different observers though always with those who are familiar with the PCF. NQSWs are subsequently asked to critically reflect on their performance and in what way this has contributed to their professional expertise.

**c) Assessment and feedback from service users**

At Poole there is a rolling programme of assessment which is agreed with the NQSW. All the line managers have been supportive of the ASYE but they vary in the degree of day-to-day interest they take in how the programme is being delivered. The co-ordinator has tried to ensure that NQSWs are offered a balance between a critical appraisal of performance and creating a positive working environment for inexperienced individuals - objectives that can have competing needs - and believes that while the ASYE delivery is still evolving overall consistency has been very effective.

Feedback from service users has been incorporated in assessment areas such as direct observation and NQSWs are encouraged to submit letters or feedback they have received as individuals. Currently there is a debate within the Authority about the function of feedback - is it merely as evidence to support the ASYE or has it a wider purpose which incorporates real meaning to service users? Currently feedback that naturally occurs is seen as more valuable and more relevant than orchestrated responses such as questionnaires.

### 4.7 Quality of the assessment decision

In the initial questionnaire supervisors/assessors were asked to select from a given list of the type of arrangements that were in place to support them in making assessment decisions. This was a multiple response question (ie they could tick as many boxes as they wished) and many had a combination of arrangements in place. The suggested list of arrangements to support the quality of their assessment decision which were set out in the questionnaire for them to consider were:

- Through partnership arrangements.
- Monitoring by Staff Development/Heads of Service/Senior Managers.
- Internal management/quality assurance panel.
- Internal standardisation and moderation.
- Validation/verification panel.
- The ASYE Manager role.
- Other.
Most of combinations of these options selected by supervisors/assessors were internal to the organisation, for example, ‘Monitoring by Staff Development/Heads of Service/Senior Managers’. ‘Internal management/quality assurance panel’ and ‘Internal standardisation and moderation’ (31 per cent - 17, 26 per cent - 14 and 24 per cent - 13 respectively). Just over a fifth (22 per cent - 12) indicated ‘Through partnership arrangements’.

‘Other’ responses from individual supervisors/assessors were:

- External moderation panel in additional to internal processes.
- The ASYE peer support group for assessors and allowed to complete assessment training module of Approved Assessor Programme.
- Group sessions with other assessors from Children’s Services.

One respondent reported:

‘Currently there is discussion across the neighbouring authorities regarding moderation and possibility of setting up a panel to ensure consistency of decision making’.

And another:

‘I am an external supplier, advising and overseeing ASYEs. I have regular meetings with Workforce Development Manager to monitor my work, I am involved in monitoring the assessment decisions of others’.

And finally:

‘My colleague and I will be our own support and will work closely to ensure our work is complimentary. No arrangements have been made by our organisation to support our role as ASYE assessor’.

The final questionnaire asked supervisors/assessors how well their employer’s arrangement for assuring the quality of assessment decisions worked. Whilst almost three quarters (72 per cent - 15) indicated very or quite well, over a quarter (26 per cent - 9) said not at all well.

For those where it worked well, comments included:

‘The approach to reviews, standardisation of work, internal workshops, external workshops, meetings, and constant updates and communications between ASYE and Senior Managers/Practice Assessors all worked very well.’

‘ASYE year has been well supported by line managers and by the practice learning team as a whole, with clear guidelines and documentation easily available’.

‘Employer has taken responsibility, through the involvement of the Line Manager, to be involved in the process and to be part of the panel that look at the activities of ASYE and determine pass or fail. I believe this is a good way of quality assurance of the process since every activity is checked at different levels’.

‘(Name of employer) have really embraced the ASYE programme, supporting candidates, offering extra support for those struggling, providing training for assessors and candidates at MASTERS level, regular reviews, drop-ins, meetings with ASYE Manager and co-ordinator, access to ASYE Manager as and when’.
For those that indicated not at all well, the reasons were:

‘I am not aware ‘personally’ that there have been any assurance of decisions or assessments made’.

‘Reports are not consistent between different managers. More work needs to be done to ensure we produce the same level of evidence’.

‘As yet the process has not been made clear to assessors or candidates. It should be given higher priority to demonstrate to the candidates the importance of the whole ASYE process’.

‘It needs to be made a mandatory task as it now gets put to the bottom of the priority list and makes workers feel de-valued’.

## Evidence from the case studies in relation to the Quality of the Assessment Decision

### a) Quality assurance of assessment decisions

Blackburn with Darwen recognises the ‘high-stakes’ nature of the assessment and the consequent need to ensure that decisions are fair and consistent; on the other hand, they fully support the concept that managers are best placed to make professional judgements about NQSWs’ practice. Managers being accompanied on occasion by Senior Leaders and one observation being conducted by another professional, help to ensure consistency in judgements. Blackburn with Darwen are working closely with their sub-regional partners, Blackpool Council and Lancashire County Council, as well as the University of Central Lancashire, to ensure a consistency of approach across the area. Panels will be held with membership from each of the above organisations to review portfolios and assessments, which will include the reflective essay that will already have been marked by the University. The purpose of the panel is not to ‘re-mark’ any components, but to quality assure the process. Further quality assurance will be provided by the University’s accreditation processes as portfolios meeting the required standard will constitute a completed module of a Post Graduate Certificate in Social Work.

### b) Working in partnership

Poole has worked closely with the surrounding boroughs although they are more advanced in implementation than the others. A pool of Practice Educators across the boroughs are now responsible for mentoring and they meet regularly to discuss issues and challenges and consider how standards can be moderated. Opportunities have been offered as a direct result of the ASYE. For example, all Practice Educators were offered a short course to up-skill through a joint Authority financed programme at Bournemouth University.

### c) Plans for external verification

In Cumbria the Professional Lead Officer is currently working with the Social Care Partnership group and two universities to consider how they may best complete external verification at the final assessment point to include internal input from the County Directorates, service user feedback and an overview from the higher education partners.
d) Ensuring the fairness and robustness of final decisions

Norfolk County Council puts considerable emphasis on quality assuring the ASYE process. Observations are carried out by more than one person and the three and six month reviews are checked by Team Managers. Practice Consultants and Team Managers can turn to the Learning and Development Consultant and to Heads of Social Care for support and advice in making judgements should they need to.

For the final assessment, a review panel will be convened which will be made up of senior managers from across the three service areas (Adult Social Care, Children’s Services and Mental Health) as well as the Learning and Development Consultant. This panel will review the submitted evidence for the ASYE from 18 NQSWs in total, ensuring a standardised approach across Norfolk. This is a big resource commitment which reflects the importance Norfolk places on needing to ensure the fairness and robustness of final decisions. NQSWs can, in addition to including it as part of their ASYE evidence to the council, submit their reflective essay to UEA for academic accreditation which also provides a further quality check.

Norfolk is also part of an Eastern regional partnership of local authorities who will be carrying out regional standardisation and quality assurance of the ASYE by reviewing evidence provided by NQSWs and assessors, as well as sharing examples of good practice. This partnership will review and share learning from local and national evaluations of the ASYE. UEA will also be contributing to the regional quality assurance and standardisation by providing feedback on a sample of the ASYE reviews, direct observations and final assessment reports from all of the local authorities in the partnership.

e) Ensuring adequate preparation for assessment

In Southampton, in order to standardise assessment, assessment evidence is reviewed by the learning and development lead. In addition, a Standardisation Panel was established with Hampshire and the Isle of Wight Council, representatives from the Royal Navy and from the voluntary sector. This panel identified some inconsistencies in practice which was fed back to assessors. As a result of this process, a regional Practice Assessor workshop was held - led by local higher education institutions.
Assessors and NQSWs acknowledged that the Authority was keen to receive feedback and act upon it. NQSWs also felt that they were able to positively shape the emerging model of ASYE support and that this process was enhanced by the fact that the learning and development lead and the Service Manager (Adults) were always available to discuss issues.

As a result of the above, the organisation believes it now has a clear and robust assessment process which is understood by candidates and assessors; assessors are confident in their role and feel that everything is working well.
4.8 Overview

In this chapter we have looked at expectations in reflective professional supervision, workload, workload management and protected development time and holistic assessment and how these appear to be being delivered and supported in practice. We have also looked at the variety of quality assurance processes in place to support the assessment decisions.

The next chapter looks at benefits, good practice and challenges.
Chapter 5: Benefits, Good Practice and Challenges

The key findings from this chapter include:

NQSWs and supervisors/assessors identified a range of benefits for the NQSW in taking part in the ASYE, the main one of which was ‘Development of professional confidence’.

The main benefits for supervisors/assessors were identified as ‘Continuing professional development’, ‘Learning to provide reflective supervision’ and ‘Learning to provide holistic assessment’.

Both NQSWs and supervisors/assessors saw the ASYE as supporting CPD.

By the final questionnaire, over two thirds of NQSWs would recommend the ASYE to other NQSWs. The vast majority of supervisors/assessors would recommend the ASYE to other organisations.

For NQSWs the main messages to sell the ASYE to another NQSW included that there is time for reflection, receiving structured support and guidance and the importance of peer support.

For supervisors/assessors the main messages to sell the ASYE to another organisation were that the ASYE helps to develop the NQSW into a competent social worker, that it provides a good probationary period and that it provides opportunities for CPD.

The case studies provide clear indicators of the keys to good practice.

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter we look at the benefits of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (the ASYE) as perceived by participants and their supervisors and assessors. We also consider the issues and challenges that have arisen during the first year of implementation and describe some examples of effective practice.

The findings in this chapter are based on the results from the initial and questionnaire surveys with both Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) and their supervisors/assessors from both Cohorts, and the results from the final questionnaire survey completed by those in Cohort One. In addition it considers evidence from the interviews with the Virtual Reference Group (VRG), the case studies and a report written for the evaluation by the Practice Learning Consortium (PLC).

5.2 Benefits of involvement in the ASYE

In the initial questionnaire, a list of possible benefits of participation in the ASYE was given for NQSWs to tick as appropriate.

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22 Cohort One comprises the first round of registrations on the ASYE during September/October 2012. Cohort Two is the second round of registrations during January-March 2013.
The most indicated benefits for NQSWs taking part in the ASYE overall were:

- ‘Development of professional confidence’ (79 per cent - 90).
- ‘Acknowledgement of personal responsibility for continuing professional development’ (76 per cent - 87).
- ‘They have received structured support’ (71 per cent - 81).

The least indicated was ‘Potential for progression’ (54 per cent - 62).

‘Other’ responses in relation to benefits from individual NQSWs were:

- Employers would have a positive view of the ASYE.
- Peer support.
- Monitoring of practitioners to ensure best practice and CPD.
- Protected caseload.
- Support and guidance in development skills.
- Group supervision.
- Recognition in a health setting that NQSWs need the support to build their confidence.

The final questionnaire also asked NQSWs from Cohort One what had been the main benefits to them of taking part in the ASYE. The main benefits were:

- ‘Discussion of your training and development needs’ (71 per cent - 22).
- ‘Advice and Guidance on more difficult cases’ (68 per cent - 21).

Of least benefit was ‘Agency Policies and Procedures’ (26 per cent - 8).

Examples of ‘other benefits’ noted by individual NQSWs include:

‘ASYE has given me the support which would have been lacking in my organisation’.

‘I also found the academic aspect of my ASYE course helpful in enabling me to think about my practice in a different way and to reflect on the changes and challenges I have faced in my first year of practice’.

‘For me the main benefits from taking part in the ASYE was being able to build my confidence as an autonomous worker. I was a very mature student with a vast experience in health and social care as a carer and as an unqualified care manager, however I had always been told what to do and being responsible in making my own decisions was something that I found difficult at first. Although I had the knowledge I was not confident, I was very afraid of giving people the wrong information’.

In the final questionnaire supervisors/assessors were asked, in their opinion, what had been the main benefits to the NQSWs taking part in the ASYE. Responses were:
‘Development of professional confidence’ which was indicated by the majority of respondents (86 per cent - 18).

‘They have received structured support’ (81 per cent - 17).

‘If assessed successfully they will have credibility with future employers’ (76 per cent - 16).

‘Acknowledgement of personal responsibility for continuing professional development’ (also 76 per cent - 16).

Just under two thirds (62 per cent - 13) also indicated ‘Improved quality of service for recipients’ and ‘Potential for progression’.

Supervisors/assessors were also asked in their initial questionnaire to indicate the main benefits for them in taking part in the ASYE. The main benefits indicated were:

‘Continuing professional development’ (84 per cent - 42).

‘Learning to provide reflective supervision’ (56 per cent - 28).

‘Learning to provide holistic assessment’ (40 per cent - 20).

Clearly the ASYE was seen by respondents as an opportunity to development supervisor/assessor skills. Least indicated was ‘Credibility with future employers’ (26 per cent - 13).

‘Other’ benefits mentioned by individual supervisors/assessors were:

Passing on experience, knowledge and enthusiasm to NQSW to ensure the future of the profession.

Sharing of knowledge and experience with NQSW to help them through their first year in practice.

Assuring that entrants to the profession continue to be fit to practice.

Pride in the profession.

Progression of others.

Supporting good quality staff to develop into effective social workers.

For example:

‘Creating a positive environment for newly qualified staff to develop confidence in their social work practice to ensure the next generation of workers are as good as we can make them’.

And:

‘I have always enjoyed supporting students with their development and have reflected that this is possibly because I was supported through my social work training in a positive way by my practice teachers at the time’. 
The final questionnaire asked supervisors/assessors what the main benefits to them had been of participating in the ASYE and responses were:

- ‘Continuing Professional Development’ which was cited by three quarters (75 per cent - 15).
- ‘Learning to provide reflective professional supervision’ (60 per cent - 12).
- ‘Learning to provide holistic assessment’ (50 per cent - 10).

### 5.3 What has worked particularly well so far in the ASYE

The interim questionnaire for supervisors/assessors asked what had worked particularly well in the ASYE so far. Suggestions included:

- Reflective supervision and activities within it (8 respondents).
- Developed confidence of NQSW (5 respondents).
- Having a capabilities framework with clear guidance for each level (5 respondents).
- Specific training and workshop activities (4 respondents).
- Protected case load and reflection time (3 respondents).
- Clear paperwork/handbooks (2 respondents).

Individual comments included:

- ‘The opportunity to have a regular review of the NQSW progress against the PCF’s and then using this information to inform the overall practice’.
- ‘The training days being spread out have given the ASYE time to build the learning into practice and reflect upon it as they develop’.
- ‘I can see the NQSW’s becoming more skilled and confident in their practice because they have had an opportunity to progress from taking less complex cases to more complex ones. The NQSW have also been allowed to work with a reduced workload to allow them time to do some reflective work’.
- ‘As the year has progressed both ASYE’s and their supervisors have gained a clearer understanding of the process and I am sure next year will run very smoothly. Feedback from development sessions has in the main been positive though this has been time-consuming for both ASYE and supervisors’.
- ‘I have become increasingly confident and competent and I have gained additional qualification as a result of facilitating other people learning. It is definitely a step further in developing other people’s learning. I have improved in my reflective practice. Like many practitioners I sometimes do not have time to reflect I am on the move at all times but because I am supporting NQSW, I have to ensure that I make time for supervision session and accommodate his concerns ensure that we clear any issue of concern while looking at various issues such as anti oppressive practice. This process is now taken to all aspect of my work including other supervisees’.
5.4 How the ASYE complements the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of social workers

The development of professional practice is a lifelong activity and for many it leads to new insights and understandings. The ability to continually learn, develop and adapt are key skills that NQSWs need to embrace. The interim questionnaire for both NQSWs and supervisors/assessors asked a question in relation to how the ASYE complements the CPD of social workers.

In terms of how NQSWs thought it complemented their own CPD a range of responses were received, summarised below:

- Prompts reflection on practice (18 respondents).
- Provides a supportive structure (12 respondents).
- Allows time to develop role (13 respondents).
- Helps identify further learning needs (9 respondents).
- Peer support is valuable (7 respondents).
- Doesn’t complement CPD (7 respondents).
- Helps build confidence (3 respondents).
- By ensuring adequate supervision (2 respondents).
- Capabilities framework has identified learning need (2 respondents).

And from individual respondents:

- Ensures minimum amount of essential training.
- Direct observations facilitate discussions with Manager.
- Gives framework to current stage of professional development.
- Structures thinking around development needs.
- Helps to prioritise CPD.

For example:

‘Gives framework to current stage of professional development. Gives insight into multiple routes of learning and evidence of CPD. Gives regular opportunity to remove self from daily practice and focus on CPD, learning and theory - energising CPD’.

‘It encourages continued learning, policies and practices are always changing, nothing stays the same and this should be the mindset of any practitioner. Learning doesn’t end when you get your degree’.

Although six supervisors/assessors had mixed views on the contribution of the ASYE to CPD the positive responses from individual supervisors/assessors included:
• Another way of measuring progress and outcomes for NQSWs.
• Valuable and specific way of showing levels of competence and accountability.
• Less cumbersome than what was previously in place.
• Useful for NQSWs but not for longer practicing social workers.
• Ensures basic competences and values are embedded in practice.
• The Professional Capability Framework (PCF) is a good framework to ensure good practice.
• Enables NQSW to focus on requirements for role.
• Has put PCF on the agenda.
• Effective structure to provide sound evidence of practice.
• Helps to focus attention on the intense and rapid learning path of NQSWs.
• Clear outline for stages of progression.
• Clear CPD progression.
• A good basic building block/foundation to a career in social work.
• It gives a firm foundation on which to build your CPD.
• Improves quality of supervision.

Examples of comments include:

‘Enables NQSW to focus on learning skills needed for workload management, incorporating research and law into their work and understand the role of a social worker’.

‘It sets the standards from the point of qualifying. It has also focused attention on the need for experienced social workers to retain involvement in CPD, share their knowledge and expertise and invest in the learning culture of the profession. It’s a good habit to establish, logging/evidencing ongoing learning activity’.

‘Helps to focus attention on the intense and rapid learning NQSWs do when beginning their practice. Reminds Line Managers and the wider organisation that staff at this stage need additional support and ‘protection’ from high caseloads it is not possible to review the progress of a newly qualified worker in this depth and detail without also reflecting on the work of oneself and other supervisees in the same light’.

‘It is the foundation to a career in social work, expectations of behaviour stated and followed through in the ASYE year will continue to be mirrored as a social worker progresses. It fits well with the HCPC having expectations that a social worker no matter what their grade will be able to show how their practice has developed between registration period’.
In the Private, Voluntary and Independent Organisation (PVI) sector the PLC has formed a partnership with the University of Lincoln to develop a range of CPD learning opportunities for social workers following the ASYE consistent with the PCF. Initially, this will involve developing and providing a supervisor training programme but will eventually include other forms of provision such as specialist modules for line managers and the development of an e-learning portal. There will also be options for learners to acquire academic credits. Several of the experienced social workers who have registered on the Supervisor Training Course have already registered for academic credit at Masters Level with Lincoln.

**Evidence from the Case Studies in relation to how the ASYE complements the CPD of social workers**

**Tailored learning for NQSWs that contribute to Masters level credits**

For Norfolk County Council, the University of East Anglia (UEA) provides two teaching days, a workbook of readings and activities and a range of other on-line resources as part of a training module that NQSWs are signed up to at the start of their ASYE. This provides the majority of the tailored learning that is provided to NQSWs but is also supplemented by workshops organised by the Learning and Development Consultant to meet specific learning needs identified in personal development plans. All NQSWs are required to write a piece of critical reflection as evidence towards the end of their ASYE. As part of the UEA module, they have the option of submitting this to the University and it can attract 40 Master’s level credits.

### 5.5 Whether respondents would recommend the ASYE to others

In the interim questionnaire, NQSWs were asked whether, based on their experience to-date, they would recommend the ASYE to other individuals - 74 per cent (67) said they would, 26 per cent (23) said they would not.

The reasons for not recommending the ASYE at that time included:

- The process was a repetition of what had been done at university (6 respondents).
- Feeling rushed and stressed (5 respondents).
- It was badly organised within the employer (4 respondents)
- At too low a level of existing experience (2 respondents).
- More guidance needed for supervisors (2 respondents).

In terms of the changes that would need to be made in order for these individuals to recommend the ASYE to other NQSWs, less written work was mentioned by four respondents. Three mentioned the need for better organisation by their employer, for example:

'**Better organisation, a more robust scheme/plan - timescales, deadlines - proactive assessor who is keen to advocate on behalf of workers and will support them - a contingency plan**'.
‘I think as the first year to undertake this there are lessons to be learnt and that in future years when the process is clearer it will be a better programme to complete. I think the LA I undertook the ASYE with was not in a position to support it appropriately due to unforeseen problems and therefore they need to review their capacity to be able to run this programme effectively’.

Three respondents wanted to see a clearer process, for example:

‘To be given clear dates of when the ASYE is starting and be allocated a supervisor/mentor at the start of the ASYE. The NQSW to be given clear guidance on what is expected of them. Be given clear timeframe of when the ASYE starts and finishes. Be given appropriate time to carry out study time’.

Two wanted to see a different course moving on from what was learnt at university. One suggested:

‘The ASYE should give masters credits as it is a lot of work completing the portfolio and it is marked at masters level’.

The final questionnaire asked NQSWs from Cohort One, as they near the completion of their year and based on their overall experience whether they would recommend the ASYE to other NQSWs. Over two thirds (67 per cent - 22) said they would. For the remaining third who would not the reasons included that there was too much unnecessary written work, management does not have the time to support staff, ASYE leaders within the organisation did not seem to know what they were doing, lack of reflective supervision and support. For example:

‘ASYE is a good idea, however it needs to be clear what the individual needs to complete and in what detail, for example what actually needs to go in the ASYE folder and in what detail. The ASYE is a beneficial if the right support is there and everyone is given the same amount of time aside each week out of their working week’.

‘The staff managing the ASYE course changed continuously which did not leave me with anyone I felt able to approach with any questions. I didn’t feel that I learnt anything in the learning sets, rather they were just a space where we simply discussed the negative about the scheme and left me feeling unhappy. I saw the ASYE programme as a series of tick boxes that were compulsory rather than an enjoyable experience. There were no clear (name of authority) guidelines for how to complete the portfolio and a lot was left up to how we wanted it to be. I was on the other hand very pleased with the input of my team manager she ensured that I felt very supported and I very much valued all the time and effort she put into my learning - however she was not fully aware of the process as I was her first student and she did not receive full training. I handed in my portfolio over a month ago and didn’t receive an e-mail reply to say that it had been received, and still have not received the results/information to continue’.

The changes that would need to be made in order for them to recommend the ASYE included dropping the written assignments, more organisation of the programme by the employer, more reflective supervision and study time and more structure. For example:

‘For the programme to be more reflective based - group supervisions, a greater understanding of what ASYE is about. Not just another programme where a portfolio is produced. It should be competency-based with the supervisor and Team Manager marking the NQSW along the way in their role’.
More structure to what is required. Employers told how much time ASYE has to have each week for reflection, etc. ASYE to be nationally recognised.

The interim questionnaire asked supervisors/assessors the same question but in relation to recommending the ASYE to other organisations. Ninety three per cent (40) said they would do so. For those who said they would not, the main reasons related to the fact that it is seen to be time consuming. Two respondents stated it was too close to work completed at university and needs to be less academic.

The final questionnaire asked this question again and at that point 86 per cent (18) supervisors/assessors said they would recommend the ASYE to other organisations. The three individuals who would not do so stated that this was owing to lack of support within their organisation (2 respondents) and because the framework as it stands is quite long and repetitive. In order to encourage them to recommend the ASYE changes would be needed in terms of clearer guidelines on the evidence required for submission, internal support and streamlined paperwork.

5.6 Key messages to sell the ASYE

The interim questionnaire asked NQSWs what the key messages were they would use to sell the ASYE to another NQSW. The key messages related to time for reflection, receiving structured support and guidance and the importance of peer support. The responses are summarised below:

- Allows time to reflect on your practice and develop your role (13 respondents).
- You receive structured support and guidance (10 respondents).
- Peer support helps to share knowledge and experience (7 respondents).
- Beneficial in the transition from education to social work practice (6 respondents).
- Workload management/protected caseload are valuable (3 respondents).
- Good for future employment opportunities (2 respondents).

And from individual NQSWs:

- It is flexible.
- You learn self-directive learning methods.

Examples of individual comments include:

‘Gives support in early stages of new professional role. Gives chance to reflect on practice and to apply learning to practice. Encourages habits of incorporating reflection into practice and incorporating CPD into professional life’.

‘It’s good to have it done, as everyone will expect it soon. It gives you an opportunity to take the time to be reflective, an opportunity that you might not otherwise have, particularly in a busy front line team. It also gives you an opportunity to develop reflective and/or working relationships with other NQSWs’.

‘Ongoing learning and development with reflective practice helps to develop your own understanding of your work, as well as learning from others in group work’.
'Work becomes very busy, very quickly and the ASYE development time gives you time to reflect on your practice which sadly tends not to happen very regularly when you are just ‘cracking on with the job’.

At the time of the final questionnaire, NQSWs said they would use the following key messages to sell the ASYE to another NQSW - again peer support features quite highly in responses:

- Allows for interaction with/peer support from other NQSWs (7 respondents).
- You receive support and supervision (6 respondents).
- Allows time for you to develop your practice (4 respondents).
- Workload management/protected caseload (3 respondents).
- Protected development time (2 respondents).
- Helps to establish CPD (2 respondents).

Examples of individual comments include:

‘The emotional support was the best part of the program. Having the support of my assessor has been invaluable. Also meeting once a month with other NQSW for training and critical reflection groups’.

‘Workload is managed. Regular supervision is provided. Time is allowed to develop practice through training, reading and research. There are opportunities to meet fellow NQSW’s and discuss how you are getting on and ways of dealing with issues that come up’.

‘ASYE provides a great opportunity to forge links with other newly qualified professionals and to learn from each other’s experiences; you will find these helpful as your career develops. ASYE is also a helpful ‘bridge’ between your university studies and the realities of practice - attend all of the workshops if you can as they are a valuable space for thinking and talking about social work practice as otherwise you could get ‘swamped’ with organisational culture and processes and forget to question the norms of your service’.

Supervisors/assessors were also asked what key messages they would use to sell the ASYE to another organisation. The most given messages were that it helps to develop the NQSW into a competent social worker, that the ASYE provides a good probationary period and provides opportunities for CPD. The responses are summarised below:

- Helps to develop the individual NQSW into a competent social worker (18 respondents).
- The ASYE is a good probationary period for NQSWs (13 respondents).
- It provides structured CPD/shows commitment to CPD (10 respondents).
- It provides a structured approach to support (5 respondents).
- The PCF provides a good framework on which to build practice (4 respondents).
- It ensures time for reflection (2 respondents).
Other comments from individual supervisors/assessors include:

- It helps to identify gaps in learning.
- It allows for a restricted caseload.
- It provides protected development time.
- Helps with retention/motivation.
- It promotes networking across teams.
- It is good development for both the NQSW and the supervisor.

Examples of individual comments include:

'It reinforces the positive work we do, it enables us to use reflection in our practice which then helps us to identify gaps in our learning and a structured CPD. It allows us the time and grace to network which promotes good practice. Overall the best evidence-based practice tool I have worked with’.

'Less time consuming, less paperwork, more time focusing on the practice, quality time with the NQSW’.

'The ASYE programme is creating great opportunities to NQSW to convert from studying social work to become a social worker’.

'The structure of the ASYE enables a clear approach to social work practice to be initiated with the NQSW and lays out clear expectations and the clear consideration that NQSW needs to continue in their practice along these lines. This is particularly the case in terms of professional decision making and ensuring that there is clear rationale for this. It also places a clear expectation on the NQSW to be responsible and continue to build on this responsibility throughout their practice’.

'Although initially it appears that the ASYE uses scarce resources, I feel that it ensures a well-rounded and fully supported professional social worker who has confidence to progress in the role and who is able to be autonomous in their qualifying role’.

5.7 Issues that have had to be resolved

At the time of the initial questionnaire, 17 per cent (19) of NQSWs overall had had major issues they had needed to resolve. These can be summarised as:

- Issues relating to supervision (9 respondents) including lack of sessions with a supervisor or indeed a supervisor, lack of knowledge and motivation amongst supervisors/assessors, not being supervised by a social worker and the loss of a supervisor who has not been replaced. For example:

'My supervisor has not got any spare time to supervise me and is not motivated to do so due to her own stress/anxiety/overload’.

'There is a lack of supervision and support from delivery. I feel that as an assessed year in employment I am not receiving the support that I should. I
have no support with safeguarding cases and in my opinion more support is required in order for me to be a competent social worker’.

‘I am not being supervised by a social worker. My Line Manager...is not familiar with the PCF or social work values. I requested professional supervision in addition to caseload supervision from a social worker. This was agreed and will now take place monthly. I have had one session so far - after four months in post’.

- Workload Management issues (3 respondents). For example:

‘Being part-time and the effect this has had on managing workload and ASYE requirements, and timelines for ASYE. At the beginning there was no guidance on ASYE for people working part-time. I don’t know if this has changed’.

- Lack of information about ASYE processes (3 respondents). For example:

‘The organisation had no idea re ASYE, why anyone would want to do it, what it was, what it meant. Absolutely no idea at all’.

‘No templates or organisation for ASYE work to be produced on, lack of coherent information, lack of direction for ASYE to progress’.

By the interim questionnaire 12 per cent (11) of NQSWs had issues they had needed to resolve since completing the initial questionnaire, some were the same individuals with issues identified at the time of the initial questionnaire. Issues mentioned by individual NQSWs were:

- Not receiving regular supervision.

- At the beginning questionnaires were prioritised over content.

- The ASYE workshops were cancelled due to their low standards.

- An identified learning need but unclear how much support for that can be given throughout the ASYE year.

- Asked to take on a large case load than felt should be the case on the ASYE.

- Got no resolution to workload issues so applied for a job on another team and will be moving shortly.

- Too much work for line managers meaning they don’t give the ASYE adequate attention.

At the time of the initial questionnaire, 30 per cent (16) of supervisors/assessors overall had issues that had arisen that they had needed to resolve and they were additionally asked what support they had received in resolving their issues. An overview of their responses are set out in the matrix below, Figure 5.1.
### Figure 5.1: Summary of issues that have had to be resolved by supervisors/assessors and the support they have had in resolving these issues (from initial questionnaire)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Support received</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty over the future of the role due to restructuring</td>
<td>No comment made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in engaging Human Resource (HR) in the process</td>
<td>More clarity on HR and workshops to develop policy linked to the ASYE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical of local learning materials which seem to contradict messages from Skills for Care and The College for Social Work (TCSW) particularly in relation to what happens if an individual fails the ASYE</td>
<td>“Bounced ideas around’ with the ASYE Coordinator within local authority (LA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems in the whole process and development of procedures</td>
<td>Was involved in establishing procedures, a shared task with a small group of people representing both Adults and Children’s services, HR and training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confusion about the paperwork</td>
<td>LA has now appointed an the ASYE Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differing expectations about the service being provided and the NQSW role in it</td>
<td>Support from line manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having to support other team members who have taken on additional work to cover for NQSW having a reduced caseload</td>
<td>No comment made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough time to provide supervision and support</td>
<td>Additional protected time provided and removal of some other responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NQSW struggling to evidence some basic core skills in social work</td>
<td>No comment made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency workers - if they are on the ASYE course what happens if they move to different agencies, does the ASYE progression move with them?</td>
<td>Very good support from Workforce Commissioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio requirements changed half way through the programme</td>
<td>Support via Senior Manager and Workforce Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queries on how an NQSW taking maternity leave will complete the ASYE</td>
<td>Still ongoing discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two candidates have no active manager</td>
<td>Negotiated additional support and increased rate of reflective supervision. Great cooperation from Workforce Development team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-compliance from a social work team with arranging Learning Agreement meeting</td>
<td>Supported by Workforce Development Manager and senior management within the Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training came too late so some deadlines for supervision were missed</td>
<td>Nothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional work for the ASYE assessors has had an impact on ability to recruit NQSWs as there is not the support available for them</td>
<td>‘the ASYE is mandatory so we had to get on with it’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HOST Policy Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Support received</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NQSW caused significant concern on direct observation</td>
<td>Discussions with NQSW’s line manager, provision on reports/additional mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NQSW did not receive any supervision from workplace as there was a management change</td>
<td>More supervision provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ASYE not receiving caseload supervision</td>
<td>Raised with Workforce Development team</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HOST Evaluation of the ASYE for Skills for Care, 2013

At the time of the interim report, 21 per cent (9) of supervisors/assessors Cohort One respondents had issues that had arisen since completing the first evaluation questionnaire that they had needed to resolve. These are summarised in Figure 5.2 below with the support received to resolve the issue alongside for comparison.

Figure 5.2: Summary of issues that have had to be resolved by supervisors/assessors and the support they have had in resolving these issues (from interim questionnaire)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Support received</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NQSW requested change as she felt she was not getting the right support</td>
<td>Discussion with Team Manager, agreed some priorities and safeguarding additional time for supervision/trackers/quality checking work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The input from Practice Educators and line managers required for the ASYE is creating a pressure on the service</td>
<td>'NONE'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessor capacity issue</td>
<td>Senior Manager, HR - it is still ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The amount of time put aside for study, training and workshops has had a huge impact on a small and busy hospital team</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties with resistance to following the programme from an NQSW which is unexpected</td>
<td>Currently have asked colleagues in the partnership but about to ask Health Care Professions Council (HCPC) for guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major personal issues affecting the assessed year for NQSWs - could lead to a failure of the year. Learning difficulty meaning NQSW not working at the same pace as others</td>
<td>The ASYE project meetings, multi discipline meeting. Report to their line manager. HR support re competency routes, occupational health assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A social worker who is failing the ASYE but meeting performance expectations</td>
<td>Manager and HR department dealing with this. Unclear if the person will remain in employment if she fails the ASYE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak support given by team manager and supervisor</td>
<td>Clarification from the ASYE lead and reviewing initial contract for NQSW.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NQSW who is completing the first ASYE decided to leave</td>
<td>We agreed the NQSW could complete her ASYE even though she was no longer in post</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HOST Evaluation of the ASYE for Skills for Care, 2013
Evidence from the case studies in relation to issues that have had to be resolved

Engaging the human resources department

The Learning and Development Managers for both the Adult and Children’s Services in Poole attempted to engage with the Human Resources (HR) department in the planning and organisation development of Employment Contracts for the ASYE candidates from an early stage in order to avoid any legal issues related to contracts or terms and conditions of employment. It took some time with HR to overcome their concerns about a one year probation period, and to fully appreciate the importance of their department’s role within the ASYE, but this is now fully established resulting in freshly drafted contracts for new NQSWs which will operate from the summer of 2013 and which reflect the importance of the ASYE and its wider impact on career progression. There have been concerns that it could be possible for individuals to pass their probationary period, the focus for which is mainly on generic issues (eg time-keeping), yet who are not moving satisfactorily towards a positive ASYE outcome. Therefore plans are being discussed - yet to be agreed - to link the ASYE with the probationary period so that the whole process is more work specific. Work is also in progress to link the PCF to a Career Matrix. This will enable an individual completing the ASYE to more clearly see their career pathway.

5.8 Keys to good practice from the case studies

Nine case studies were conducted to inform this report, selected from the evidence from the respondents to the surveys as evidencing good practice. The case studies are presented in their entirety at Annex I and have been used as vignettes to illustrate various elements of the ASYE process throughout the report.

The case studies provide us with clear indicators of the keys to good practice. For example:

- Adapting the available support materials and templates to make them directly relevant to the organisation and local practice.

- Ensuring that the Human Resource Department is involved from the initial stages, particularly in relation to synchronising the probation period and the ASYE.

- Facilitating appropriate initial and update training to enable supervisors/assessors to fulfil their ASYE role.

- Ensuring that the Learning Agreement is central to the process, because it underlines the importance of continuing to develop as a practitioner post-qualifying.

- Ensuring that individual NQSWs have a clear understanding of the expectations of the framework, and the support available to them, so that each individual is aware of their progress and what they need to do to reach acceptable standards of professional practice.

- Encouraging a strong attendance at the ASYE meetings and workshops by staff so that they understand the ASYE from the outset.
- Ensuring good communications especially in co-ordinating services with partner organisations to ensure they meet service needs.

- Developing clear channels of communication from the Workforce Development Team, through Practice Educators and supervisors/assessors down to NQSWs to ensure a shared understanding.

- Ensuring that the review process is well planned and delivered, building in the capacity to adapt approaches if required.

- Recognising that partnership working with other local organisations and neighbouring authorities is crucial as it allows for formal and informal exchange of effective practice.

- Ensuring feedback from service users is sought and taken into account.

- Ensuring that those involved in observation and assessment activities are familiar with the PCF.

- Recognising the importance of mentoring and peer support for NQSWs in their induction year.

- Facilitating support sessions for NQSWs and supervisors/assessors which allow for open discussion as these have been found to be a productive exercise and offer peer support opportunities.

- Ensuring a uniform approach, encompassing NQSWs in both Children’s and Adult Services.

- Ensuring that Senior Managers/Lead Social Worker attend observation sessions as this helps emphasise the importance placed on NQSW development allowing them to gain insights into the process. It also provides an element of validation to the assessment process.

- Ensuring adequate preparation for assessment, that plans are in place for external verification and for the quality assurance of assessment decisions.

- The establishment of a local assessment panel, with representatives across a local area and employers working together, can ensure consistency in assessment decisions across organisations.

The PLC prepared a short report for the evaluation that provides a different model for consideration and focuses on the ASYE in the voluntary sector.

A common self-audit was completed by the PLC which played a co-ordinating role throughout the implementation process. This role included:

- Circulation of an NQSW Briefing Paper to employers.

- Identifying NQSWs in post in small voluntary sector employers.

- Submitting a common Self-Audit to access funding and resources.

- Developing a database of NQSW supervisors based on an existing pool of qualified and experience Practice Educators.
- Matching external supervisors to NQSWs where an internal supervisor was not available.
- Developing protocols for small employers around employing freelance NQSW supervisors.
- Liaison with statutory sector employers in relation to accessing an agreed Portfolio and developing consistent assessment protocols.
- Providing a workshop and support programme.

The role of the Practice Learning Consortium in supporting NQSWs is shown below:

This model has been carried forward into the ASYE with the PLC registering NQSWs for the ASYE and co-ordinating activities across a number of employers.
5.9 Overview

This chapter has looked at the benefits, good practice and challenges that have been identified through the evaluation activities. It has reviewed aspects that have worked particularly well and identified good practice as well as considered issues that have been resolved in the implementation year. The next and final chapter pulls together the conclusions from the report and sets out recommendations for consideration.
Chapter 6: Areas for Consideration

6.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the key findings and explores some of the issues arising with recommendations where appropriate. It draws conclusions about the relative effectiveness of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (the ASYE) components and suggests alternative approaches for the next round of registrations. In particular we examine

- Areas of the ASYE which are strong and those that need development.
- Effective practice that could be disseminated and which have a clear transferable element.
- Any specific areas of implementation which have effected operational change or have influenced other processes.
- How Skills for Care and their partners could use the evaluation results to refine or enhance the ASYE.

It should be noted that whilst recommendations are aimed at Skills for Care as the commissioning body for the evaluation, our expectation is that they will work with their strategic partners and other agencies in order to implement them.

6.2 Findings from previous research

The previous Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) Programme

We researched evaluations from the previous NQSW Programme in the first interim report and highlighted a number of areas which could be contrasted and compared to the ASYE. This included the issue of high workloads and the availability of trained and skilful supervision - something that dominated Year 2 of the previous framework.

Links between the previous NQSW programme and the ASYE

The current evaluation suggests that both of these are still relevant issues, particularly supervision.

For example, there is evidence from both the surveys and the case studies that supervision, when competently carried out, is a crucial and inspiring forum for dialogue in social work and one where the professional and the organisation meet. The survey however also indicates that for some, supervision does not assure, support or assist NQSWs to evaluate their own practice and improve it. Time pressures and workloads account for some of this but it appears that is not the whole picture. Some NQSWs reported that supervision is being conducted without apparent planning and without NQSWs being given the necessary time and space to reflect on their performance.

There is evidence that organisations who ran the previous programme delivered more successfully in the second year. This could have implications for the ASYE and is certainly reflected in the evidence from the interim questionnaires for the current evaluation. The first year of any new process is bound to have some challenges and it appears that, for many individuals, things that were problematic initially such as lack of information or insufficient support materials within their organisation, were gradually
addressed and resolved as the implementation year progressed. The new intake from September 2013 will certainly benefit from all the work that has been done in this first year in designing pro formas, training of assessment staff and partnership working and the experience that supervisors/assessors have gained should help to ensure a smoother operational process from autumn 2013 onwards.

The supervisors/assessors involved in the current evaluation comprised a mixture of those who were involved in the previous NQSW Programmes and those who were not. There is some limited evidence to suggest that those with prior experience were able to adapt more quickly but even here some individuals reported that they found the transition from competence-based to holistic assessment challenging. Training has not been delivered to all supervisors/assessors to support their role but evidence from the case studies is that when this was carried out it benefitted both experienced staff and NQSWs. Some comments from the surveys further suggest that most affected were the supervisors/assessors who were very new to their role and did not have any prior experience of supporting or line managing an NQSW. We shall return to the issue of support and training for supervisors/assessors later in this chapter with associated recommendations.

**The implementation of the ASYE in Children’s Services**

The most recent research published by the Department for Education involved consultation with ten local authorities to examine how they had implemented the ASYE within their Children’s Services. The ASYE was viewed as an important initiative that was said to have been long overdue. This research suggested that there was consensus over the need for all social workers to have a clearly identified career pathway, alongside an assessment model that encompassed each of the levels identified in the Professional Capability Framework (PCF) and a conviction that investing in training and support in the first year of practice would reap rewards in terms of improved practice. The ASYE was seen as an essential part of the process of embedding a culture where employers and employees shared responsibility for professional development.

This study also indicated that despite the fact that the ASYE was viewed positively it had brought with it some challenges, not least the fact that it had been introduced at such short notice. There was also no doubt that the requirements relating to reduced caseloads and protected time were adding to the pressure on some teams.

Staff within these local authorities felt that there should be more standardisation within the ASYE so that expectations and assessments would be the same for all, and most wanted this then to be linked to a Licence to Practise.

**6.3 Communications and support materials**

According to responses from the initial questionnaire, just over half of NQSWs found out about the ASYE from their employer, indeed the majority of NQSWs overall became involved in the ASYE because it was an employer requirement. It is encouraging that a third of those NQSWs in Cohort Two got involved through their own choice.

The other main source of information at the time of the initial questionnaire for almost two fifths of NQSWs was from their university. This relatively low figure was almost certainly because the majority of the information on the ASYE was published in

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23 A full summary of the research is in Chapter 2 of this report.
24 There was in fact a year’s lead in time for the development of ASYE and the detail came out on schedule in September 2012.
September 2012 when most universities had lost, or were losing, contact with their students. In future it would be expected that universities would feature more prominently in providing information on the ASYE, indeed The Department for Education (the DfE) and Skills for Care expect this as part of the preparation of students from study to workplace.

**Recommendation**

1. Skills for Care contact the universities and make sure that they are aware of the available materials and will communicate that information to their students as part of the transition process.

At the time of the interim questionnaire, the main source of information on the ASYE for NQSWs was their assessor (21%). For supervisors and assessors, however, at the time of the interim questionnaire their main source of information was Skills for Care (68%).

Skills for Care ran a series of presentations on the ASYE which the lead officers from employer organisations were invited to attend; we have no verifiable information on how effective the subsequent dissemination to their employees was, especially those who would be charged with supervising and/or assessing NQSWs under the ASYE.

It is however clear from the findings that individual NQSWs in the implementation year of the ASYE were dependent on information from their work setting. From the initial questionnaire, over a quarter of NQSWs considered the description of the ASYE from their employer as 'not clear', and a quarter of supervisors/assessors felt the same.

From discussions that took place at the Skills for Care area workshops and the case study interviews, it is clear that many organisations have downloaded, and continue to download, Skills for Care material, adjusting it for their own purposes and then re-branding it. Readers and users of this material would not necessarily know who had produced the original documents. For this reason when NQSWs, were asked whether they had seen documents from the Skills for Care website, their responses may reflect this. As set out in Chapter 3, large numbers of respondents had not seen the individual documents directly relevant to them that were mentioned in the questionnaire. It should also be noted, that significant numbers of supervisors/assessors had not seen the materials on the website and others did not answer the question.

It may be unwise to draw too many conclusions from this. A newly introduced framework by its very nature will involve considerable documentation all of which would be new to those who are involved in implementation. It is possible that some NQSWs and their supervisors/assessors were still familiarising themselves with the necessary record keeping and different approach from the previous framework and may be confused; any subsequent follow up by Skills for Care however should be able to better illuminate this detail.

There is clearly an issue regarding the website, where difficulties in navigation were reported from a number of those currently involved in the ASYE and those who are not presently engaged. This is evident from all the survey responses received and appears to be more than just familiarisation with the site. NB: Skills for Care is in the process of launching a new website which is already taking into account the interim recommendations.
2. Employers review the information they hold internally on the ASYE and how that information is presented to NQSWs, their supervisors/assessors and line managers. This should include links to sources of information including the Skills for Care and The College of Social Work (TCSW) websites. The case studies have provided examples of how this might be approached.

3. Employers who work closely with each other and local agencies consider the co-ordination of the information and general support provided. This recognises that some NQSWs and their supervisors/assessors may work across several organisations.

4. There is a need for Skills for Care to develop a formal dissemination strategy to ensure that the individuals involved in the ASYE are told about the website and the materials that can be accessed, there especially the case studies, when they register for the ASYE. This could be by means of a ‘sources of information’ document signposting the available materials. Such a direct method is likely to be more effective than relying on a cascade effect from the employer which does not appear to have been an efficient method in the implementation year.

5. Skills for Care conduct a professional review of the website. This should include the way the material is presented and the signposting of materials to appropriate individuals such that there is clear indication of the intended audience (NQSWs, supervisors/assessors, employers and more general enquires). This might be achieved, for example, by regrouping and rebadging materials according to the intended audiences, such that the initial ASYE screen starts with a simple menu choice according to the person viewing. Then the selection takes an individual again to an uncluttered screen with clearly named documents.

6. When the website has been reviewed/reconfigured it might be appropriate for a website guide/toolkit to be produced to make navigation easier for each of the main ASYE audiences. However, if the website is reconfigured and properly tested for ease of use then there may be no need for this.

At the time of the initial questionnaire, 40 per cent (46) of NQSWs overall indicated that they did not have enough information on the ASYE and there was little difference between responses from the two Cohorts. 25 Similarly, 22 per cent (11) of supervisors/assessors overall felt they did not have enough information on the ASYE initially to fulfil their role. To some extent this would be expected at the early stages in the implementation of the ASYE and given the perception of the speed at which it was introduced. The initial need was largely centred on process issues, how to evidence requirements, complete pro formas, etc.

In responses to the interim questionnaire, just over a quarter of NQSWs and just under a fifth of supervisors/assessors overall indicated that there was still a shortfall in required information on the ASYE. At this point, whilst there were still queries from NQSWs in relation to portfolios and general clarification on processes and roles, the focus from supervisors/assessors was on clearer guidance and progress of candidates through the ASYE process and assessment rather than generic issues.

25 Cohort One comprises the first round of registrations on the ASYE during September/October 2012. Cohort Two is the second round of registrations during January-March 2013.
This suggests that individuals need different information at different points in time. They also need an effective method of notifying audiences that new information is available on the website, and the simplest way might be through a dedicated ASYE RSS\textsuperscript{26} feed so that individuals who sign up to it get an automatic notification when additions are made to the ASYE materials.

**Recommendations**

7. The establishment of an RSS feed just for the ASYE pages of the website so that individuals receive up-to-date information that is directly relevant to their situation.

8. Employers take steps to ensure that NQSWs and their supervisors/assessors have all the information they need throughout the different stages of the ASYE, not just when they register. This should reflect the fact that they have different information needs at individual points in time (eg on registration, prior to three and/or six month assessments, in preparation for final assessment, etc).

### 6.4 Delivery and assessment

A key dimension of the induction and probation process is for NQSWs to establish an open discourse with their supervisors. Some organisations have established ‘Learning Sets’ of NQSWs for people to discuss expectations and experiences.\textsuperscript{27} The majority of survey respondents expected workload management to be a significant part of their supervision, however it was clear that workloads and employer approaches to the management of workloads vary considerably across the country.

Evidence from the good practice identified in the case studies suggested that given that there is not a definitive workload management system that can determine fair workloads, it is crucial that expectations about workloads are part of every session between NQSWs and their supervisors. These conversations should address what caseload NQSWs are being allocated and whether it is manageable.

The issue of workload management is linked to the requirement for protected development time as a heavy caseload will impinge on the NQSWs ability to take advantage of study time. The majority of NQSWs and supervisors/assessors stated that protected development time was as set out in the Learning Agreement. We have seen the importance that supervisors/assessors have placed on the example Learning Agreements and guidance notes that are available from Skills for Care. These could be reviewed to ensure the requirement for agreed caseload and protected development time is clear.

**Recommendations**

9. Skills for Care issue further guidance in relation to what constitutes effective workload management and what protected development time should entail. This should be linked to our later recommendation on the training and development of supervisors/assessors.

\textsuperscript{26} Really Simple Syndication (RSS) are used on many websites and allows individuals to be kept up-to-date with their favourite sites by automatically receiving alerts whenever new information is added to the website.

\textsuperscript{27} Evidence from case studies and observation at the ASYE workshops by HOST.
10. Employers should ensure that workload management is regularly reviewed internally to ensure caseloads are manageable and that NQSWs feel able to take their protected development time.

11. Skills for Care review the Learning Agreement template and the guidance notes to ensure these issues are adequately covered within them. The importance of the Learning Agreement needs to be further stressed in communications with key audiences.

At the early stages of the evaluation, responses to the initial questionnaires showed high levels of awareness of the PCF and the standards described for the ASYE were considered suitable for the participating NQSWs. As time has progressed and the PCF has become embedded in the ASYE supervisory processes, the interim and final questionnaire responses suggest a very positive appreciation of the individual capability statements as confidence to deliver the ASYE increases. Just over three quarters of NQSWs and the majority of supervisors indicated that in the development of professional judgement and confidence a holistic rather than competency-based assessment is preferable.

At the time of the initial questionnaire both NQSWs and supervisors/assessors were clear on their expectations of what should be included in reflective supervision and the majority of NQSWs had agreed the frequency and duration of their supervision sessions. By the interim questionnaire, however, ‘constructive challenge’ and ‘feedback from people who use services’ had gone down significantly (from 62% to 31%). This is potentially an issue for holistic assessment as service user feedback is an important part of developing professional social work practice. The survey results suggest a lack of coherence in approach to obtaining service user feedback which needs to be addressed.

Recommendations

12. In order to develop a solid approach to holistic assessment, guidance is developed to facilitate the gathering of service user feedback. This should contain the types of approaches that could be used and also exemplar pro formas for gathering consistent information.

13. Employers review their approach to obtaining service user feedback to ensure it is fit for purpose and supports holistic assessment.

The majority of supervisors/assessors were confident in their ability to conduct reflective supervision and holistic assessment based on their previous experience and expertise. However, the evaluation findings suggest that additional training may be required and indeed from the case studies we have identified a number of areas where this approach has been taken with successful outcomes. This leads to another area central to successful delivery of the ASYE which is support.

The Social Work Reform Board (SWRB) listed the support expectations for the ASYE within the requirements in the Employer Standards and Supervision Framework with the overall expectation that this applies to employers, supervisors, and social workers. An important thread of the ASYE is therefore that the Learning Agreement completed at the start establishes the:

- Frequency of reflective supervision.
- A professional development plan.
- Statement on reduced workloads in the first year of employment to accommodate this.

The final questionnaire asked supervisors/assessors in Cohort One how well the provision of reflective professional supervision with their NQSWs had worked and all respondents indicated it had worked ‘very’ or ‘quite well’.

Only two fifths of supervisors/assessors felt they were getting adequate support from their employer. From the case studies the picture varies with some supervisors/assessors indicating that the support they received was well structured and regular while for others it was structured but less effective. Overall the NQSWs interviewed during the case studies reported feeling well supported, having their Learning Agreements reviewed regularly, and their learning needs met.

### Recommendations

14. Skills for Care review the guidance on training provision for supervisors/assessors to ensure it allows for further development and support for those with less experience and/or new to that role, including an understanding of how to support the development of reflective practice. There also needs to be explicit guidance for employers on providing support to supervisors/assessors to enable them to do their supervision/assessment duties effectively.

15. Employers, recognising the central role of supervisors/assessors, ensure that sufficient support is in place to enable the effectiveness of that role. This includes providing supportive management, but also a review of training needs which will vary according to the individual experience of the supervisor/assessor. Where employers work with others locally, the provision of training might be developed and delivered cost-effectively across the organisations.

In relation to assuring the quality of the assessment decision, it is encouraging to note that the early survey responses reported some processes in place to support this and at the time of the final questionnaire, almost three quarters of supervisors/assessors indicated their employers’ arrangement for assuring the quality of the assessment decisions worked ‘very’ or ‘quite well’, though a quarter stated it did not. It should be noted however, that at the time of the final survey not all assessment processes were completed so this is only a partial picture.

Quality of assessment is an area of concern expressed by the majority of members of the Virtual Reference Group (VRG) and also reflected in comments from the non-participants interviewed and from some questionnaire responses. From the case studies some locations appear to be well advanced in planning quality assurance procedures with elements of internal and external input. Indeed, partnership is a recurring theme in the case studies which provides cohesion in most respects with which all stakeholders can identify.

### Recommendations

16. Building on the evidence from the evaluation, Skills for Care work with key stakeholders to develop, monitor and support a nationally consistent approach to the assessment process.
17. Employers should have a clear plan and procedures in place for ensuring the quality of assessment. The case studies have suggested that where local employers work closely together this could be achieved as a group approach such as a local assessment panel.

6.5 Benefits and issues

It is encouraging to note that the majority of NQSWs and supervisors/assessors would recommend the ASYE to others. From the initial questionnaire, ‘Development of personal confidence’ and ‘Acknowledgement of personal responsibility for continuing professional development (CPD)’ featured highly as key benefits for NQSWs and ‘Continuing professional development’ followed by ‘Learning to provide reflective supervision’ and ‘Learning to provide holistic assessment’ were the highest ranked benefits by supervisors/assessors. According to supervisors/assessors at the time of the final questionnaire, the main benefits to the NQSWs taking part in the ASYE include confidence, the receipt of structured support, credibility with future employers and CPD.

Clearly the ASYE was seen by respondents as an opportunity to develop supervisor/assessor skills and there is a large amount of evidence from the interim questionnaires from both NQSWs and supervisors/assessor on how the ASYE process complements CPD. In the final questionnaire, CPD was cited by three quarters of respondent supervisors/assessors as a benefit of their participation in the ASYE followed by ‘learning to provide reflective professional supervision’ and ‘learning to provide holistic assessment’.

Evidence from the case studies suggested that supervisors and Practice Educators welcomed this not least because it helped give a professional identity to their role within Adult Services that is frequently not as defined as that of Children’s services in many regions, a point also made by members of the Virtual Reference Group. An awareness of CPD was viewed as an important thread in developing capability not least in relation to team work.

Recommendations

18. Skills for Care conduct a review of the benefits of participation in the ASYE highlighted in this report and develop a dissemination strategy to present them in an appropriate form to employers, supervisors/assessors, NQSWs and stakeholders more generally.

19. Employers clearly set out the benefits of participation in the ASYE to all those involved in the process.

The main issues identified by NQSWs related to supervision. This is also true for the supervisors/assessors but they also had concerns about restructuring, engaging their employer and unresolved queries such as how the ASYE works with agency staff, perhaps reflecting once again the challenging background against which the ASYE was introduced.

The issue of agency staff and how they can be supported to participate in the ASYE, and whether that is the responsibility of the agency or the employer with whom they are working on their temporary contract, has arisen during the evaluation, particularly in the Virtual Reference Group discussions. In one case study all temporary workers were offered the ASYE enrolment and ad hoc training. However, there is no major evidence from the fieldwork that would lead to conclusions or recommendations in relation to the
use of temporary workers. We note that the Local Government Association has facilitated the development of a Protocol for the Engagement of Agency-based social workers in England, developed in discussion with the Employer Standards Working Group but that the ASYE is not specifically mentioned within that.

The importance of engaging the human resources team especially within a statutory authority was evident from the case studies. This helped to overcome legal employment issues, help facilitated a single probation/ASYE process and helped HR to consider how the PCF and assessed standard are likely to affect job specifications and job roles in future.

6.6 Overview

The evaluation of the implementation year of the ASYE in Adult Services presents an encouraging picture of a real commitment by staff and NQSW to embed the process and ensure it reflects local practice as well as national professional standards. There are still issues to be resolved largely connected with workload management and the availability of suitably experienced supervisors/assessors to facilitate the process. There is evidence that successful and sustained delivery of the ASYE is most likely to be achieved when all stakeholders work in partnership to ensure that communications and delivery are cohesive. The evaluation highlights the importance of NQSWs taking some responsibility for their own development in order that their future professional capability reflects personal needs as well as the vision of the organisation in which they work and service users.

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# Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASYE</td>
<td>Assessed and Supported Year in Employment</td>
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<td>CPD</td>
<td>Continuing Professional Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>CWDC</td>
<td>Children’s Workforce Development Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>DfE</td>
<td>The Department for Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>HCPC</td>
<td>Health and Care Professions Council</td>
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<td>HOST</td>
<td>HOST Policy Research</td>
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<td>HR</td>
<td>Human Resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>Local authority</td>
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<td>NOS</td>
<td>National Occupational Standards</td>
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<tr>
<td>NQSWs</td>
<td>Newly Qualified Social Workers</td>
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<td>PCF</td>
<td>Professional Capability Framework</td>
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<td>PCT</td>
<td>Primary Care Trust</td>
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<td>PDR</td>
<td>Personal Development Record</td>
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<td>PVIs</td>
<td>Private, Voluntary and Independent Organisations</td>
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<td>QA</td>
<td>Quality assurance</td>
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<td>RSS</td>
<td>Really Simple Syndication</td>
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<td>SfC</td>
<td>Skills for Care</td>
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<td>SWAN</td>
<td>Social Work Action Network</td>
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<td>SWRB</td>
<td>Social Work Reform Board</td>
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<td>SWTF</td>
<td>Social Work Task Force</td>
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<td>TCSW</td>
<td>The College of Social Work</td>
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<tr>
<td>UEA</td>
<td>University of East Anglia</td>
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<tr>
<td>VRG</td>
<td>Virtual Reference Group</td>
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