

# **Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) child and family**

Annual report to the Department for Education

April 2022 – March 2023

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## **Section 1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Acknowledgements**

Skills for Care would like to acknowledge the hard work and commitment of all the employers and employees that are involved in the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) for child and family services.

We would particularly like to thank those organisations that participated in quality assurance review visits during this year.

### **1.2 Overview**

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 fifth report published since 2018 all of which reflect the journey that ASYE programmes, newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) and assessors have been on over this time. During the past year some significant changes have taken place in relation to the structure of the programme and what we mean by the term national consistency. The evaluation criteria we are using has been developed to support programmes and a new emphasis placed on employers to evidence quality assurance and the continuous development of their programme.

This report will focus on the work that has been done in the last year as we strive to develop an approach which is nationally consistent, prioritises the NQSW experience as an active participant in the programme, focuses on the development needs of assessors and above all ensures that programmes are offering an equitable ASYE experience to everyone.

Section 2 of this report discusses the current ASYE framework and developments that have taken place over the past year and plans going forward.

Section 3 explores the learning from a broad range of sources including:

- The NQSW registration portal
- National forums, including the NQSW national forum, assessors national forum and the GEMS forum
- In-depth employer quality assurance review visits
- The 360-degree organisational evaluation tool
- Action learning sets for supervisors, co-ordinators and bespoke action learning interventions

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- The annual ASYE survey

Section 4 focuses on specific themes which emerged from the learning from different sources. These are equality, diversity and inclusion, the benefits of investing in the ASYE and developing assessor quality

Section 5 offers conclusions and recommendations in the form of reflective questions.

Section 6 is a list of appendices (referenced throughout the report).

## **1.3 Executive summary**

The purpose of this report is to provide an update about ASYE activity that has taken place in 2022-23 and share learning with employers and the Department for Education (DfE), and the wider social work profession and stakeholders.

We recognise that there are continued pressures on employers in relation to the recruitment and retention of social workers. This directly impacts the NQSW experience as workload remains a key issue for many employers. Assessors are also often left without adequate support whilst supervising and assessing an NQSW. NQSWs benefit from an academy or similar style learning environment which acknowledges the uniqueness of their role and benefits they bring to a team, and that those who supervise and assess them bring to the ASYE programme and wider organisational learning and development activity.

There are varying approaches to embedding equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). We are proactively encouraging employers to be leaders in promoting EDI and anti-racist practice. This is still an area that needs resources and to be prioritised in the sector.

- The ASYE framework has been further developed in 2022-23 to strengthen some key pillars of the programme. All documentation can be found on the new web pages (links to these are in the appendix and referenced throughout the report).
- New evaluation criteria were introduced with additional criteria 'plus' designed to enable organisations to continue developing their ASYE programme, above and beyond the national programme expectations.
- The term national consistency has been re-defined to include support, assessment and outcome.
- Quality assurance is now linked to funding and there is a requirement for ASYE programmes to provide evidence of continuous development.
- Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) remains central to the ASYE and our focus has broadened from the work we have been doing on race, to include all protected characteristics and NQSW individual learning needs.

Below are some key messages from the report which have come through from exploration of the sources.

### **Key messages**

- Support for NQSWs with specific learning needs or access to work requirements are inconsistent despite many employers confirming the need for a range of learning support and access to work arrangements being requested.
- The support and development offered to assessors and supervisors is very variable across the country and requires continued focus to ensure that every NQSW receives a consistent experience.
- Understanding of the importance of the assessor role needs to be further developed. Employers need to look at training, dedicated time and support for assessors.
- Employers are encouraged to collect data of the impact of employing NQSWs on recruitment and retention.

The recommendations at the end of the report pose a series of reflective questions to employers. The purpose of these questions is to support employers to think about how these national issues apply to them and changes they could implement to develop their ASYE programme.

## **2. The ASYE framework**

### **2.1 Refreshed ASYE documentation**

The ASYE framework enables newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) to build confidence in their practice and thereby supports the raising of professional standards. The framework of guidance and resources provided by Skills for Care on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE) promotes national consistency of newly qualified social workers' experience of the programme. The journey to these outcomes relies on a robust quality assurance (QA) framework, focused on developing, consolidating and improving where necessary the quality of each ASYE programme delivered by employers.

In September 2022 the ASYE refreshed framework along with supporting guidance and streamlined templates became live on new skills for care website pages. The 'refresh' was co-produced through consultation with employers. A major focus of the refreshed paperwork is to be more inclusive of meeting the needs of individual

learners. The presentation element of the portfolio gives more flexibility to employers to offer alternative methods of assessment. The emphasis is on supporting employers to meet the needs of their NQSWs individual learning needs, taking into account equality, diversity and inclusion. A link to the new web pages can be found in appendix 6.1.

The templates were launched at the annual event under the theme of 'grow, support and retain'. Further support through assessor briefings and drop-in sessions offered to ASYE co-ordinators helped to ensure the bedding-in of the new paperwork and continue gathering feedback. Feedback from coordinators is that they appreciate the new streamlined templates and clear guidance. It has also become evident that there is a need for continued ongoing support due to a high turnover of staff responsible for leading ASYE programmes.

In the previous iteration of the programme (2015) the concept of national consistency was understood in narrow terms, i.e. consistency of outcome. This no longer reflects wider developments within the sector and also within the programme itself. For example, as the ASYE programme has become more established in organisations and its value has been realised, organisations have moved from a transactional to a transformational delivery approach to the programme; this has meant that organisations have wanted to add value to their programmes and offer more to their NQSWs.

Given these developments, a more expansive understanding of national consistency has been adopted and become central to the refresh of the quality assurance framework. The focus of this framework is on achieving national consistency of NQSWs' experience across the dimensions of support, assessment and outcome.

The refreshed QA framework evolves from the existing QA system. The existing elements (ASYE evaluation criteria, moderation and the national panel) have been developed and are integrated with a new fourth element, the action plan for continuous development.

## **2.2 National evaluation criteria**

The national evaluation criteria (NEC) sets out the elements expected of a successful ASYE programme and supports the continuous development and quality of a programme. It's not expected that an organisation will meet all of the criteria at the same level in one year. Strengthening a programme is a journey and the national evaluation criteria should be used as guidance in the direction of travel.

Criteria that are one step beyond the NEC (known as NEC+) have been developed, setting out areas of a programme where an employer may demonstrate having gone beyond the level of the NEC in developing the experience of NQSWs' support, assessment and outcome. The updated evaluation criteria can be found in appendix 6.2.

## **2.3 Internal and external moderation**

The moderation templates have a focus on providing feedback to the employer about how the consistency of NQSWs' experience across the dimensions of support, assessment and outcome could be developed further. This feedback is quality assurance evidence and should be used in developing the organisation's annual action plan for continuous development.

The external moderation process, working in a local/regional partnership, is recommended practice for all ASYE programmes. It remains a requirement of the Post Qualifying Standards (Knowledge and Skills Statement) in adult services.

## **2.4 Action plan for continuous development**

The action plan for continuous development of a programme is produced annually by the ASYE co-ordinator working closely with the senior manager with responsibility for the programme. The plan is based on an evaluation of the quality assurance evidence gathered by the programme and is developed by reference to the national evaluation criteria. The plan sets out what programme areas have been strengthened over the previous 12 months and the areas identified for development in the next annual cycle.

The action plan provides evidence of the impact of the ASYE (e.g. through feedback from NQSWs and their assessors and supervisors) which is submitted by each organisation's in support of its annual ASYE grant funding application. The action plan has been launched in advance of implementing the link to the grant funding application in 2023-24. Further information about the action plan can be found in appendix 6.3.

## **2.5 National quality assurance panel (NQAP)**

The new national quality assurance panel (NQAP) will be launched in April 2023. Its purpose is to support, promote and aid development of national consistency of the NQSW experience across the programme, again focussed on the core dimensions of support, assessment and outcome.

It aims to achieve this through three objectives:

1. by scrutinising and reviewing a random selection of ASYE assessment decisions from employers and local moderation partnerships throughout the country.
2. by providing an annual set of key messages, based on the findings of the NQAP's scrutiny and review process
3. by identifying and endorsing good practice in programme delivery and by making these examples available to the sector.

## Section 3. Learning from different sources

### 3.1 The NQSW registration portal

Cohort 10 (2021-22) had 3052 NQSW registrations, following a dip in the previous year which was attributed to the impact of the pandemic. This year there have been 2844 registrations. There have been 2664 completions this year which is a slight increase from last year. A detailed breakdown of registrations and completions can be found in appendix 6.4.

### Protected characteristics

Using the ASYE registration portal, Skills for Care has investigated the impact of protected characteristics of NQSWs (gender, age, ethnicity, and nationality) and other factors (region and deferral rate) on the ASYE outcome (pass or fail).

Employers claiming ASYE funding are required to record information on NQSWs, such as demographics, outcomes of six- and twelve-months' reviews, etc., on the Skills for Care portal.

Data for the four most recent cohorts of child and family social workers is summarised below (see Table 1):

*Table 1*

	Cohort				Total
	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	
Child & Family NQSWs	2,813	2,977	2,764	3,103	11,655

Of these 11,655 records we currently only have complete cases (i.e., those where we held data on all predictors as well as the success/fail outcome) for 6,419 NQSWs<sup>1</sup> of whom 6,348 (98.9%) passed the ASYE and 71 (1.1%) did not.

By applying a statistical method called logistic regression to the data collected, we have been able to ascertain which, if any, of the protected characteristics/factors above have a significant impact on the ASYE outcome. We used this method as the outcome is binary: a NQSW either passes or fails their ASYE.

2022 was the second year that this analysis has been undertaken. By building on our original analysis, using more and updated data we have been able to further test the reliability of last year's 'baseline' findings.

The results of the logistic regression revealed, for child and family ASYE, two significant determinants of failing the ASYE:

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<sup>1</sup> This also reflects the fact that some NQSWs have deferred or left the ASYE programme whilst others have experienced delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



- Ethnicity - NQSWs from a minoritised ethnic background were more likely to fail their ASYE than white NQSWs. 1.8% of NQSWs from a minoritised ethnic background failed compared with 0.8% of white NQSWs
- Deferral rate - NQSWs who have been deferred were more likely to fail their ASYE than NQSWs who have not been deferred. 2.6% of NQSWs who have been deferred once or twice failed compared with 0.7% of NQSWs who have not been deferred.

Gender did not have an impact in child and family services although it did where in adult services where a higher percentage of male NQSWs failed. There were no differences regarding age, nationality and region across both service areas.

These findings are very similar to last year. The differences between outcomes for White NQSWs and those from minoritised ethnic groups are smaller than last year but remain significant. The impact of deferrals on failure in ASYE has become stronger compared to last year (the top 6 reasons for deferrals are sick leave, maternity leave, COVID-19, personal circumstances, support requirements were not available, and operational circumstances).

### Key messages

- As a result of last year's findings, Skills for Care has started to introduce measures to improve the ASYE experience for NQSWs from a minoritised ethnic background. Due to the low number of ASYE fails, individual cohorts cannot be compared to each other (for example, we cannot make a statistical statement on the differences between NQSWs in the 2020-21 cohort and those in the 2021-22 cohort). However, the data in the next two years will allow us to analyse whether there have been any significant (and lasting) changes in terms of success/fail rates. NQSW registration and completion numbers are similar to last year, which is what we would expect to see.
- Skills for Care has started to introduce measures to improve the ASYE experience for NQSWs from a minoritised background, which will be a theme discussed further, throughout the report.

## 3.2 National forums

There are now three established national forums:

- the national NQSW forum
- the Group for Ethnic Minority NQSWs (GEMS)
- the assessors forum.

All have been established as two-hour sessions which take place four times per year.

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We have explored with participants through polls areas of interest and support needed for each of these groups.

It has become apparent that it is important to share information between forum groups to ensure there is a feedback loop so for example assessors receive information on what is emerging from NQSWs from both the national and GEMS forums. This supports increased insight into what each group is experiencing and ensures they are supported to take account of varying needs and experiences.

Participants for all forums do vary from session to session. It is a 12-month programme making it difficult to predict or assume that those in attendance will have experienced the learning and information shared in previous sessions. This has to be managed whilst still being responsive to support needs.

## **The national NQSW forum**

The forum is open to and attended by NQSWs from both child and family and adults services. NQSWs who have attended have been able to explore topics of interest to them about their experiences of ASYE programmes as well as topic related issues. Information is shared and NQSWs can discuss this in groups. Many have said they appreciate the chance to speak with NQSW colleagues nationally, giving them insight into how their experiences may differ or be similar. Some topics that have been covered throughout the year have been:

- Information on the refreshed ASYE process and other relevant changes regarding the ASYE.
- Learning from and feedback on quality assurance visits and resulting ongoing themes such as NQSW wellbeing, support for assessors and the disparities in success rates of NQSWs from different minoritised ethnic backgrounds
- Opportunity to explore what they (NQSWs) see as their ongoing support needs as provided by their employer/ASYE programme.
- Working with neurodivergent NQSWs. This session had an invited speaker and covered how ASYE programmes could provide this support and also addressed how NQSWs could request support. There was a brief introduction to neurodivergent issues and concerns, their importance for supporting NQSWs development and progress, support needed and relevance to their social work practice and ongoing development.
- Space to explore what the prevailing culture is within their own organisations and the opportunities they are supported with to have open discussions re their own experiences particularly regarding the learning and development content re: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) on their ASYE programmes.

It is clear from feedback that some employers do have various internal groups which have a space in which NQSWs can explore issues via a monthly EDI forum (many have different names) but are essentially a space in which NQSWs can explore issues of importance to them. A theme which has also emerged has been support for NQSWs on how to achieve work/ life balance and the need to explore how to look after themselves as social workers.

NQSW feedback: “I’ve found it really useful to speak with other NQSWs from other authorities to see what their employer is doing with the ASYE. I’ll be encouraging others from my local authority to join the next one.”

## **Group for Ethnic Minority Social Workers (GEMS) NQSW forum**

This group is open to and exclusively attended by NQSWs who self-subscribe as being from minoritised groups and communities. Since it was established a year ago, the group continues to grow. From the outset, these NQSWs identified the topics that were of concern to them and these have varied. Issues which they highlighted for exploration were:

- Understanding ‘hidden’ structural racism which makes being a social worker harder for people from minoritised backgrounds.
- How to deal effectively with racism directed at them from people who draw on care and support and in some instances that experienced from colleagues.
- Challenges minoritised NQSWs experience whilst undertaking the ASYE.
- Coping strategies.
- Exploring how a person’s identity affects their practice.
- Exploring how to deal with conscious and unconscious bias and micro-aggressions.

These are only some of the identified themes but they enable insight into what some of the concerns are for this group of NQSWs. Sessions have therefore varied with opportunities to explore:

- Addressing and challenging racism: NQSWs were encouraged to share their experiences and shared their own examples of how they have dealt with this. The group have also been incredibly supportive to those who were more isolated and were seeking support.
- The challenge of incorporating cultural perspectives to influence change and better outcomes for minoritised ethnic groups in health and social care using the example of a Muslim social worker’s efforts to get spirituality and religion considered when treatment plans were being devised in a multi-disciplinary setting. This led to a much broader discussion about the individual experiences which many NQSWs reported that they felt unable to bring into a social work environment lest they be judged negatively. Some clearly expressed feeling unsafe to do so.

The GEMS forum continues to address topics raised by participants. At a recent forum a GEMS NQSW gave an example of a racist comment and behaviour experienced from a manager. The group were able to encourage, support and acknowledge how difficult it is to raise and deal with these issues. The support given is a good example of the value of having a ‘safe space’ to raise issues and shows that this continues to be an ongoing area of development for both NQSWs and ASYE programmes.

A blog written by GEMS members for Black History Month (October 22) was shared on the Skills for Care website and social media. It included a case study and tips for

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employers. Having tracked this through website analytics, we know the blog was well received attracting the second highest number of readers for all Skills for Care web pages in the month it was published. A link to this blog can be found in appendix 6.5.

Feedback from participants:

“This session has been really useful and empowering.”

“We need this kind of forum for continuity. A safe place to speak and continue beyond our ASYE training.”

“It is a safe space to talk about our experiences.”

## **National assessors’ forum**

This group is open to assessors of NQSWs but is often also attended by ASYE coordinators (some of whom may have a dual role as both coordinator and assessor). It is an opportunity for assessors nationally to come together, discuss concerns and challenges and enables engagement between the sector and Skills for Care. Topics covered over the course of the year have varied from briefings on:

- the refreshed ASYE framework – input and opportunities for clarification questions to be explored and challenges to be discussed.
- quality assurance visits - issues, concerns and challenges. These have supported a level of sharing appreciated by participants particularly for those assessors and coordinators who may be new to their roles and the ASYE programme.

These topics were further explored through before and after polls, used to understand, for example, assessor confidence and experience: They looked at:

- how confident participants felt about the changes to the ASYE
- how well informed they felt and
- how well prepared they felt about the introduction of oral presentations as part of a robust, holistic assessment.

They were then given the opportunity to reflect on this following the input, which enabled us to gauge and plan for action to meet need. A participant commented:

“Thank you for the forum today, it has been helpful. Looking forward to receiving more guidance templates and seeing how this rolls out for everyone.”

The theme of anti-racist practice and EDI has been a recurring theme and has therefore been explored in various forums. People welcomed the opportunity to share ideas and challenges. At the start of a forum on EDI, a poll revealed:

- 8% said they were extremely well informed about how well their ASYE programme delivered on EDI.
- 69% reported fairly well,
- 15% not very well and
- 8% were just starting to do so.

By the end of the forum, 32% reported that they were much clearer about how their ASYE programme could address EDI, and 62% felt a little clearer and 6% did not feel clearer.

Participants were also asked about the support their programme needs to improve EDI. This was a multiple-choice response:

- 52% said they wanted materials
- 58% wanted more opportunities for discussion
- 50% wanted more guidance
- 48% wanted training.

A final poll question focused on future forum topics:

- 68% wanted to address EDI
- 43% quality assurance processes
- 92% wanted tools for practice e.g models/tools for assessment and examples of good practice
- tools to help assessors with report writing
- tools to assist in NQSW assessor role.

What was clear from the process was that the forums offer the opportunity for assessors to share information, network, and feedback on what their needs and challenges are. From these responses it is also clear that assessors would value more tools and resources to help them in providing consistent support and assessment of NQSWs and may not feel well supported in their role. Participant feedback included:

“I had thought this session was around how we are experiencing the new paperwork, but this has been a pleasant surprise and interesting discussions.”

“This has been very interesting and good food for thought.”

“thanks to the team for a really good session which has been thought provoking.”

“Very useful and informative, thank you. Lots of learning I can take with me.”

### Key messages

- NQSWs and assessors who attend the national forums, have told us that they find them a useful resource.
- In the forthcoming year the focus of forums will extend beyond ant-racist practice to include other areas of difference covered by protected characteristics.
- Some employers have internal groups for NQSWs to explore EDI issues of importance to them.

- Assessors are requesting more resources and guidance in order to feel more supported.

### 3.3 In-depth employer quality assurance review visits

As in previous years quality assurance (QA) visits enable robust qualitative data to be collected directly from ASYE programmes, from the NQSWs supported by those programmes, and from the assessors/supervisors of the NQSWs. During 2022-23 we have had the opportunity to meet with 34 ASYE programmes across a range of employer settings. A breakdown of the profile of organisations that were visited this year can be found in appendix 6.6.

In each annual round of visits, we explore themes with all participants, enabling a strong triangulation of evidence and a clear understanding of the ASYE as expressed through those themes. For 2022-23 the themes were:

- How equality impact assessments are undertaken and inform the ASYE programme. Building on the recent focus on racial inequality we have broadened the discussion to include any circumstances which might lead to inequity and impact on the outcomes for NQSWs.
- Assessor support and development – how they are selected, trained and supported to undertake the role.

In addition we have continued to collect written information about the management of NQSW workload as part of the preparation for each QA visit. Protecting workload remains a challenge for every ASYE programme and the current pressures on social work teams means that it is important to continue to pay attention to this vital aspect of the support offered through the programme.

#### Key messages

- Through the conversations held during this round of QA visits, and stimulated by the thematic discussions, three strong topics have emerged. These highlight both positive opportunities that are being realised and where challenges remain and are discussed in detail in section 4. Quality assurance visits enable robust qualitative data to be collected directly from ASYE programmes which informs the national programme.

## 3.4 360-degree organisational evaluation tool

### 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 33 statements organised under four overarching themes:

- 1) The NQSW experience is central to the ASYE
- 2) The ASYE programme is delivered in accordance with the AYSE framework and employer standards
- 3) The ASYE programme ensures that PQS (previously KSS) and the PCF underpin NQSW professional practice
- 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').

Employers complete the assessment themselves ('self-assessment'), as well as inviting their NQSWs, assessors, supervisors, 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. The tool is used as part of preparation for the quality assurance visits and stimulates insights which are then discussed. This year we have seen the tool become more embedded in this process with many employers using the feedback to draw up action plans, and some going further setting targets for progress which they intend to use the tool to measure. With the introduction of the new action plan for continuous development (as set out in section 2) the 360-degree tool will be an ideal resource for all employers to use to gather feedback as part of their quality assurance process.

The 360-degree evaluation annual report can be found in appendix 6.7.

### Key messages

- The 360-degree evaluation tool is informing ASYE programme action plans and is being used to set targets and measure the impact of development.

- Using the 360-degree evaluation tool is a useful way for organisations to monitor the continuous development of their programme

### **3.5 Action learning sets for supervisors, co-ordinators and bespoke action learning interventions**

Resources were available to offer self-managed action learning sets to 36 supervisors of NQSWs. These were delivered between October 22 and March 23.

The action learning sets for supervisors focused on supporting the development of supervisors' leadership, reflective practice and collaborative learning skills to enable them to address challenges in their practice as well as share best practice.

The feedback from supervisors about action learning sets cover the factors that influence and challenge the delivery of action learning in organisations. These have included time pressures and wider work commitments. It also showed how the knowledge and skills gained from the training is going to be applied in changing the delivery of the programme, such as:

- in peer group settings, using action learning to facilitate problem-solving
- enabling supportive, rather than directive, leadership cultures
- using action learning techniques and methods in reflection meetings and team meetings
- changing approaches to supporting NQSWs by developing their perspectives on practice issues engaging new questioning skills to support NQSWs to develop their own solutions
- creating self-managed action learning sets for peer supervision
- engaging managers on action learning in the development of the ASYE programme
- a re-evaluation of their own 'solutions-focused approach to their supervisor role.

The co-ordinator training focused on facilitating individual, professional and organisational development and change. It aims to tackle real world problems or issues whilst encouraging reflection to develop practice.

Some of the initial learning impact of the action learning training programme included:

- the value of peer networking in support and learning
- the undermining impact of 'stepping in' with their own solutions, rather than creating the space for NQSWs to learn about their own strengths
- the value of action learning in problem-solving
- the importance of being empathetic to another's problems
- its value in helping to move from unconscious incompetence to conscious competence

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- the importance of asking questions to discern information more clearly.

In 2022-23 a bespoke action learning intervention was offered for the first time for organisations that had identified significant areas for improvement in the delivery of the ASYE programme. The intervention uses action learning methodology to help organisations develop an action plan for delivering the programme in areas where particular issues and difficulties are being experienced. The intervention is initiated using activities designed to develop a consensus around the challenges and barriers that are creating difficulties in achieving programme success. This is followed by facilitated virtual action learning sets to explore the issues further with the final stage being the co-production of an action plan. Two organisations have been supported so far by the bespoke action learning intervention.

#### **Key messages**

- Action learning sets training has resulted in assessors/supervisors re-evaluating and changing their practice in supporting the development of NQSWs.
- Assessors/supervisors have valued the peer supervision and support provided by self-managed action learning sets.
- Assessors/supervisors are using the techniques and methods they have developed in the action learning sets training in different organisational settings.

### **3.6 The annual ASYE survey**

The survey links were emailed to ASYE leads, assessors and NQSWs registered on the ASYE portal on 25 January 2023 and the survey was closed on 2 March.

A full analysis of the survey data collected is still being undertaken at the time of writing this report. However, some highlights from the three surveys have been included in appendix 6.8.

#### **Key messages**

- 98% of ASYE leads and 94% of ASYE assessors understand the assessment arrangements for the ASYE very/fairly well.

- The majority of ASYE leads were confident in the capability of the ASYE supervisors and assessors within their organisation and ASYE assessors were similarly confident in their own abilities.
- Across a number of measures, ASYE leads rated the impact of the ASYE positively (79% average score). ASYE assessors and NQSWs were slightly less positive (71% and 60% respectively<sup>2</sup>). Further exploration of the data is required to determine why this might be.
- ASYE leads rated the support provided by Skills for Care positively (89% average score across five measures).

## Section 4. Core themes in the past year

This section will discuss the core themes that have emerged over the past year, through QA visit discussions, feedback through drop-in sessions, action learning and national events.

### 4.1 Equality, diversity and inclusion

This continues to be an important area of enquiry and debate throughout the national ASYE programme of work. As mentioned earlier in the report, data has again been analysed to understand if protected characteristics and other factors might have impact on the outcomes of the ASYE. We know that there remains a difference in outcomes for people from black and other minoritised ethnic backgrounds. Gathering, understanding and reporting data opens the space for discussion and learning to take place, and this is an important aspect of creating a fair and consistent ASYE programme.

Another reason for looking at equality, diversity and inclusion more broadly was the increased reports from employers indicating that more NQSWs were requesting assessment for neurodivergent conditions during the ASYE (we use this term in its widest sense to include conditions such as dyslexia). Many employers have confirmed the need for a range of learning support and access to work arrangements being required. There is however a mixed picture of experiences for NQSWs, from early assessment and prompt provision of equipment to many months of waiting and frustration at the other end of the spectrum. There are some examples of good practice such as the use of dictation software which is made available for all, not just those who might need it as part of their specific learning support.

There is a continued focus on anti-racism and the experiences of NQSWs from black and minoritised ethnic backgrounds. Many ASYE programmes use models such as Social Graces and the Mandela model in a variety of ways including workshops and

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<sup>2</sup> NQSWs were given fewer measures to rate than ASYE Leads and ASYE Assessors

peer groups for NQSWs, specific one to one conversations with supervisors or as a formal training opportunity. However there is still not a consistent picture of a safe reflective space where every NQSW is able to deal with issues of racism and other forms of oppressive or discriminatory behaviour, or of opportunities for learning and development in this area.

Evidence from the latest round of quality assurance visits further confirms the view that organisations who employ social workers are at varying stages of having clear and established policies on anti-racism. This is important to note as ASYE programmes are inevitably subject to the policies and attitudes set by the organisations within which they work. We have come across examples where well-established policies and public facing statements have been made, and are clearly seen as important by senior leadership, but where, as yet this has not trickled down to impact on the experience of NQSWs, their teams and those who assess them.

Conversely, we have also engaged with groups of NQSWs and supervisors, assessors and managers who are learning together, challenging racist and oppressive behaviours and leading on championing the needs of those with protected characteristics both within the workforce and in their social work practice. This is further borne out by the Skills for Care national forums and particularly the GEMs forum summarised in section 3.

Skills for Care continues to wherever possible support the creation of safe space in which to learn and reflect on the issues of anti-racism. It is not our intention in this report to criticise individuals or organisations, but to encourage all in a continued journey of learning.

### **Key messages**

- Support for NQSWs with specific learning needs or access to work requirements are inconsistent despite many employers confirming the need for a range of learning and support and access to work arrangements being requested.
- Across the ASYE 'community' there is increasing focus on anti-racism and the experiences of NQSWs from black and minoritised ethnic backgrounds.
- There is still not a consistent picture of a safe reflective space available for every NQSW to deal with issues of racism and other forms of oppressive or discriminatory behaviour, or of opportunities for learning and development in this area.

## **4.2 Investing in the ASYE**

Across social work and more widely in social care there continues to be a severe recruitment and retention problem. Repeatedly we hear how employers are using the

ASYE and other associated resources to invest in developing their workforce for the future. This is especially so where employers have found it difficult to recruit experienced social workers and have decided to use the ASYE as one part of their strategy to ensure they have the social workers they need.

There is significant evidence of the attention employers are giving to identifying potential recruits at the earliest opportunity. We hear of how they work in partnership with universities, offer student placements, adjust their recruitment cycle to invite students to apply for posts all of which is followed by clear investment in the ASYE and clear career development opportunities. We have come across many Supervisors who are starting to say 'I did my ASYE here', and are now supporting their new team members.

The development of academies supporting the learning and development of the whole workforce is also a key investment benefiting the ASYE. A number of employers have developed a more specific 'ASYE academy'. Whatever the model this often provides additional support to NQSWs and the delivery of the ASYE.

Commonly, this included practice educator/facilitator roles who take responsibility for some or all of the ASYE assessment process and reflective supervision, working in partnership with team based supervisors who are responsible for the day to day work of the NQSW. In some cases the first part of the ASYE is spent within an Academy 'team' before the NQSW then joins their operational social work team; and in one case we heard of the cohort of NQSWs being completely supernumerary to the established workforce providing a high level of learning, support and experiences.

#### **Key messages**

- Employers work in partnership with universities, offer student placements, adjust their recruitment cycle to invite students to apply for posts all of which is followed by clear investment in the ASYE and career development opportunities.
- The development of academies (or equivalent) supporting the learning and development of the whole workforce is also a key investment benefiting the ASYE in response to recruitment and retention pressures.

### **4.3 Developing assessor quality**

Understanding more about the training, development and support of ASYE assessors has been a theme explored in the last two annual rounds of QA visits. Although there are many circumstances, such as academy models (mentioned above) or the commissioning of external supervisors, where additional assessor and supervisor support is resourced, it is still the case that many NQSWs are managed,

supervised and assessed by a single individual who is likely to be a team manager, deputy or senior practitioner.

Identification and selection of people to be assessors for the ASYE is equally inconsistent when looking at the whole, with some being recruited to dedicated roles at one extreme to it being 'pot luck' for a manager who happens to recruit an NQSW! Whilst many organisations strive to have all their assessors trained as practice educators, it is often the case that they do not have enough people with that training to meet all the demands of the ASYE alongside offering student placements. In child and family services ASYE assessors have often participated in the supervisor development programme funded by the DfE.

There is considerable commitment across the groups of assessors we have met through QA sessions to their NQSWs. Nevertheless, in most ASYE programmes more could be done to provide more support, ASYE related information and training specific to the role of assessor. In some cases assessors have themselves been asking for allocated time to devote to the tasks associated with the ASYE assessment. These findings align with the responses reported elsewhere from assessors attending the quarterly forum which clearly show that there is demand for more support, guidance and resources for those assessing and supervising NQSWs.

#### **Key messages**

- Whilst there are increasing numbers of assessors in dedicated roles, many NQSWs are still managed, supervised and assessed by a single individual who is likely to be a team manager, deputy or senior practitioner.
- There is a considerable commitment across the groups of assessors we have met through QA sessions to their NQSWs. Nevertheless, in most ASYE programmes more could be done to provide more support, ASYE related information and training specific to the role of assessor.

## **Section 5. Moving forward: Conclusions, recommendations and next steps**

This report builds on those published in previous years and is intended to guide ASYE programmes in their continuous improvement journey.

This review period (April 2022–March 2023) covers a year where Skills for Care have been working alongside the DfE and employers to strengthen the ASYE framework, in response to sector needs. We have continued to emphasise the core values of the ASYE whilst introducing some new measures, to support employers

with quality assurance, and understand the impact of their ASYE programme. Evidence from our direct contact with employers, largely through the quality assurance visits suggests that whilst they are at different stages in the journey, the majority of employers are seeking to provide their ASYE programme within a cycle of quality assurance and continuous improvement. It should be noted that many programmes have demonstrated considerable change following periods affected by organisational change and restructuring, or following the impact of Ofsted inspections on their organisation. Many programmes have benefitted from experienced co-ordinators who then move on. For these and other reasons the ongoing support for programme development remains a priority in striving to provide fair and equitable support for NQSWs.

- The ASYE quality assurance framework has been refreshed to support the goal of achieving national consistency of NQSW experience, across the dimensions of support, assessment, and outcome.
- From April 2023 it will be a requirement for funding, that all ASYE programmes provide evidence of their quality assurance and continuous improvement journey.
- There is an expectation that senior managers have oversight of the continuous development of their ASYE programmes through signing off an action plan for continuous development.
- We are continuing our commitment to anti-racist practice through the collection and analysis of our portal data and reflective conversations within our forums and quality assurance visits.
- We have broadened our EDI focus, building on our anti-racist practices, to include other areas of difference.
- We have begun to increase the response to the needs of assessors, although the contents of this report suggest that more is needed to be done in this area.
- We recognise that there is a severe recruitment and retention problem across social work and that investing in the ASYE and NQSWs is helping organisations retain their social workers.

# Recommendations

1. ASYE programmes should monitor the quality assurance of their programmes
  - How are you implementing quality assurance and continuous improvement of your programme?
  - Who is currently involved in this and who else could be involved?
  - Do you have a process for regularly seeking and responding to feedback?
2. ASYE programmes should continue to develop their ASYE framework offer
  - Is the management of NQSWs workload consistent and manageable across the organisation?
  - Are NQSWs completing their portfolio outside office hours?
  - Are assessors working out of hours?
  - Do you have senior management support?
3. ASYE programmes should invest in assessors
  - How are the training needs of your assessors understood and met?
  - Do assessors have dedicated time to complete their ASYE obligations?
  - What support so assessors have to develop their role?
  - How does the wider organisation understand the importance of the ASYE assessor role?
4. ASYE programmes should continue to ensure that issues of equality, diversity and inclusion are proactively addressed.
  - In what way do you make an equality impact assessment which informs the ASYE programme?
  - Do you gather/have access to EDI/protected characteristics/workforce demographics data in relation to recruitment and retention?
  - Have you considered how to respond to recruitment and retention challenges?
  - Have you considered EDI in terms of your NQSWs individual learning needs
5. ASYE programmes are seen as a vital part of the organisations recruitment and retention strategy
  - What can be learnt from organisations who have developed academy models to further embed your ASYE programme in a strong learning environment?
  - How will you organisation continue to invest in recruiting and supporting NQSWs?
  - What innovation/best practice can you share with others through the proposals for the new quality assurance panel.
  - What evidence do you have to support the benefits of recruiting and developing NQSWs through your ASYE programme?

## Section 6. Appendices

6.1 [ASYE templates](#)

6.2 [National evaluation criteria](#)

6.3 [Action plan for continuous development](#)

6.4 [NQSW registration portal data 2022-23](#)

6.5 [Supporting equality and diversity when working with GEMS newly qualified social workers](#)

6.6 [Profile of employers visited for quality assurance meetings](#)

6.7 [360-degree evaluation annual report](#)

6.8 [Annual surveys 2022-23 report](#)