

ASYE child and family

Annual report to the Department for Education

June 2020

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Skills for Care would like to acknowledge the hard work and commitment of all the employers and employees that are involved in the ASYE for children and families.

We would like to thank those organisations that participated in the review visits, and those that generously hosted the action learning facilitation training.

Section 1. Introduction

Skills for Care is the employer-led workforce development body for social care in England.

In 2018 we were appointed by the Department for Education (DfE) to manage the support to child and family services with the delivery of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment programme.

This is the second annual report. It seeks to present the overall state of play with regards to the delivery of the ASYE programme for children and families in 2019-20, providing an assessment of the consistency in delivery of the ASYE programme nationally.

As last year, this report is underpinned by the four overarching themes of the evaluation criteria set out in the Cycle of Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement (appendix 1):

- 1) The ASYE programme is delivered in accordance with ASYE Framework and Employer Standards
- 2) The ASYE programme ensures that the PQS and the PCF underpin Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWS) professional practice (please note that throughout this report we will be referring to the Post Qualifying Standards (PQS) and not the KSS)
- 3) The NQSWS' experience of undertaking the ASYE is central to the quality assurance and continuous improvement process
- 4) The ASYE programme is integrated within the wider organisational system

In year one we sought to gain an overview of the programme delivery so as to create a benchmark from which to make subsequent comparisons.

In year two we have explored the overarching themes stemming from the programme from the perspective of NQSWSs.

We have engaged with the NQSW Community of Practice to identify the specific areas on which to focus. This has significantly contributed to our review and emphasises the role that newly qualified social workers play in influencing the development of ASYE programmes.

1.1 Summary of what is covered in the report

This report brings together both quantitative and qualitative data and information from a broad range of sources including:

- The NQSW registration portal
- The 360-degree organisational evaluation tool
- The NQSW Community of Practice
- Regional workshops
- In-depth quality assurance review visits
- Action Learning Facilitation Training

Section two discusses relevant key messages from the sources outlined above.

Section three focuses on the specific areas that we were tasked to explore by the NQSW Community of Practice – NQSW workload; Supervisors; Wellbeing.

Section four draws together the learning from all sources and outlines the key messages and recommendations for the further development of ASYE programmes.

Section five includes appendices which provide further detail of information provided in the report.

1.2 Executive summary

The purpose of this report is to provide an update about ASYE activity that has taken place in 2019-20 and share the learning with employers and the Department for Education (DfE). It also references the areas for future development in 2020 and beyond.

The Cycle of Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement is reflected in the report structure - by presenting the key messages from the perspective of NQSWs and framing the recommendations for the benefit of employers, we seek to influence programme development so that NQSW experience remains at the core.

This is important because in 2019-20 numbers of NQSWs registered by their employers on the ASYE funding portal were at the highest level to date. It is a very positive indication of the perceived value of the ASYE to employers who regard it as a vital element in the recruitment and retention of new frontline staff.

The DfE shares this commitment and wants to understand the ways that ASYE programmes are delivered, including the issues and needs at local level. To help with this they need as much detailed information as possible. With this in mind, from 2020 employers receiving NQSW grant funding are expected to confirm that they have implemented a process of quality assurance and continuous improvement in their ASYE programme. Completion of the 360-degree feedback tool will be

accepted as evidence of their quality assurance cycle on an annual basis. Some minor changes to the ASYE portal will also be made to gather further detail about deferrals and withdrawals of NQSWs.

Given its' "Influencing" role within the Cycle of Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement, the main themes explored in the report were identified by the NQSW Community of Practice. Developing the work of this forum be a focus in 2020-21.

In terms of the main themes - NQSW workload and well-being together with the identification of and support for supervisors-, the overarching message in this report, is those programmes that provide the best experience for NQSWs enjoy senior manager buy-in; are where the ASYE is valued and invested in; supervisors are supported and NQSWs have an identity recognised by all levels of the hierarchy.

The single most critical element within an ASYE programme is reported to be the availability of regular and effective supervision including both caseload and professional aspects. This is regarded as vital in managing workload, protected time and overall well-being. In addition to one to one supervision with their line managers or other designated person, peer learning and support is valued by NQSWs. Action Learning is a methodology that is particularly valued.

Given the significance of these activities it is important that employers have arrangements in place to ensure that those responsible for supervision are supported in their role with access to training, peer support and space within their workload.

Overwhelmingly, the findings from all data sources suggest that employers understand their commitments and want to ensure that all elements of the ASYE framework are in place to benefit NQSWs. Some organisations encounter a myriad of challenges along the way and this results in variations in the quality of support provided. Consistency in NQSW experience therefore remains a challenge.

The mechanisms for assuring quality differ across organisations, some being more robust than others. This is an area for further development in most cases.

1.3 COVID-19

The data in this report was gathered before March 2020. While the data does not reflect the widespread effect that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on children's services, the recommendations have been written during lockdown and take this into account.

Section 2. Learning from different sources

2.1 The NQSW registration portal

The number of NQSW registrations on the portal for 2019-20 is 2912, which is a slight increase from 2827 registrations last year.

Three quarters of registrations are from local authorities, which is similar to last year. There are also registrations from a range of different settings in the Private, Voluntary and Independent Sector (PVI), Fostering, Schools and the NHS.

Registrations come from across England with the majority of two thirds from London and the South East.

A small number of registrations have been withdrawn/deferred for various reasons, the most common were for health reasons, maternity and the NQSW leaving their current employment.

Key message

- The number of NQSW registrations on the portal remains high and there has been a slight increase in the numbers of employers using the portal from last year. This reflects the value employers place on it as a method of retaining staff and maintaining high standards.

2.2 The 360-degree Organisational Evaluation Tool

This tool provides a comprehensive method for reviewing an ASYE programme. Once completed, the generated report can be used by employers to inform action planning. It also has the capability to produce local/regional/national data which will be able to inform strategic planning at each level.

Following its' launch in May 2019, the number of organisations that have registered on the system is 98. Out of these, 53 have fully completed the process, with seven organisations completing their second round.

Most of these early adopters first engaged with the tool as part of their involvement in the in-depth review visits. Their feedback has been overwhelmingly positive with recognition of the value it can bring to their ASYE programmes. The inclusion of NQSWs feedback was considered by most to be a strength and they were able to identify new ways in which they could use it. A few others were concerned that NQSWs may not have access to sufficient knowledge about the programme structure to enable them to fully answer the evaluation questions.

The high-level data generated through the tool (appendix 5.6), while limited, reinforces what we observed in the visits, namely that there are a number of well established, well-functioning programmes. We have not identified any significant

changes over the two years. This may be due to the small amount of data currently in the system. It may also reflect limited change over this time period.

With this in mind, from 2020 employers receiving NQSW grant funding are expected to confirm that they have implemented a process of quality assurance and continuous improvement in their ASYE programme. Completion of the 360-degree feedback tool will be accepted as evidence of their quality assurance cycle on an annual basis.

This increase of data within the system will maximise the potential of the evaluation tool and generate a much fuller picture of ASYE programmes nationally.

Key messages

- From 2020 all employers applying for grant funding for NQSWs are expected to demonstrate how they are complying with the Cycle of Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement, evidenced through completion of the 360-degree organisational evaluation tool on an annual basis or through another systemic process that is focused on achieving continuous improvement
- Employers should ensure that NQSWs understand their employers' rationale for providing the ASYE and the overall shape of the programme within their organisation. This will enable them to make a meaningful contribution to and be active participants in the Cycle of Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement, including the 360-degree evaluation.

2.3 The NQSW Community of Practice

Established in January 2019, the NQSW Community of Practice forms a central pillar of the Cycle of Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement. It is the vehicle through which NQSWs can influence innovative practice and learning in ASYE programmes. The NQSW Community of Practice meets three times a year, a combination of virtual and face to face meetings. It consists of a group of NQSWs and employers. The NQSWs drive the agenda and the employers offer advice and information to support the NQSWs. Meetings consist of some separate and joint sessions between the two to discuss findings on questions posed and work/guidance reviewed. Please see appendix 5.2 for more information regarding the role of the group.

The establishment of the NQSW Community of Practice is a work in progress. During the first year its' focus has been on establishing the groundwork for the fulfilment of its role. Going forward attention will be given to raising its profile with NQSWs and employers across the country in order to encourage information sharing and the generation of new ideas.

In order to initiate this dialogue, members of the NQSW Community of Practice have taken the lead in identifying the key focus areas for this evaluation report.

These are:

1) NQSW workload

- identifying and managing workload throughout the year
- use of a 10% reduction within the organisation. How this is calculated and managed throughout the year.

2) Supervisors

- identification of ASYE supervisors
- training and support available to supervisors prior to and during the ASYE.

3) Wellbeing

- support for NQSW wellbeing throughout the ASYE
- identification and use of protected days.

The findings are reported in section three of this report.

Key messages

- In 2020-21 there will be a refresh of the NQSW Community of Practice membership and the aim going forward will be to embed the community further as reviewers and leaders of best practice which can then be shared with the sector.
- Employers should make NQSWs aware of the existence of the NQSW Community of Practice (CoP) and their influencing role within the Cycle of Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement. Opportunities to share learning and innovative practice with the CoP should be explored.
- We would encourage employers to send examples of learning and innovative ASYE practice from their locality to be reviewed and ratified by the NQSW Community of Practice. These examples will then be published on the Skills for Care website to support shared learning.

Further information about the NQSW Community of Practice, including current membership details, are provided in appendix 2.

2.4 Regional workshops

A key conclusion arising from the year 1 evaluation report was the value of restating the basic criteria for the ASYE. The intention of this was to help the establishment of consistency across programmes and in this way support quality assurance.

In Autumn 2019, Skills for Care took this recommendation forward through the delivery of 6 regional workshops entitled “The Cycle of Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement – Where are we now and what next?”

Half-day workshops took place in:

- Wolverhampton - 13 November 2019
- Cambridge - 18 November 2019
- Leeds - 20 November 2019
- Taunton - 25 November 2019
- Preston - 10 December 2019
- London - 19 December 2019

In total 271 participants representing 158 of the 167 employers currently delivering ASYE programmes attended the events.

These workshops provided an opportunity for participants to reflect upon the findings of the year 1 report, revisit the ASYE assessment requirements and consider the aspects of their ASYE programmes that may need to be updated.

The fact that they took place in the middle of the pre-election period did restrict some discussions about future plans, but overall, the response from employers was positive. For some organisations the recommendations would only require a light-touch review while for others they offered guidance about more significant changes they would need to make going forwards.

When considering external quality assurance processes, it was interesting to note a level of synergy between the child and family and adult ASYE programmes – particularly around Moderation – that existed in some organisations.

Key messages

- Given the very high proportion of employers who attended the workshops, messages about the basic assessment requirements for the ASYE have been widely received. The assessment requirements are also outlined on the Skills for Care website and over time this should translate into more consistency across the sector.
- Participation in external moderation, alongside adult services, is widely reported.

2.5 In depth quality assurance employer visits

In February and March 2020, Skills for Care conducted a series of face-to-face visits to employers across England. These organisations were selected using a heterogeneous, purposive sample in order to select a diverse range of employer type, number of NQSWs and region. We excluded those who had been visited in 2018-19.

Twenty-two visits had been planned. In the event, due to the COVID-19 pandemic fifteen were undertaken - face-to-face visits to twelve employers, with a three conducted virtually. Seven visits were cancelled. Despite this reduction, the reviewers were able to gather a significant amount of information to inform this report. The profile of the organisations visited is outlined in appendix 5.3.

The review visits were undertaken in the spirit of “critical friend” as opposed to formal assessments. The visits consisted of discussions with those involved with the programme, including NQSWs, supervisors, principal social workers and ASYE leads. Discussions were based around the 360-degree tool completed by employers prior to the visit, the evaluation criteria and the three key focus areas identified by the NQSW Community of Practice. They also provided an opportunity to review the extent to which organisations are adhering to the basic requirements of the ASYE programme.

It was very positive to note that the majority of the ASYE programmes we visited were being delivered broadly in line with the basic requirements. They rightly prided themselves on the quality of the experience they were providing, and this was reinforced by most of NQSWs we spoke to. In the main any recommendations arising from the visits were about further improvement or sharing of good practice rather than fundamental problems. Where there were serious issues affecting the NQSW experience these were acknowledged by the organisations concerned and very much reflected the wider structural/organisational difficulties beyond the scope of the review visits.

The choice of delivery model, combined with position within organisational structures, has an impact on the profile and status of programmes. It is evident from organisations we visited that those which are backed by senior management and receive investment are more likely to reap the benefits to recruitment and retention that the ASYE is able to provide.

The Learning Academy model has been adopted by a number of organisations. While there are variations in operational features, this model can be summarised as an environment where learning is prioritised and included alongside the day-to-day work. We observed the key characteristics to be:

- a strategic approach that embodies the “Learning Organisation” culture with appropriate investment being available to support this
- a cross-organisation approach to Induction, core training and CPD for the whole workforce
- a well-resourced ASYE programme with a distinct learning offer for NQSWs that sits within a recognised CPD pathway
- the existence of a clear identity for NQSWs completing their ASYE, which is understood and supported by the whole organisation
- the deployment of Advanced Practitioners in a support/supervisory role with NQSWs also fits within the academy model.

As with academies there are variations in the way that advanced practitioners are deployed, but in all cases the role is defined and distinct and it is regarded as an important feature of the ASYE support and assessment arrangements. The job description varies in ways such as:

- Whether the role is part or full time; practice-based or workforce development based; regarded as a stepping-stone to line management or as a specialist role in its' own right.
- Whether the practitioner holds a caseload or not – those who retain a direct practice role may have a reduced caseload; others with a workforce remit either do not hold a caseload or they may act as the responsible person for the NQSW's caseload.
- The remit for assessment – in some cases as the designated assessor but more usually in conjunction with the line manager who is the designated person.
- The nature of support role – with individuals; provision of peer support via action learning sets; distinction between professional and caseload supervision split with line manager.

A further important observation arising from the review visits was the significant positive impact that the ASYE coordinator can have on the success of a programme. The high level of personal commitment and enthusiasm demonstrated by the individuals with whom we have had contact in the review visits (plus the regional workshops and action learning facilitation training) is a common thread that is endorsed by NQSWs. These individuals are the backbone of successful ASYE programmes. From the point of view of NQSWs supportive co-ordinators transform the ASYE from an organisational requirement into a highly positive personal and professional development experience.

Key messages

- There is evidence that many ASYE programmes are well established and function broadly within the framework.
- Organisational approaches to the delivery of the ASYE vary – academy models including those built around senior practitioners are widely used. We encourage employers using these models to share their experience with others via Skills for Care
- The value that the ASYE coordinator brings to the success of a programme is significant

2.6 Action Learning Facilitation training

The ability to reflect on and critically analyse social work practice is a key element of the PQS. Any local ASYE programme activity that supports NQSWs to develop in this crucial aspect of their professional role can be regarded as a significant quality indicator.

Action learning is a well-established means of developing critically reflective practice and in 2019 Skills for Care, in partnership with the Centre for Action Learning, rolled out Action Learning Facilitation training to ASYE leads.

Thanks to the generosity of the organisations that provided venues (listed below) we were able to deliver a three-day ILM recognised Development Award with follow up support via virtual action learning in ten locations.

London Borough of Camden	January/February 2019
Blackpool Council	April/May 2019
London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham	July 2019
Essex County Council	September/October 2019
Somerset County Council	September/October 2019
Gateshead Council	October/November 2019
York City Council	November/December 2019
Warrington Council	January/February 2020
Walsall Council	February/March 2020
Surrey County Council	March/April 2020

The intention of these free development opportunities was to create sustainable capacity by providing skills development to personnel within local ASYE programmes and further support to help them embed action learning within their organisations.

In total 87 individuals from 75 organisations participated (66 x local authority and 9 x PVI).

While the medium to longer term impact of this training is yet to be evaluated, feedback from participants on completing the programme has overwhelmingly been extremely positive.

While most of the participants had some prior experience of using elements of action learning within their ASYE programmes, they appreciated learning more about the approach and practicing new techniques and were impressed by its power and impact. They completed the programme alive with ideas about ways in which they could employ them going forward.

A significant point of learning was around the range of potential uses for their newly developed skills, over and above enabling NQSWs to reflect critically on their practice. They also recognised the potential of establishing action learning sets for

supervisors; as well for wider organisational activities such as culture change and transformation projects.

The cross-organisational relationships that were fostered within the training were also valued. A number of participants identified that they sometimes feel isolated within their organisations and the opportunity to spend time with like-minded people in similar roles enabled them to form much welcomed peer support networks. In addition to the mutual support element, these networks also enable the sharing of learning and innovative practice across programmes.

The four virtual action learning sets that took place once the face-to-face programmes were completed provided a safe space for participants to discuss their progress in establishing new action learning interventions within their organisations. While the content of those discussions is confidential, the main themes reflect the issues reported elsewhere in this document:

1. NQSWs not being able to complete their ASYE portfolios on time because of:
 - competing work demands/pressures and high or inappropriately complex caseloads
 - inadequate support from managers, including supervision.
2. Inconsistency in quality of support provided by managers or assessors across organisation.
3. Manager buy-in to ASYE programme (or perceived value of ASYE programme by managers).
4. Workload and stress issues.

Key messages

- ASYE leads report that they sometimes run the risk of feeling isolated within organisations and opportunities for them to participate in cross-organisational networks is therefore regarded as important. In addition to providing peer support, this also makes the sharing of learning and innovative practice possible.
- NQSWs overwhelmingly value the peer support and learning opportunities that action learning makes possible.
- Further activity will take place in 2020-21 to evaluate the impact of the Action Learning Facilitation training.

Section 3 NQSW Community of Practice - areas of focus

3.1 NQSW workload

- identifying and managing workload throughout the year
- use of a 10% reduction within the organisation. How this is calculated and managed throughout the year.

There is a general acknowledgement across organisations that the identification and management of workload to incorporate a reduction relevant to the NQSW's needs and level of experience is a challenging balancing act.

A variety of approaches have been adopted ranging from very prescriptive to much more informal, but all emphasise the importance of dialogue between the NQSW and their line manager/supervisor and use of the Learning and Support Agreement in the supervision process.

Organisations involve different people in this dialogue - line managers, advanced practitioners, and in a few cases, colleagues as part of a discussion in weekly team meetings. The key variables that influence allocation are the complexity of the case, and the NQSW's experience/identified development needs/capability/stage of the ASYE/level of confidence.

There is general agreement that a well-managed workload can only be maintained when these variables are reviewed on a regular basis.

The concerns about placing sole emphasis on dialogue within supervision as a way of managing workload and reduction are identified as:

- lack of clarity, consistency and transparency between managers/teams and the wider organisation in relation to the monitoring of workload and appropriate adjustments
- difficulties in protecting the caseloads during high pressure periods
- slippage in providing time for completing the ASYE documentation or attending training.

By way of mitigation some organisations have developed service-wide agreements about the way that NQSW's workloads are identified and managed and these form the benchmark for allocation. These may be ASYE specific policies or they may be connected to wider organisational procedures. Whatever the agreement looks like, the success or otherwise relies heavily on the ownership by senior management and compliance at team management level.

Across organisations we observed a spectrum of approaches ranging from the adoption of a case load policy that provide benchmark numbers but giving managers discretion, to the laying down of specified caseload caps for different stages of the

ASYE or a Weighting system that is used to determine numbers based on levels of complexity. A smaller number of organisations adopt a co-allocation approach with an advanced practitioner as the named case holder. More detailed information about these findings can be found in appendix 5.4.

Regardless of the method being adopted, a shared understanding of the details of the approach enhances transparency, accountability and integrity within the ASYE programme. Many organisations explain the approach in ASYE Induction and within the Programme handbook. This may also link to the Probation Policy so that expectations are clear from the outset.

The identification and use of protected development days is closely associated with an organisation's approach to workload management. Some organisations adopt a "hands-off" approach, leaving it to NQSWs to manage their commitments. Others proactively direct them to diarise protected days, training and portfolio building at the beginning of the year. Feedback from NQSWs suggested that many of them need "permission" and support from management to prioritise their ASYE commitments, and the latter approach was widely welcomed.

Most organisations provide specific guidance about this in the ASYE handbooks and team managers reinforce the messages. Where this does not happen, the risk is that NQSWs do not take their allotted time properly which has implications for their learning and development.

Key messages

- Most organisations place emphasis on appropriately managing the workloads of their NQSWs. Unfortunately, there are still a small number of examples of organisations where this is not happening.
- Senior management ownership of workload management policies is fundamental.
- Dialogue within the supervision process is crucial.
- A clear statement of the approach being adopted for managing workload is important to maintain transparency and accountability.

3.2 Supervisors

- identification of ASYE supervisors
- training and support available to supervisors prior to and during the ASYE.

Organisations adopt a range of approaches to the identification of ASYE assessor.

In most cases there is an expectation that the line manager will act as the ASYE assessor however, not infrequently assistant managers/senior practitioners also take this responsibility. Small organisations may employ external independent supervisors.

Based on the organisations we visited it would appear that the employment of advanced practitioners with a specific remit to support NQSWs is a relatively common approach. The specifics of the role vary, but most involve a shared supervisory relationship with the line manager.

The levels of training and support available for ASYE assessors varies considerably between organisations – from comprehensive to non-existent.

Those learning organisations that provide an integrated and structured programme of support and learning cited a range of opportunities such as:

- Internal training and access to external workshops and conferences:
 - PEPs – either in-house or in partnership with a local HEI
 - PQS standards and working towards NAAS supervisors' assessment
 - first line manager development programme
 - DfE commissioned training delivered by Research in Practice
 - access to the whole organisation training offer including resilience and wellbeing.

- Peer support facilitated by the L&D team and including such things as:
 - practical workshops to explain the assessment process – in one organisation visited, supervisors meet quarterly to discuss the practicalities of the programme and their assessment role etc. They have four workshops during the year that take place on the same day as the NQSW's workshops
 - bi-monthly reflective sessions which look at case management/how to evidence less tangible work and including opportunities to share good practice and educational resources
 - peer reflection (in organisations where the advanced practitioner model is used this was particularly noted)
 - buddying – new assessors with someone more experienced.

- Honorariums – a small number of organisations mentioned that they are paying these.

Unfortunately, access to support and training for supervisors is not universally available and we visited some organisations where supervisors received limited assistance and poor recognition of their assessment role.

This was reflected in a negative perception of the ASYE with low priority given to the assessment process.

Key messages

- There are a range of models where Advanced Practitioners have a designated role in the support of NQSWs. The level of assistance that these experienced workers provide is well received by NQSWs and line managers.

- The role of the ASYE supervisor is time-consuming, especially so for line managers with more than one NQSW in their team. The demands that they face

create significant additional pressure for these individuals and this should be acknowledged with additional support provided

- While many organisations provide good support for their ASYE supervisors, this is not across the board, with negative repercussions for the integrity of the programme plus damaging implications for their well-being and that of their NQSWs.

3.3 Wellbeing

- support for NQSW wellbeing throughout the ASYE
- identification and use of protected days.

The NQSWs in most of the organisations visited viewed supervision and supportive colleagues as key to supporting their wellbeing.

Commitment to regular supervision which includes time to express wellbeing concerns and receive support has the potential to mitigate many workplace pressures. Ultimately it can make the difference between an NQSW feeling able to cope and not.

Effective supervision may not happen automatically and all those involved (NQSWs, line managers/supervisors) benefit from guidance and training in this area. The DfE commissioned training delivered by Research in Practice has been held in high regard by those who have experienced it. Similarly, insight profiles around learning and communication styles have been valued by NQSWs.

The benefits to wellbeing associated with one-to-one supervision are enhanced when NQSWs feel that they also have access to ad-hoc/informal and pastoral support from others in their organisation. This may come from a range of sources – supportive team colleagues, other NQSWs, ASYE coordinators, others in the wider hierarchy including senior management and HR.

Of these a supportive team is pivotal. Regular team meetings, briefings and shared decision-making are important, but the ability to go to others for advice and guidance when needed is considered most useful.

The way that teams are configured plus the practices of hot-desking and remote working influence the availability of this type of support. Teams that work at developing their supportive ethos are appreciated by NQSWs.

Peer support networks are also highly valued. These are integral to most ASYE programmes with Action Learning models in widespread use. NQSWs find particular benefit from being able to share a breadth of experiences with colleagues from other teams including those who work in adult services where these opportunities exist.

ASYE coordinators also have an important role in supporting NQSWs. They are often involved in the facilitation of peer learning sessions, but also in providing

informal support on a one to one basis. Many coordinators feel very responsible for “their NQSWs” and play an important mediation/advocacy role as well as offering practical advice and guidance about portfolios etc. Through undertaking the review visits, we came across some striking examples of pastoral support from ASYE coordinators which were significant in keeping NQSWs in the profession when encountering extreme personal or professional pressures. It is clear and obvious that the commitment, energy and enthusiasm of coordinators is regarded by NQSWs who experience it as a defining feature of their ASYE experience.

Those organisations that prioritise the ASYE are often characterised by a strong culture where everyone regards it as their responsibility to make NQSWs feel settled and supported. NQSWs fortunate enough to work in these settings describe open door policies with senior leaders, principal social workers and service managers. One NQSW reported the comfort she felt after receiving a personal phone call from the Director when she had her car stolen while at work. Another mentioned how reassuring it felt to know that a concern of hers was being taken seriously and acted upon by the PSW.

This level of interest is also reflective of an employer that is committed to employee well-being more generally and NQSWs told us about a wide range of initiatives that they have valued such as:

- staff access to massage
- mindfulness meditation sessions for all staff
- monthly reflection with psychotherapist
- annual summer event
- plans for/buddy system/coaching sessions
- regular team “emotional support afternoons” – for example sporting activities, charity events, office “dressing” competitions
- team development activities delivered by consultant six times a year
- resilience workshops offering coping strategies and techniques.

NQSWs also point to organisational cultures which impact on their wellbeing such as the taking of TOIL, annual leave and the home/work life balance; flexible working practices including working from home on study days; health and safety in regard to lone and late working. NQSWs need encouragement to maintain their wellbeing by taking their time owing and working flexibly.

Organisations that demonstrate a learning culture are most conducive to a positive ASYE experience. Access to training – organisation wide and ASYE specific; buddying and coaching were things that were valued by NQSWs. Concerns were expressed about post-ASYE support, and learning organisations were able to provide reassurance in this area. A number of organisations we spoke to are actively considering extending elements of the ASYE support package into the second year of practice.

Key messages

- There are a range of models where Advanced Practitioners have a designated role in the support of NQSWs. The level of assistance that these experienced workers provide is well received by NQSWs and line managers.
- Team managers with more than one NQSW in their team experience additional workload pressures - this should be acknowledged with additional support provided.
- While many organisations provide good support for their ASYE supervisors, this is not across the board, with negative repercussions for the integrity of the programme.
- Employers should consider the impact of team cultures on staff wellbeing.

Section 4 – Moving forwards – conclusions and recommendations

As the name implies, the Cycle of Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement is about ASYE programmes progressing over time, taking account of feedback and learning from experience.

The recommendations outlined below draw on the findings from the sources discussed in previous sections. They build on the recommendations outlined in the first annual report and are framed from the perspective of NQSW experience. By presenting the recommendations under the evaluation criteria headings we are firmly locating them within the Cycle of Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement and emphasising the actions that employers can take to drive forward improvement within their ASYE programmes.

4.1 The ASYE programme is delivered in accordance with ASYE Framework and Employer Standards

Workload management was highlighted as a clear challenge in the first annual report and it remains the case in this one. Feedback from NQSWs we met through the review visits reinforced the view that effective dialogue within supervision is critical to managing this. However, a reliance on this without some form of organisational commitment that everyone signs up to can undermine individual agreements and planning. Potentially it can also make it very difficult for the NQSW to prioritise their ASYE commitments and raises questions about equity and transparency.

Similar to 2018-19, supervision with the line manager/assessor has been highlighted as the most crucial element of the ASYE programme from the point of view of the NQSW in 2019-20. It is the most valued relationship in terms of managing wellbeing. Unfortunately, it remains the case that regular, planned supervision is often the first

casualty in times of high pressure within teams – the very thing that is most needed may not be available.

Recommendations for employers:

- Ensure that NQSWs are clear about the way in which decisions about workload management are being taken in your organisation.
 - make it possible for them to undertake their ASYE commitments without feeling they are letting down team colleagues
 - consider organisation wide approaches to workload management and explore ways in which the requirements of the ASYE framework can be incorporated within this.
- As part of the approach to workload management, ensure that protected time is clearly outlined in the learning agreement, that NQSWs are advised to diarise these times at the outset; that there are regular reviews throughout the year.
- Prioritise supervision, ensure that the necessary organisational support is available to line managers so that this is maintained to a high standard.
 - this is particularly important in teams where there is more than one NQSW at any one time.
- Consider the development and support needs of supervisors alongside those of the NQSWs.

4.2 The ASYE programme ensures that the PQS and the PCF underpin NQSW professional practice

In year one employers were encouraged to help assessors develop their use of the PQS and PCF in supervision and in their ASYE assessment. They were also encouraged to think about ways in which they can embed the PQS and PCF frameworks across their organisations.

Recommendation for employers:

- Keep last year's key messages and recommendations under review. Continue to embed the PQS and PCF within organisational practices.
- The ability to reflect on and critically analyse social work practice is a key element of the PQS. Consider using action learning as a way of enabling NQSWs to develop their critical reflection skills.

4.3 The NQSWs' experience of undertaking the ASYE is central to the Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement process

In the first annual report the centrality of NQSWs was emphasised through messages about the value of seeking and acting on feedback. In year 2 we were keen to reinforce this message and encourage employers to move towards more proactive use of the 360-degree organisational evaluation tool and in building links with the national NQSW Community of Practice.

Recommendations for employers:

- Explore ways to ensure that NQSWs understand their employers' rationale for providing the ASYE and the overall shape of the programme within their organisation. This will enable them to make a meaningful contribution to the Cycle of Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement through engagement with the 360-degree evaluation process.
- Make NQSWs aware of the existence of the NQSW Community of Practice and their influencing role within the Cycle of Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement. Opportunities to share learning and innovative practice through the Community of Practice should be explored.

4.4 The ASYE programme is integrated within the wider organisational system

In the 2018-19 report the link between the effectiveness of the ASYE programme and the engagement of senior leaders was stressed. This link is being further reinforced in 2020-21. A whole organisation commitment to embedding the ASYE framework is regarded as the most critical element in the delivery of any programme. Without this engagement NQSWs do not receive the support that they need and the integrity of the ASYE is undermined.

As in 2019, the review visits that we have undertaken in 2020 have noted the limited engagement across service areas (with adult services and the local independent sector). This could be considered a missed opportunity both in terms of sharing ideas and workload and also, very importantly, in the professional insight that NQSWs can gain when they are encouraged to engage with their peers in other parts of the social work system.

Recommendations for employers:

- Ensure that there is whole organisation buy-in. This means embedding the ASYE within:
 - HR policies around recruitment and retention, CPD, performance management, TOIL, working from home, lone working, staff wellbeing etc.

- practice improvement measures around workload management, supervision etc.
- Reinforce the NQSW identify through providing opportunities for peer support and making it possible for them to provide the system with feedback about issues of importance to them, for instance, the impact of remote working and hot-desking arrangements.
- Consider ways in which the ASYE experience can be enhanced through engagement with peers in other settings.

4.5 COVID-19 – Implications for NQSWs/Where to next?

From speaking to a number of employers we are aware that ASYE programmes are continuing as normal where possible under the new circumstances. In cases where this is not possible then an individual's ASYE may have been deferred.

In many cases teams have been working differently to meet the needs of service users and some anecdotal evidence suggests that client contact has been higher than ever in some settings due to virtual meetings.

There is ongoing discussion about the long-term impact of the pandemic and a potential of a spike in referrals to children's services once lockdown restrictions are lifted further.

There is also some indication that student experience may be different at this time requiring a different response to provide support for NQSW's in the coming years.

In response to the complexities arising from the impact of COVID-19, Skills for Care is in discussion with the Department for Education and Social Work England about how to progress moving forward in order to continue to support NQSWs.

Section 5 Appendices

5.1 The Cycle of Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement – infographic



5.2 The NQSW Community of Practice

The role of the NQSW Community of Practice is to provide a national voice for newly qualified social workers undergoing the ASYE. The NQSW Community of Practice influences ASYE programmes by reviewing innovative practice shared by employers and supporting the development of guidance and resources.

We ask employers to send Skills for Care examples of systems or processes which they have implemented and have resulted in an improvement to their ASYE programme and the overall experience of the NQSW. The examples do not need to specifically be about NQSW's but will have impacted the programme in a way that has benefitted NQSWs.

The NQSW Community of Practice will review and ratify examples and these will be published on the Skills for Care website.

The group was set up in 2018 and consists of eight NQSWs from across the country. This year we plan to recruit more NQSWs to join the group and increase membership to twelve.

Within the NQSW Community of Practice there are also eight experienced employers. As the year has progressed the role of the employers within this group has been identified as taking on an advisory role.

The NQSW Community of Practice meets three times a year, a combination of virtual and face-to-face meetings. The NQSWs drive the agenda and the employers offer advice and information to support the NQSWs. Meetings consist of some separate and joint sessions between the two to discuss findings on questions posed and work/guidance reviewed.

As we continue to move forward we would like the NQSW Community of Practice to continue to be involved in reviewing and ratifying innovative practice examples sent in by employers from ASYE programmes and we will share this with the sector by publishing it on our webpages.

We would like to thank the current group listed below for their valuable contribution to this report and continued support of the child and family ASYE programme over the past two years.

Name	Organisation	Area
Employer 1	Achieving for Children	London and South East
Employer 2	Cafcass	London and South East
Employer 3	Cambridgeshire County Council	Eastern
Tim Nicholls	Cumbria County Council	North West

Daniel Alexander	Compass Fostering	North West
Suzanne Smith	Hull City Council	Yorkshire and Humber
Paul Lawrence	London Borough of Croydon	London and South East
Employer 8	Plymouth City Council	South West
NQSW 1	London Borough of Sutton	London and South East
NQSW 2	Liverpool City Council	North West
Natasha Bennett	Plymouth City Council	South West
NQSW 4	Hampshire County Council	London and South East
NQSW 5	Stockport Council	North West
NQSW 6	Cumbria County Council	North West
NQSW 7	Derby City Council	Midlands
Atinuke Diya	Sandwell Children's Trust	Midlands

A refresh of the group membership will take place this year and communication about this will be included in the social work briefing.

5.3 Profile of organisations visited as part of the quality assurance process

Employer type	NQSW count	Region
Local authorities	2	South West
	3	Yorkshire and Humber
	3	London
	6	London
	8	North East
	10	South West
	13	North West
	16	West Midlands
	18	East Midlands
	18	South West
	34	North West
Private, Voluntary, Independent Sector	1	South East
	2	London
	11	Yorkshire and Humber
	22	North East

15 visits were completed (12 face-to-face and 3 virtually) before the COVID-19 crisis began. A further 7 visits were planned but were not able to be carried out (see table below).

Employer type	NQSW count	Region
Local authorities	5	North West
	8	Yorkshire and Humber
	9	Yorkshire and Humber
	16	South East
	38	South East
	61	Eastern
Private, Voluntary, Independent Sector	9	West Midlands

5.4 Further information about workload management processes adopted by the organisations where in-depth review visits were undertaken

The information below is as it was reported to us by employers. It is illustrative of a range of approaches we encountered in these visits.

1. Limits on NQSW caseloads - examples from organisations that we visited:
 - maximum of 5 up to 3 months; 10 up to 6 months – no more than 15 after 6 months, some more flexibility introduced at this stage
 - up to 11 cases increasing over the year but with flexibility
 - 4-6 for first 3 months – by individual agreement after that.
2. Co-working model - NQSW and advanced practitioner co work cases with the advanced practitioner acting as the responsible person until the NQSW is signed off for child protection work (approximately halfway through the ASYE in most cases). The advanced practitioner models good practice and provides support as the NQSW gains confidence. The line manager and advanced practitioner provide some joint supervisions, so there is a good connection between case and practice supervision. NQSWs felt this is a very supportive model, that enables them to build up confidence and autonomy. This model also has the added advantage of supporting those ex- students who did not have statutory placement experience.
3. Child protection cases are not worked on until the end of the ASYE.
4. Points based caseload system weighted on complexity and competency.
5. In the first 6 months of the ASYE the workload is very protected and then the challenge is increased gradually. The NQSWs feel very able to challenge the amount of work they are undertaking as required. They have the advantage of both an advanced practitioner and a line manager to go to in this circumstance. NQSWs undertake taught sessions from the local university including core mandatory training as well as other workshops/action learning. This is built into their working week.
6. Approach to workload for NQSWs is supported by the language they employ “Working towards 90% workload” which is from the start and is clear to teams and managers that this is a working towards rather than a straight reduction.
7. Guidance on NQSW caseload

The ASYE programme provides NQSWs with a reduced caseload, capped at 15 cases in children’s social work, regular supervision and 10% protected professional development time. Together, these allow NQSWs the time and space to critically reflect on their own practice and assess their level of development. To assist with the transition from student to NQSW the NQSW should be given a graduated caseload

which builds to a caseload slowly by the 6 month point. There is a requirement on the team manager to ensure the ASYE caseload is carefully managed. NQSWs should be assigned work at a level of complexity and risk that fits their experience, whilst providing appropriate challenge. As a rule of thumb within fieldwork teams complexity of allocations will develop over time as suggested by the following:

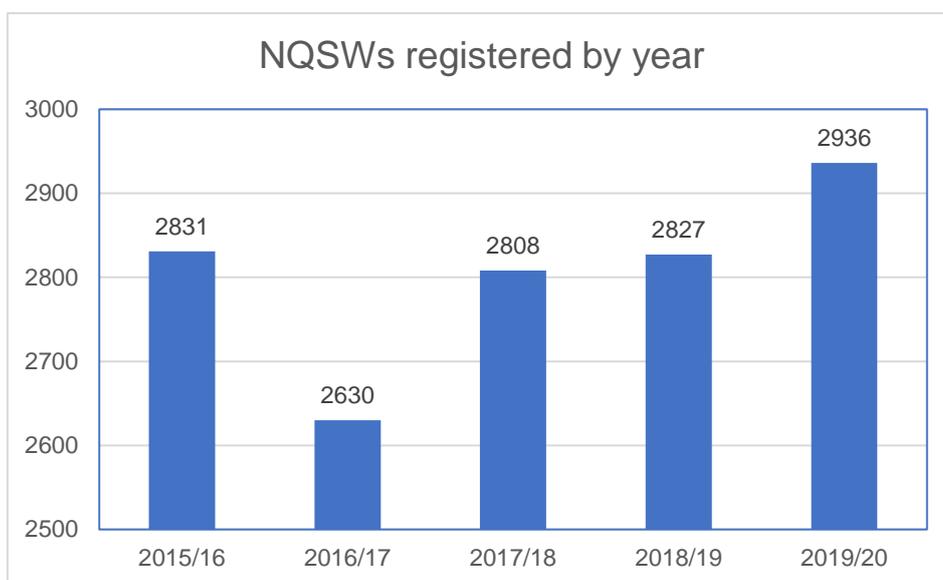
- Within the first 12 months of practice, a NQSW should not be allocated a case of a child subject to a child protection plan, or care proceedings, nor any other case of such complexity in their first 6 months in practice. A NQSW will be given the opportunity to co-work child protection cases they have previously been involved in. The readiness to be assigned tasks on child protection cases will be subject to a joint process of evaluation and agreement between the team manager and strategic manager. Ability to take on sole case work responsibility for child protection cases will similarly be subject the NQSW having experience of co-working this type of case with a more experienced colleague.

5.5 Data from the NQSW registration portal

This section contains a summary of the data collected on the Skills for Care portal in respect of employer applications for grant funding. It shows that in 2019-20 a total of 168 different employer organisations registered 2,936 newly qualified social workers onto the ASYE programme.

NQSW registrations, by year

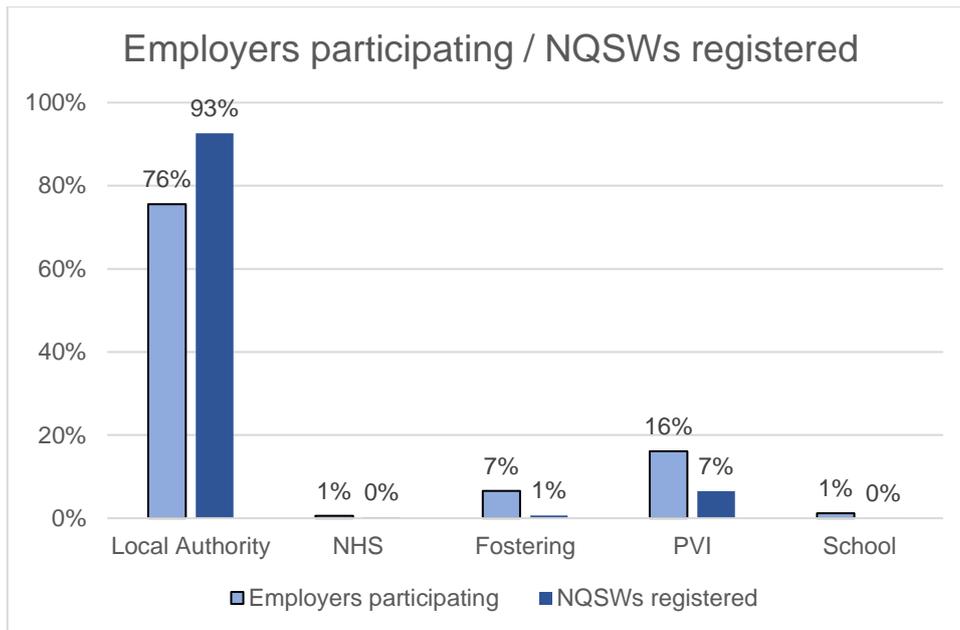
The total number of ASYE registrations for 2019-20 was 2,936. This was slightly higher than the previous two years.



2019-20 registrations, by employer type

Registrations were made by 168 employers, three-quarters of whom were local authorities:

	Number of employers	Number of NQSWs registered
Local authority	127	2,718
PVI	27	191
Fostering	11	20
NHS	1	5
School	2	2
Total	168	2,936



2019-20 registrations, by area

A third of registrations came from employers based in London and the South East:

	Number of employers	Number of NQSWs registered
Eastern	14	316
London/South East	55	827
Midlands	28	538
North West	26	463
South West	15	259
Yorkshire and Humber/ North East	30	533
Total	168	2,936

Employers participating / NQSWs registered



5.6 Data from the 360-degree organisational evaluation tool

The data submitted via the 360-degree tool to date indicates that the ASYE is functioning well for participants across most statement measures.

The evaluation criteria statements scoring the highest nationally were:

- NQSWs have access to learning opportunities relevant to their individual and collective development needs (score = 4.3)
- Assessment outcomes for individual NQSWs are quality assured by the organisation's internal moderation process to ensure that they are accurate, valid, robust and sufficient (score = 4.3)
- Supervisors/Assessors base their ASYE assessment on the PQS and the PCF (score = 4.3)

The evaluation criteria statement scoring the lowest nationally were:

- NQSWs are able to engage with the national quality assurance and continuous improvement framework via the National Community of Practice for NQSWs (score = 3.4)

Background

A 360-degree tool has been provided to help employers gather feedback that will help them to review and quality assure their ASYE programmes. The tool enables employers to gain a balanced view of their progress because feedback is gathered from multiple stakeholders.

The tool is based around the ASYE programme's evaluation criteria and consists of 32 statements organised under four overarching themes:

- 1) The ASYE programme is delivered in accordance with ASYE Framework and Employer Standards.
- 2) The ASYE programme ensures that the PQS and the PCF underpin NQSW professional practice.
- 3) The NQSWs' experience of undertaking the ASYE is central to the quality assurance and continuous improvement process.
- 4) The ASYE programme is integrated within the wider organisational system.

Respondents rate how they feel about each statement using a scale from 1 ('Significant development needed') to 5 ('Exceptional strength')¹.

¹ NB: These descriptions have changed since 2018-19 where 1 = 'Not functioning for any participants' and 5 = 'Fully functioning for all participants' and this should be borne in mind when considering any comparisons between the two years.

Employers complete the assessment themselves ('self-assessment'), as well as inviting their NQSWs, line managers and others to complete it. Feedback is provided anonymously.

Once complete each employer receives a personalised report which shows their results as an average for their organisation as well as broken down by type of respondent. As more data is input into the tool Skills for Care will be able to provide employers with comparative results for their region or Teaching Partnership.

The following pages show the composite results for the 32 organisations who had submitted their data up to 31 March 2020². Using this we are able to report on the national average for each statement, as well as the range of scores, from the minimum (0) to the maximum (5). The results have been coded as follows:

- 1.0 - 1.9 = Red  (1 = Significant development needed)
- 2.0 - 3.9 = Amber  (2 = Development needed / 3 = Working well)
- 4.0 - 5.0 = Green  (4 = Strength / 5 = Exceptional strength)

Evaluation criteria theme 1: The ASYE programme is delivered in accordance with ASYE Framework and Employer Standards

The results for the statements in this section were generally high. Fifteen out of the nineteen statements scored an average, nationally, of at least 4 out of 5 ('Green'), with the remaining four statements scoring an average, nationally, of 3.8 or 3.9 ('Amber') (see overleaf).

There was no significant change between these scores and those recorded for 2018-19³ (any observed changes were either 0.1 increase or decrease). Statement 10 (The development needs identified in the NQSW's final placement report (pre-qualification) are addressed in the initial PDP of the ASYE) was the only statement to change rating (from 'Amber' to 'Green').

² A further 26 organisations have registered, but not submitted any data and a further 27 organisations have submitted some data but have not met the minimum criteria for inclusion in our reporting.

³ Please refer to the caveat in the previous footnote relating to the change in descriptors used. This applies to subsequent sections also.

	National average	Min	Max
The support needs of individual NQSWs are clearly identified and recorded and plans are in place to meet them from the start of the ASYE programme	 4.1	 3.2	 4.9
Plans are in place to meet an NQSWs support needs from the start of the ASYE programme	 4.1	 3.3	 4.8
NQSWs receive regular reflective supervision from a registered social worker who has demonstrable skills and experience in developing others	 4.1	 3.0	 4.7
Supervision takes place as stated in the Employer Standards and is appropriate to the stage the NQSW is at in the ASYE	 4.1	 3.3	 4.8
NQSWs receive work-load relief appropriate to their stage in the programme with a minimum level of 10%	 3.8	 2.3	 4.5
There is a transparent approach to the way that workload relief is managed for NQSWs participating in the ASYE programme	 3.8	 2.3	 4.5
Protected time is made available for NQSWs to undertake personalised CPD activities, ASYE dedicated training events and other peer learning opportunities such as action learning	 4.1	 3.2	 4.7
Opportunities are available for NQSWs to access peer support	 4.2	 3.4	 4.7
The support needs of supervisors / assessors are addressed in ways appropriate to their needs and level of experience in this role	 3.9	 3.0	 4.4
The development needs identified in the NQSW's final placement report (pre-qualification) are addressed in the initial PDP of the ASYE	 4.0	 3.4	 4.7
The development needs of individual NQSWs are clearly identified, recorded, and reviewed via a PDP at each stage of the ASYE process	 4.2	 3.4	 4.7
NQSWs have access to learning opportunities relevant to their individual and collective development needs	 4.3	 3.7	 4.8
Supervisors / assessors have access to learning opportunities relevant to their individual and collective development needs	 3.9	 3.0	 4.8
NQSWs are supported to develop critically reflective practice within the ASYE programme	 4.2	 3.5	 4.7
NQSWs and supervisors / assessors are supported to understand the emphasis on progressive development within the ASYE assessment process	 4.1	 3.5	 4.7
Both NQSWs and supervisors have a clear understanding of what is required of them with regard to the sufficiency and quality of assessment evidence	 4.0	 3.2	 4.6
Feedback gathered from service-users as part of the ASYE programme is addressed within the assessment process	 4.1	 2.9	 4.7
Detailed action plans are put in place and reviewed regularly where there are concerns about an NQSW's conduct and performance at any stage of the ASYE	 4.1	 3.0	 4.8
Assessment outcomes for individual NQSWs are quality assured by the organisation's internal moderation process to ensure that they are accurate, valid, robust and sufficient	 4.3	 3.9	 4.8

Evaluation criteria theme 2: The ASYE programme ensures that the PQS and the PCF underpin NQSW professional practice

The results for the statements in this section were generally high. All five statements scored an average, nationally, of at least 4 out of 5 ('Green') (see below).

There was no significant change between these scores and those recorded for 2018-19 (any observed changes were either 0.1 increase or decrease).

	National average	Min	Max
The NQSW is informed about the KSS and the ASYE plus the associated organisational expectations as part of the recruitment	 4.1	 3.1	 4.6
Measures are in place to ensure that NQSWs have an understanding of the KSS and its' significance to their professional practice as soon as possible after they start their employment, and before they commence the ASYE	 4.1	 3.2	 4.7
ASYE supervisors / assessors and line managers (where different) support NQSWs to develop their professional practice underpinned by the KSS and the PCF	 4.1	 3.4	 4.6
There is clarity about the ways in which the ASYE learning and assessment process is mapped against the KSS and the PCF and this is clearly referenced in the assessment documentation	 4.1	 3.4	 4.6
Supervisors / assessors base their ASYE assessment on the KSS and the PCF	 4.3	 3.8	 4.7

Evaluation criteria theme 3: The NQSWs' experience of undertaking the ASYE is central to the quality assurance and continuous improvement process

The results for the statements in this section were slightly lower than the previous two sections. Both scored an average, nationally, of at least 3.4 out of 5 ('Amber') (see below).

These scores were exactly the same as those recorded for 2018-19.

	National average	Min	Max
The views of NQSWs about their experience of the ASYE programme are fully represented within the local quality assurance and continuous improvement process	 3.8	 3.0	 4.4
NQSWs are able to engage with the national quality assurance and continuous improvement framework via the National Community of Practice for NQSWs	 3.4	 1.3	 4.1

Evaluation criteria theme 4: The ASYE programme is integrated within the wider organisational system

The results for the statements in this section were generally high. Four out of the six statements scored an average, nationally, of at least 4 out of 5 ('Green'), with the remaining two statements scoring an average, nationally, of 3.8 or 3.9 ('Amber') (see below).

There was no significant change between these scores and those recorded for 2018-19 (any observed changes were either 0.1 increase or decrease).

	National average	Min	Max
The organisation takes ownership of the supervisor / assessor's assessment recommendations as part of practice endorsement for child and family social workers	 4.1	 3.1	 4.6
A clear and transparent quality assurance and continuous improvement process is in place within the organisation	 4.0	 3.1	 4.5
The perspectives of supervisors / assessors and service users informs the quality assurance and continuous improvement cycle	 3.9	 3.0	 4.5
Senior management is engaged with all aspects of the quality assurance and continuous improvement process	 3.8	 2.7	 4.5
Career / CPD progression opportunities following on from the ASYE are in place for social workers	 4.1	 3.3	 4.7
Performance within the ASYE is linked to supervision, appraisal and other performance management processes	 4.1	 3.1	 4.7