

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

Annual report to the Department for Education

April 2023 – March 2024

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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'd particularly like to thank those organisations that participated in quality assurance review meetings 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 sixth 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 the employers delivering ASYE programmes have been embedding changes to the guidance and documentation which support the structure of the programme and implementing a refreshed approach to the quality assurance process. Employers are now expected to complete an annual action plan for continuous improvement and development of their ASYE and submit it as part of their application to obtain grant funding disbursed by Skills for care on behalf of the Department for Education.

This report will focus on the work that has been done in the last year as we lead and support the ASYE community in striving to embed an approach which:

- prioritises the NQSW taking in to account their personal and professional needs
- promotes nationally consistency
- focuses on the development needs of assessors
- above all ensures that programmes are offering an equitable ASYE experience to everyone.

In this year we've seen an increase in the number of newly qualified social workers registered with Skills for Care by employers to 3203, the largest number in one annual period. This should be seen in an overall context where there has also been significant increases in the numbers of NQSWs in adult services over the last two years.

The report also:

- discusses work developed during the period covered by this report to improve support to ASYE co-ordinators who are new to role (section 2).
- explores the learning from a broad range of sources (section 3) 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
 - The annual ASYE survey
- focuses on specific themes which emerged from the learning from different sources (section 4).

1.3 Executive summary

The purpose of this report is to provide an update about ASYE activity that has taken place in 2023-24 and share learning with employers and the Department for Education (DfE), and the wider social work profession and stakeholders. This summary sets out the key messages identified throughout the report.

Our ASYE co-ordinator drop-ins continue to be popular and provide a valued space for the clarification of ASYE programme issues, for sharing of ideas and experiences and for networking. A relatively new initiative we offer is training for new ASYE co-ordinators which offers additional support related to their learning and development needs and knowledge of the ASYE programme. The training highlighted the complexity experienced by co-ordinators when they try to change what is being delivered within the programme and the importance of the role senior managers take in championing the development of the programme.

The data we collect from the child and family ASYE funding and registration platform shows that while the numbers of unsuccessful completions are marginal, they remain higher among male NQSWs, those from a Black or minoritised ethnic community and those who have deferred their ASYE. Rates of unsuccessful completion of the ASYE are decreasing for all NQSWs over the years, however differences regarding ethnicity, gender and deferral rates remain. The percentage of NQSWs from a Black or minoritised ethnic background among adult NQSWs is higher and has consistently increased. However, among child and family NQSWs, the ethnic distribution has remained relatively stable.

We continue to run our ever popular forums (NQSW, assessor and GEMS) and the new format for forums has provided a valued CPD activity for assessors. Assessors have found working in small groups helpful in exploring the practice area focused on

in the forums and for networking. Supportive connections have been established between organisations new to the programme and those working in the same setting.

This year saw the formation of the national quality assurance panel (NQAP). The panel is representative of the whole profession approach of the ASYE programme and is supporting the development of consistency across the programme, which is done via moderation.

Action learning sets for supervisors, co-ordinators and bespoke action learning interventions have been offered throughout 2023-24. This has resulted in assessors/supervisors re-evaluating and changing their practice in supporting the development of NQSWs. Assessors/supervisors have valued the support provided by self-managed action learning sets in developing their approaches to promoting NQSWs' critical thinking and reflection. Assessors/supervisors are using the techniques and methods they have developed in the action learning sets training to promote collaborative problem-solving strategies in their different settings.

Our annual survey showed that ASYE leads agree unanimously that the ASYE has had a positive impact on the practice confidence of NQSWs. The survey results showed that ASYE assessors were confident in their own capabilities in relation to ASYE supervision and assessment.

Over the last year there have been a number of themes identified which cover equity, equality, diversity and inclusion (EEDI) in ASYE programmes, and these are NQSW workloads, wellbeing and supervisory support. Developments around EEDI have continued to be prioritised by employers, who are encouraged to continue to keep the voice of the NQSW at the centre of these and other developments.

A key message that emerged from discussions about workload was that NQSWs feel a loyalty to their team and are willing to take on a higher caseload despite the general ASYE framework providing for protected development time and a reduction in workload.

Employers continue to report significant levels of self-disclosure and requests for access to work assessments in this area, and there are examples of good practice in supporting employment of neurodivergent staff.

Finally, on the topic of supervisory support, the majority of organisations take the matter of support and supervision seriously. However the impact of individual and organisational change is still a challenge within ASYE programmes.

More detail about each of the topics covered in the executive summary can be found in the rest of the report.

Section 2. Supporting ASYE co-ordinators

The role of the co-ordinator in an ASYE programme is crucial to its success. NQSWs and assessors regularly refer to the individual responsible for co-ordinating the programme as a 'fount of all knowledge'.

This year we have developed and built up the support offer for ASYE co-ordinators because:

- Our locality managers based around the country had reported an increasing 'churn' in the ASYE co-ordinator role and the need to support the development of their programme knowledge
- We were aware that NHS Trusts were engaging more with the ASYE programme and did not necessarily have an institutional knowledge base about the programme on which to draw.
- A group of ASYE programmes linked to a teaching partnership, identified as one of its challenges that the new ASYE co-ordinators coming into role had either limited or no knowledge of the ASYE programme.
- The ASYE co-ordinator role can be an isolated one.

In response to these issues and the associated emerging need, the support offer has been increased in two specific ways:

1. To continue the drop-ins for ASYE co-ordinators, which had originally been established in a time limited way to support the implementation of the refreshed ASYE programme and the new national quality assurance framework.
2. To develop training for new ASYE co-ordinators and a handbook to support the training.

2.1 ASYE co-ordinator drop-ins

The drop-ins are online sessions run monthly and structured so that co-ordinators have the opportunity to raise questions about the programme and seek clarification on issues they are experiencing in their local context. Co-ordinators can 'drop-in and drop-out' whenever it suits them. Typically, we find that they stay for the whole session. This is because the drop-ins:

- provide a forum for co-ordinators from different parts of the country to meet and support each other
- help reduce the isolation that co-ordinators may experience
- provide a quick and accessible way to have a question or issue addressed
- provide a forum for co-ordinators to share their own experiences of how they have addressed issues and developed their programmes. In this respect the sessions are strengths-based and facilitate problem-solving and programme development.

Questions and themes the drop-ins have considered include:

- the best way to support assessors with NQSWs who have additional learning needs and with their time management skills
- working out the programme timescales for NQSWs working reduced hours, how long review periods should be, supervision, protected development time
- advice about the action plan for continuous development
- an update on the consultation regarding proposed changes to the wording of guidance
- clarity around the internal moderation process.

We continuously evaluate the impact of these co-ordinator drop-in sessions. The feedback we have received has been very positive, indicating that the identified need is being met, for example participants:

- found the drop-ins helpful
- liked to hear from other co-ordinators across the country, their experiences and how they were approaching issues
- recognised new themes emerging and appreciated hearing different views on them
- liked that there was a place to ask questions about issues they were facing
- appreciated the insights they heard from those attending
- commented that the drop-ins provided 'food for thought'.

Key message

- The ASYE co-ordinators drop-ins provide a valued space for the clarification of ASYE programme issues, for sharing of ideas and experiences and for networking.

2.2 Training for new ASYE co-ordinators

In response to the identified number of ASYE co-ordinators who were new to the role, in 2023-24 for the first time, we designed and delivered training for new ASYE co-ordinators. The nature of the training meant that the number of spaces was limited. Twenty child and family co-ordinators registered for the training which meant that it was fully booked.

The aims of the training were:

- To enhance new ASYE co-ordinator's knowledge of the ASYE national framework and to support them to understand the requirements of their programme within this context.
- To promote new ASYE co-ordinator's confidence in undertaking their role and to help them establish their peer support networks.

Over six sessions, the training covered the areas of:

- understanding the ASYE programme
- understanding the co-ordinator's role and responsibilities
- supporting NQSWs and assessors where the NQSW is not progressing as expected to the ASYE standard
- the ASYE assessment and the role of evidence in the assessment process, including in the internal moderation panel
- quality assuring the ASYE programme and developing action plan for continuous development
- sources of support for ASYE co-ordinators.

A handbook was developed to support the knowledge transfer element of the training.

For co-ordinators supporting NQSWs in child and family services this was supplemented by six one hour sessions on using an action learning approach for problem solving issues being experienced.

The evaluation of the training indicates it was well-received, and demonstrated impact for participants including:

- Increasing confidence in what they are doing in the delivery of their role.
- Enabling development of their role so that they had the confidence to engage with their stakeholders in new ways.
- Highlighting the range of the stakeholders in the programme, at different levels of the organisation and the need to work with them to develop the programme.
- The development of knowledge and understanding of the programme in all its areas.
- The confidence to be more pro-active in implementing ideas for developing the programme.
- The confidence to start changing the narrative and culture in the organisation around the ASYE programme and to strengthen the value of the programme.

Key messages

- It was identified that new ASYE co-ordinators would benefit from additional support related to their learning and development needs and knowledge of the ASYE programme.
- The training highlighted the complexity experienced by co-ordinators when they try to change what is being delivered within the programme and the importance of the role senior managers take in championing the development of the programme.
- The programme supports ASYE co-ordinators not to feel isolated in their role and they value the opportunity to meet up with each other.

Section 3. Learning from different sources

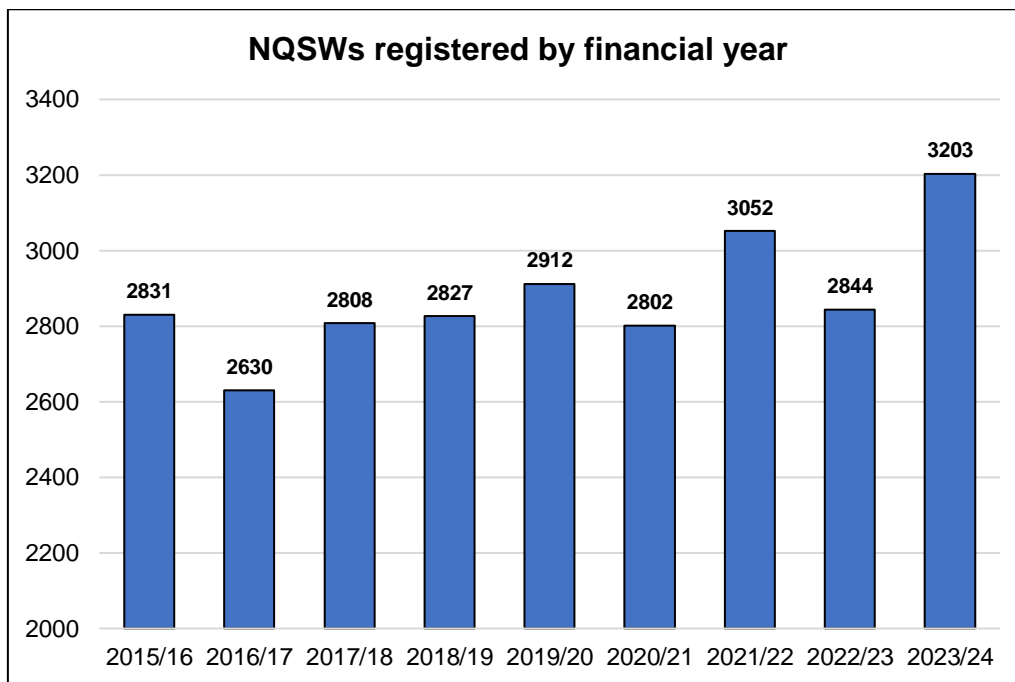
3.1 The child and family ASYE funding and registration platform

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 the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024* a total of 191 different employer organisations registered 3203 newly qualified social workers onto the ASYE programme.

*(*data correct as of 10 April 2024)*

NQSW registrations, by year

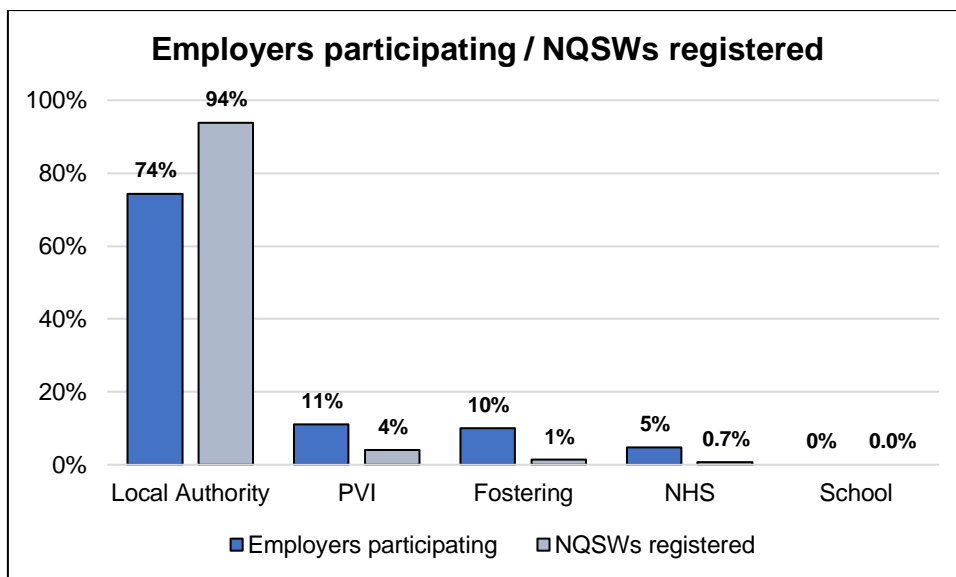
The total number of ASYE registrations for 2023-24 was 3203.



2023-24 registrations, by employer type

Registrations were made by a total of 191 employers.

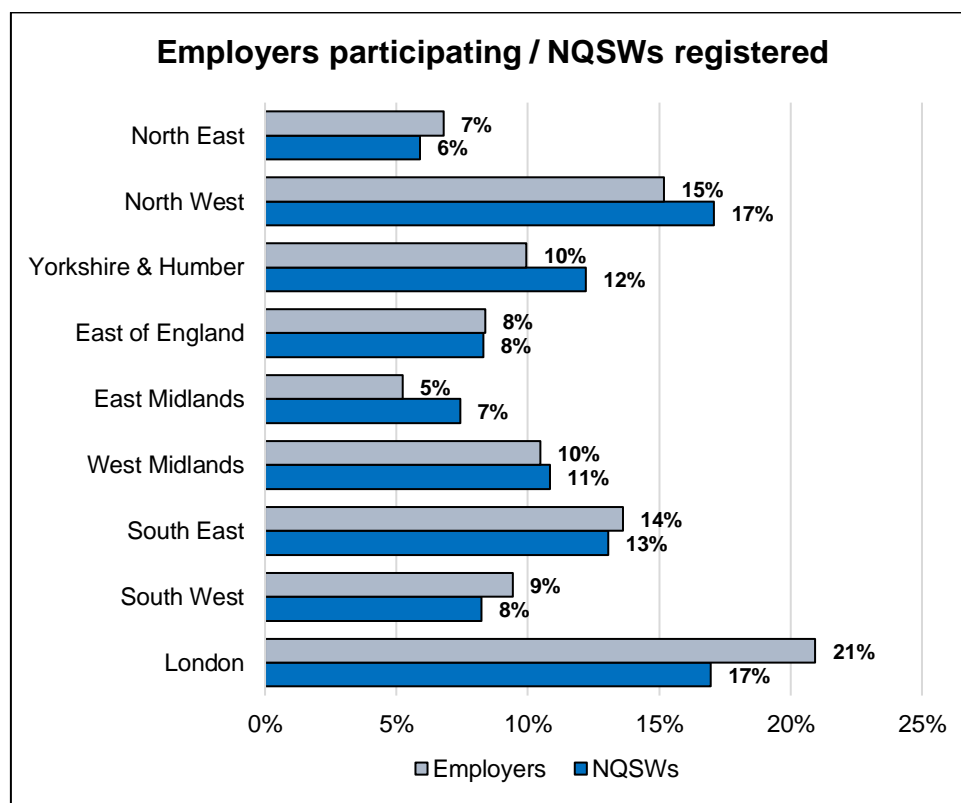
	Number of employers	Number of NQSWs registered
Local authority	142	3005
Private, voluntary and independent (PVI)	21	131
Fostering	19	43
NHS	9	24
School	0	0
Total	191	3203



2023-24 registrations, by area

44% of the registrations came from employers based in the South of England, 24% came from those based in the Midlands and 32% came from those based in the North of England.

	Number of employers	Number of NQSWs registered
North East	13	189
North West	29	547
Yorkshire and Humber	19	391
East of England	16	266
East Midlands	10	238
West Midlands	20	347
South East	26	418
South West	18	264
London	40	543
Total	191	3203



3.2 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 (successfully/unsuccessfully completed).

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 three recent cohorts of child and family social workers is summarised below (see Table 1).

Data on the portal can change as records can be updated/filed later. The most recent cohort from 2022-23 was not included in the analysis as the data was not yet fully available as still in progress at the time of the analysis (summer 2023).

	Cohort			Total
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	
Child and family NQSWs	2985	2742	2995	8722

Of these 8,722 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 6,011 NQSWs of whom 5,958 (99.1%) passed the ASYE and 53 (0.9%) 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 is either successful or unsuccessful in completing their ASYE.

NQSWs who have been deferred were more likely to be unsuccessful in completing the ASYE than NQSWs who have not been deferred. Whereas 2.7% of NQSWs who have been deferred once and 2.5% who have been deferred twice were unsuccessful, only 0.4% of NQSWs who have not been deferred did not successfully complete their ASYE.

2023 was the third 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 following results are based on the Child and family NQSW data.

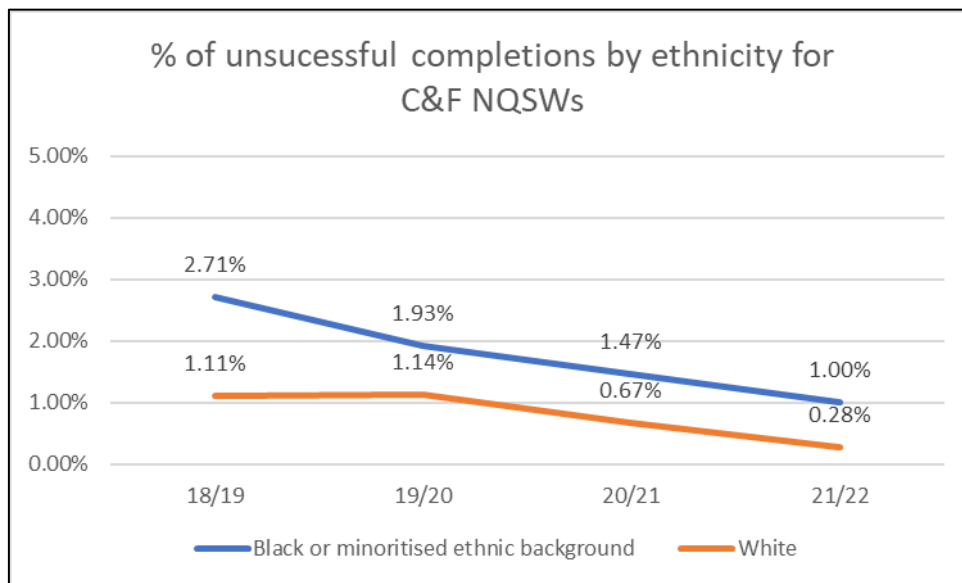
- NQSWs from a Black or minoritised ethnic background were more likely to be unsuccessful in completing the ASYE than white NQSWs. Whereas 1.4% of NQSWs from a Black or minoritised ethnic background were unsuccessful, only 0.7% of white NQSWs did not successfully complete their ASYE.
- In comparison to previous analyses, the data analysed this year also showed that male NQSWs were more likely to be unsuccessful than female NQSWs. Whereas 1.8% of male NQSWs did not successfully complete the ASYE, only 0.8% of female NQSWs were unsuccessful.

While the numbers of unsuccessful completions are marginal, they remain higher among male NQSWs, those from a Black or minoritised ethnic community and those who have deferred their ASYE, as was the case in previous years. A key finding however is that the proportion of unsuccessful completions is decreasing for all NQSWs (child and family and adults services) compared to previous years.

For the first time, we were able to look at trends over time to see how rates of unsuccessful completion have changed over the last four years. Due to the data retention policy (personal data is only kept for four years) trend data is based on aggregated data. As mentioned above, the most recent cohort from 2022-23 was not included in the analysis as the data is not yet fully available. On average, rates of unsuccessful completion of the ASYE are decreasing for all NQSWs over the years, however differences regarding ethnicity, gender and deferral rates remain.

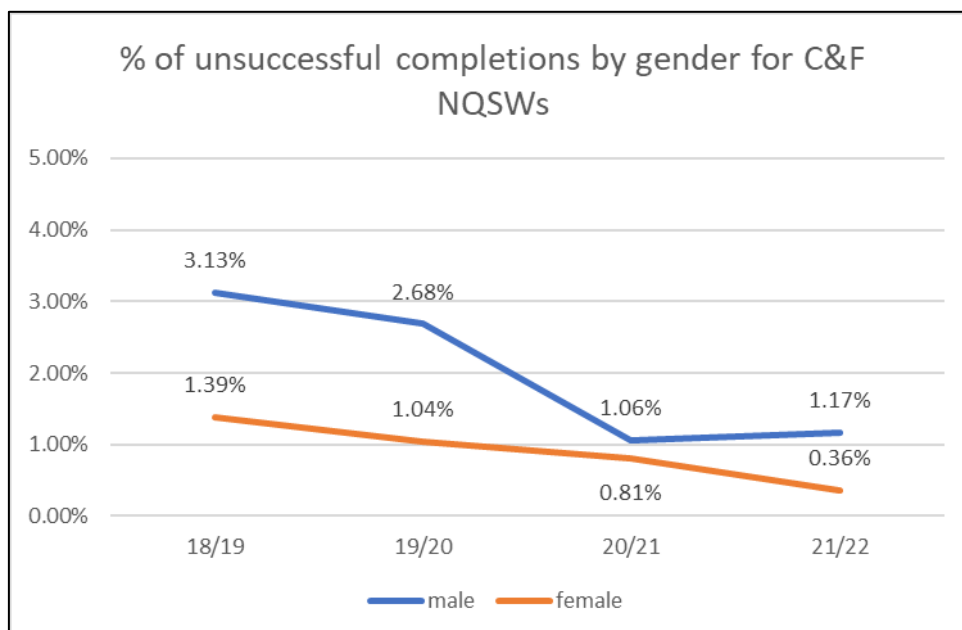
Figure 1 shows that, while the level of unsuccessful completions is decreasing overall, the gap between NQSWs from a Black or minoritised ethnic community and their white counterparts remains relatively stable.

Figure 1: Rates are decreasing for child and family NQSWs but gap between NQSWs from a minoritised community and their white counterparts remains stable.



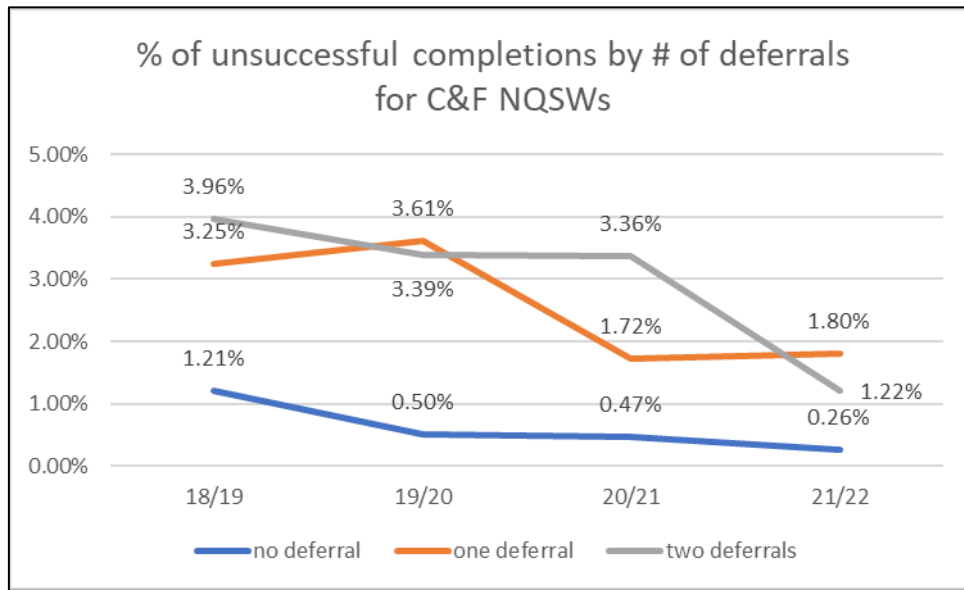
The trend data for gender differences is showing positive signs. Figure 2 shows that the gap in rates of success between male and female NQSWs has been decreasing over a 4 year period.

Figure 2: The gap in unsuccessful completion rates between male and female NQSWs is decreasing.



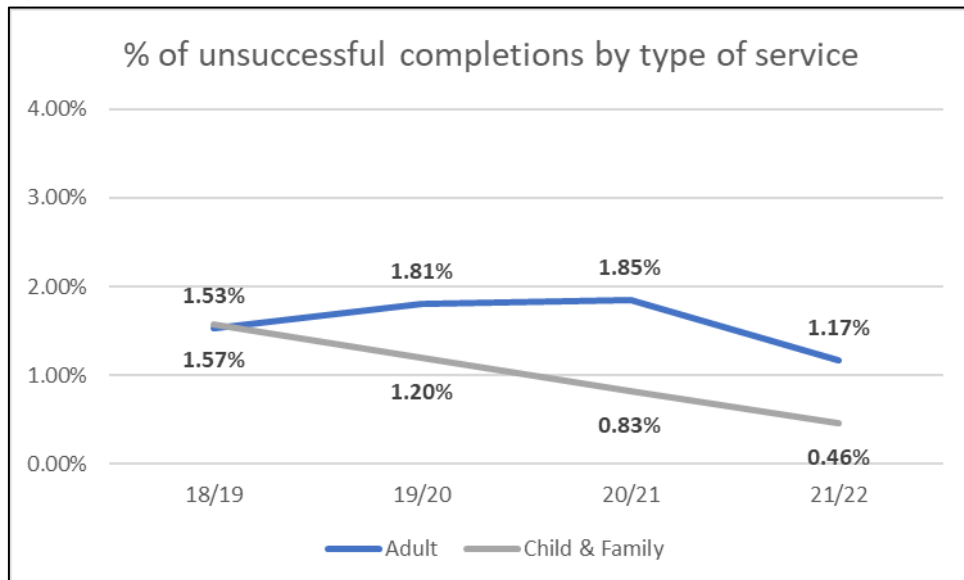
Similarly, the impact of deferrals on rates of unsuccessful completion has started to decrease. Figure 3 shows that in 2021-22 NQSWs who have been deferred once or twice are less likely to fail their ASYEs compared to previous years.

Figure 3: Impact of deferrals on unsuccessful completion rates is decreasing.



As we conduct the same analysis for adult NQSWs, we were able to look at trend data comparing ASYE programmes in both service areas. Figure 4 shows that rates of unsuccessful completion among child and family NQSWs have been consistently lower than among Adult NQSWs in the last three years of this reporting period.

Figure 4: Gap in unsuccessful completion rates between different services has been increasing.



Our analysis showed that gender, ethnicity, and deferral rates have the greatest impact on whether NQSWs successfully complete their ASYE. This could also explain the difference in failure rates between child and family and adult NQSWs. Further analysis revealed that deferral rates are comparable, but the child and family

NQSWs are less diverse. Figure 5 shows that the percentage of NQSWs from a Black or minoritised ethnic background among adult NQSWs is higher and has consistently increased. However, among child and family NQSWs, the ethnic distribution has remained relatively stable.

Figure 5: Gap in ethnic diversity between adult and child and family NQSWs is increasing.

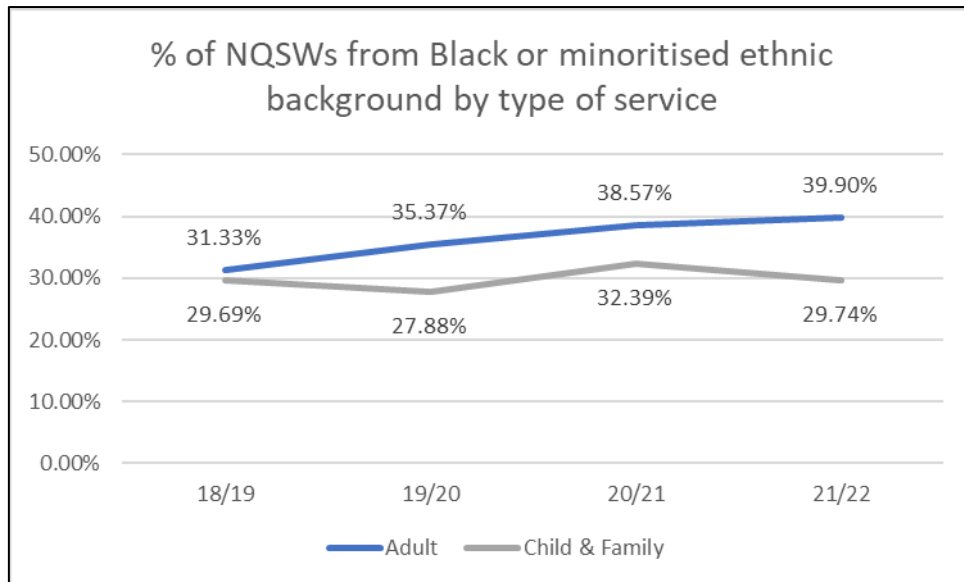
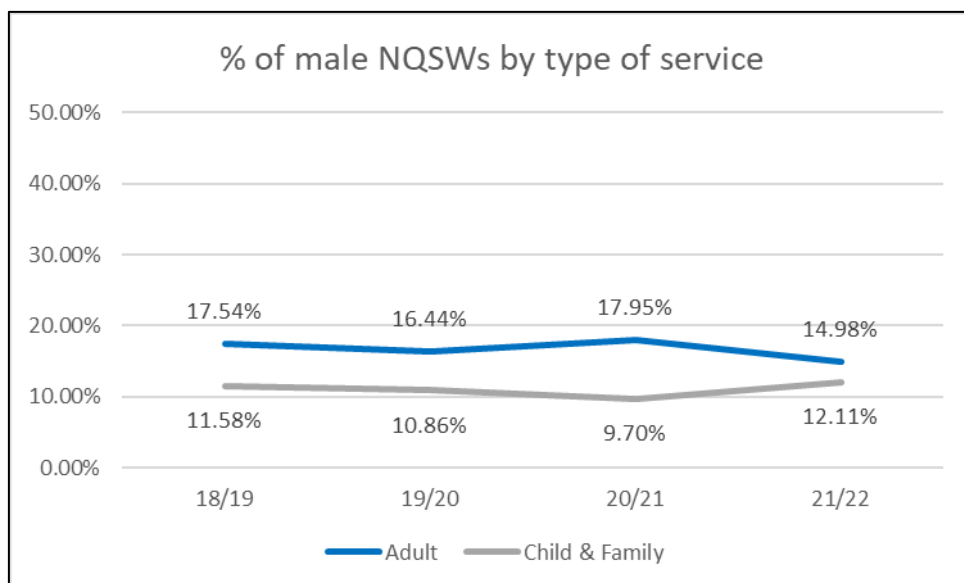


Figure 6 shows that the percentage of male NQSWs has consistently been lower in child and family services compared to adult services.

Figure 6: Less gender diversity among child and family NQSWs compared to adult NQSWs.



Key messages

- While the numbers of unsuccessful completions are marginal, they remain higher among male NQSWs, those from a Black or minoritised ethnic community and those who have deferred their ASYE.
- Rates of unsuccessful completion of the ASYE are decreasing for all NQSWs over the years, however differences regarding ethnicity, gender and deferral rates remain.
- The percentage of NQSWs from a Black or minoritised ethnic background among adult NQSWs is higher and has consistently increased. However, among child and family NQSWs, the ethnic distribution has remained relatively stable.

3.3 National forums

There are 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.

3.3.1 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. The forums offer an additional CPD activity for NQSWs. 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:

- Discussion and providing feedback in relation to the refreshed ASYE documentation.
- Engaging social workers in practice based research.
- Workshops around developing knowledge around working with neurodivergent NQSWs have been provided and well received at both the NQSW and assessor forums.
- Professional identity – a blog written by a member of the Skills for Care team following this session can be found [on our website](#).
- Trauma informed supervision.

The NQSW forums have been well received and feedback suggests that NQSWs find them informative and enjoy having the opportunity to engage with other NQSWs on different ASYE programmes.

3.3.2 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 Black, Asian and ethnic minoritised groups and communities. Since it was established, the group has continued to grow. From the beginning, the NQSWs identified the topics that were of concern to them, and these have been variations on familiar themes. Such as:

- Understanding 'hidden' structural and systemic racism which makes being a social worker harder for people from these ethnically minoritised backgrounds.
- Dealing effectively with racism directed at them from people who draw on care and support and in some instances that experienced from colleagues and managers.
- Challenges including racism and discrimination that they as Black, Asian and ethnic minoritised NQSWs experience whilst undertaking the ASYE.
- Seeking guidance and support around coping strategies.
- Exploring how a person's identity affects their practice.
- Exploring how to deal with conscious and unconscious bias and micro-aggressions.
- Developing resilience in an area where sometimes sensitivities and responses are often heightened.

These are only some of the identified themes, but they enable insight into what some of the concerns are for these groups of NQSWs.

Each session is two-hours long and participants are either given updates from Skills for Care, benefit from hearing from an invited speaker or are introduced to a pre agreed topic. They are also given the space to discuss what they've heard in smaller groups.

The numbers attending this national GEMS forum have steadily increased which is a positive trend but is also an indicator of needs. It would also seem that its existence has encouraged some employers to set up similar groups. The session held in March 2024, had a total of 87 participants. In feedback received some have pointed out that they would like to have attended more sessions had their ASYE programme informed them of the forum's existence from the beginning of the ASYE. However, it is also noted that non-attendance can also be attributed to other factors, including not finding out about the forum until quite late in the process or work pressures have also presented challenges for time available to attend.

As an example, at the March session there was an invited speaker. He was an Asian Muslim qualified social worker who shared his experiences as they ranged from student, NQSW to experienced social worker, to manager and finally as a social care provider and business owner. Participants were really interested in what he had to

say about what the possibilities are for them, how they need to prepare themselves to deal with the challenges of racism and discrimination from both service users, colleagues and managers. This generated a lot of discussion and the group were given the opportunity to share their own experiences in small groups. Some of the feedback to this input included participants sharing their experience of the concept of 'code switching' which in effect meant that they were constantly having to adapt their style of speech, appearance, behaviour and expression of self in ways that would optimise the comfort of others in exchange for what they hoped would be fairer treatment. Some of the discussion acknowledged and recognised that there was often a negative impact on self. So the opportunity to hear from others supported them in being able to conceptualise ways forward for themselves.

Following their discussion and sharing of experiences in small groups, a few participants raised concerns about what they referred to as the "mental health stress and trauma" they had experienced as students and therefore were carrying into the ASYE. They asked what could be done to raise this with qualifying programmes because of the negative impact it had had on them, particularly starting the ASYE programme having experienced this kind of trauma was felt to be very challenging.

The feedback received confirmed the need for an ongoing GEMS forum in which participants can affirm their own experiences, understand they are not alone and feedback to Skills for Care on issues which they feel need to be addressed to support a positive ASYE experience. It is also noted that we have been contacted by NQSWs who have said these sessions are needed post ASYE and/or they have raised the question of whether they can continue to attend for support after their ASYE programme has concluded. This indicates that there is still a gap between reality and the need for these NQSWs and social workers to be offered specific support that is geared to their needs in an environment in which they feel safe enough to express and explore their need for support which enables them to grow and develop as qualified social workers. Feedback from the March session included the following:

"Very helpful and confidence building."

"This is my first session and it's so informative, many thanks."

"Thank you so much for the session. It was very informative and inspiring. Thanks also to all those who shared their stories. It is interesting to hear about all the different experiences."

"I have attended two sessions and both have been extremely helpful. I would love to attend these sessions post ASYE."

"It is informative. Very happy I joined the forum to share ideas and support from one another."

"GEMS is a great information sharing and learning forum."

"Thank you for the sessions."

“Thank you. This has been really useful and a great opportunity to listen to people’s experiences. Thank you all for sharing your stories and sorry for some of the situations you have been put in.”

“My first session. It’s an eye opener. I really learned a lot, very helpful indeed.”

“it is very helpful but this is my first session. It would be nice to invite people immediately we start our ASYE, so that we know we are not alone.

“I am extremely grateful for these sessions, as they have been very insightful and have motivated me to stay true to my authentic self. I am really looking forward to the other sessions. Thank you.”

Many issues are raised and addressed in four 2-hour sessions each year. Often the complexity of the issues raised and the experiences of GEMS NQSWs are more complex than the ideal time which is needed for sensitive exploration. However, even this short window enables and supports these NQSWs not to feel alone. They can hear about the ASYE programme experiences of other NQSWs nationally, learn new information and gain ideas and genuine support. Where necessary, participants are informed about the NQSW protocol which supports them to inform Skills for Care about difficulties they might be experiencing and whilst we cannot change employer decision making, Skills for Care can raise the issues with the principal social worker or other senior leader thereby trying to ensure that the NQSW has a voice.

Forums this year have also focused on “Being Othered” (pressure to conform and fit in). Use of Self – own values/beliefs and how to navigate that alongside their professional role, dealing with power imbalance between NQSW/assessor, matching up processes and the complexity this presents when dealing with these common issues are also overlaid with differences of race, ethnicity, exposure to racism and discrimination.

In the December forum our invited speaker was from Social Work England and so a joint session looked at their fitness to practice process and an initial analysis of their diversity data. Once again, this created discussion around diversity, inclusion and issues currently faced by those from ‘global majority’ backgrounds. The use of this term also signals the different terminology which has and is emerging as part of an ongoing debate. Awareness of this meant that at the March session we explored the GEMS term. See appendix 1 for details.

3.3.3 National assessors’ forum

This group is open to assessors of NQSWs but is often also attended by ASYE co-ordinators (some of whom may have a dual role as both co-ordinator and assessor). Assessor forums continue to provide the opportunity for assessors to network, learn from each other and provide CPD opportunities. Skills for Care has continued to develop the model for these sessions to include an opportunity to hear from academics in terms of the latest research and theory base in social work, to discuss

this in small groups and reflect on how they can integrate this into their practice. Attendance has increased providing evidence that the opportunity is well received. One recent forum focused on trauma -based supervision. An attendee stated that it was:

“Lovely to meet up with other ASYE assessors. Some great ideas for supervision. Will definitely re-look at supervision agreements with NQSWs... Thank you. Helpful group learning, some important reminders and ideas to follow-up.”

The forum’s opportunity to network has also highlighted examples of organisations sharing good practice, for example, one organisation wanted support in undertaking presentations with an NQSW. Through the forum we were able to facilitate them linking up with another organisation who had experience in this area. More assessors are joining the forum from NHS mental health services and Skills for Care facilitated them linking up with other organisations who can offer support and guidance in setting up ASYE programmes in new settings.

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) is a constant thread throughout the forums. Considering individual learning needs in terms of supervision and further exploration from our recent events exploring how organisations can develop their own EDI framework for their ASYE programmes.

It has been identified that there was a lack of robust evidence in terms of what support assessors were receiving to deliver their role, and how their work was being quality assured. Peer reviewers (ASYE co-ordinators) participating in quality assurance meetings reinforced this view adding that assessors need to provide an excellent level of critical reflective supervision, as this is such an important element in the development of NQSW’s. The last round of quality assurance (QA) meetings asked specific questions in terms of assessor training and support. This work has been linked into the forum, for example, through the sessions on trauma-based supervision and professional identity.

We will continue to seek feedback from assessors via the forum and events to continue to develop the assessor forums.

Key messages

- The new format for forums has provided a valued CPD activity for assessors.
- Assessors have found working in small groups helpful in exploring the practice area focused on in the forums and for networking.
- New supportive connections have been established between organisations new to the programme and working in the same setting.

- Workshops around developing knowledge about working with neurodivergent NQSWs have been provided and well received at both the NQSW and assessor forums.

3.4 In-depth employer quality assurance review meetings

As in previous years quality assurance (QA) meetings 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 2023-24 we have had the opportunity to meet with the organisations listed in appendix 2. We have continued to experience some difficulty in engaging very small organisations and those with only 1 NQSW in the QA meetings where a different approach is needed.

Prior to QA meetings employers are invited to submit a pre-meeting questionnaire, a 360 degree evaluation report for their programme and their current action plan for development. Additionally, in each annual round of meetings, 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 2023-24 the themes were:

- 1) One element of the national evaluation criteria is the prioritisation of NQSWs wellbeing from the beginning of the ASYE. Also that NQSWs are made aware of how to access the support structures available to them within the organisation from the outset, such as buddying and peer support networks. A dimension of the wellbeing of NQSWs is that the programme is tailored to their individual support needs, including their cultural and identity needs. We are interested to understand how both organisational and ASYE programme approaches are being developed to support the wellbeing of NQSWs. Another dimension relates to the deferral of an individual NQSW's programme and the support provided across the deferral. We are interested to understand the changes in the number of deferrals over the last few years and the different reasons for the deferrals that are agreed.
- 2) The assessor is pivotal to the delivery of the ASYE programme and the NQSWs experience of support, assessment and outcome. The support provided to the assessor enables them to fulfil their professional responsibilities. We're interested to learn about how their support and learning needs are addressed in ways appropriate to them, individually and collectively. We're also interested to find out how assessors work is quality assured to support their development and the development of the programme (this is only for our meetings with senior managers/ASYE leads and assessors).

This approach provides a significant amount of information which contributes to the overall understanding of the state of the ASYE across England. The core themes that emerge from these QA meetings are incorporated into the discussion in section 4 below.

3.5 National quality assurance panel (NQAP)

The panel comprises 22 members, drawn from the public sector and the private, voluntary independent sector. The members bring operational and strategic experience of delivering the ASYE programme and their roles include ASYE co-ordinators/leads, principal social workers and service managers.

The panel undertook its first meeting in October 2023 and met again in April 2024.

It has three functions:

1. Moderation of portfolio evidence: the panel moderated 24 sets of portfolio evidence and provided individual feedback to the submitting organisations. In consideration of the whole professional approach, the panel is able to moderate portfolios from child and family organisations that are voluntarily submitted to the panel.
2. Endorsement of examples of good practice in the delivery of the programme. The panel provided feedback to the first organisation to seek endorsement of its practice and considered how it might promote future endorsement applications. It received nine applications for consideration at the April 2024 panel. The endorsement function will provide a bank of good practice resources for organisations to consult when considering how to develop the quality of their programmes; in this way it will stimulate good practice and consistency across the sector.
3. Annotation of evidence of progression and review reports: panel members had annotated two pieces of evidence of progression, which were considered by the panel. The panel decided that they would not share the evidence with the sector on this occasion because it related to the non-refreshed documentation. Five different annotated pieces are under consideration by the panel and any outcome of that will be shared with the sector.

The panel will be providing a formal report on the key learning from their moderation of sets of evidence on an annual basis. The panel however asked Skills for Care to report to the sector some initial feedback on three key themes for improving the quality of the evidence presented in portfolios by NQSWs and assessors:

- The importance of writing learning objectives in a SMART way. Objectives which are specific, measurable and realistic are more likely to be achievable within a set review period.

- Ensuring that the NQSWs evidence of progression and the assessor's reports reference where it is believed that it supports a practice capability of the PCF and PQS (KSS).
- In the progressive development section of a record of support and progressive assessment (RSPA), encouraging assessors to record practice examples to support what they're saying. This can be achieved by referencing the evidence of progression or referencing examples of a NQSWs' developing practice capability they have observed, or a colleague has reported observing.

Key messages

- The panel is representative of the whole profession approach of the ASYE programme.
- The panel is supporting the development of consistency across ASYE programmes through moderation. Annotated pieces of evidence and endorsement of good practice is currently under review.

3.6 360-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:

- Every NQSW has a personal development plan (PDP) (Score = 4.4)
- The support and development needs of NQSWs are clearly identified, recorded, and reviewed via a personal development plan at each stage of the ASYE process (Score = 4.3)
- NQSWs have access to learning opportunities relevant to their individual and collective development needs (Score = 4.2)
- All aspects of the ASYE programme place emphasis on the importance of critically reflective practice (Score = 4.2)
- Feedback gathered from people, including children and young people who need care and support, through direct observations is addressed within the assessment process (Score = 4.2)
- ASYE assessment is based on the PQS and the PCF (Score = 4.2)

The evaluation criteria statement scoring the lowest nationally were:

- NQSWs are encouraged to engage with the national ASYE framework via the quarterly NQSW online forums (Score = 3.5)
- Feedback is proactively sought by employers through mechanisms such as the 360-degree evaluation tool to ensure NQSWs are active participants rather than passive recipients in their ASYE (Score = 3.6)
- NQSWs - along with other stakeholders (i.e. ASYE supervisors/assessors, and people who need care and support and their carers, this includes children and young people) are able to make a meaningful contribution to ASYE quality assurance and continuous improvement (Score = 3.6)

There was very little change between the national average scores in 2023-24 and 2022-23.

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, 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 inputted 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 113 organisations who had submitted their data up to 29 February 2024¹. 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) |

¹ A further 14 organisations have registered, but not submitted any data and a further 34 organisations have submitted some data but have not met the minimum criteria for inclusion in our reporting.

Evaluation criteria theme 1: The NQSW experience is central to the ASYE

The results for the statements in this section were reasonably high (see below). Seven out of the eight statements scored an average, nationally, of at least 3.6 out of 5 ('Amber'), with the remaining statement scoring an average, nationally, of 3.5 ('Amber'). The results are almost identical to those from last year.

		2023-24			2022-23			
		National average	Min	Max	National average	Min	Max	
The NQSW experience is central to the ASYE	1	Feedback is proactively sought by employers through mechanisms such as the 360-degree evaluation tool to ensure NQSWs are active participants rather than passive recipients in their ASYE	3.6	2.0	4.8	3.5	2.0	4.3
	2	NQSWs - along with other stakeholders (i.e. ASYE supervisors/assessors, and people who need care and support and their carers, this includes children and young people) are able to make a meaningful contribution to ASYE quality assurance and continuous imp	3.6	2.5	5.0	3.6	2.3	4.6
	3	NQSW wellbeing is prioritised from the beginning of the ASYE and NQSWs are made aware of the support structures available to them within the organisation from the outset of their ASYE and how to access this support, such as buddying and peer support netwo	3.9	2.4	5.0	3.9	2.4	4.7
	4	Equality, diversity and inclusion is central to the ASYE programme, ensuring that all NQSWs are offered an ASYE experience which is tailored to their individual needs, including cultural and learning needs	3.8	3.0	5.0	3.9	3.0	5.0
	5	ASYE programmes have policies in place to ensure their NQSWs and those supporting them practice from an anti-racist perspective	3.8	3.2	5.0	3.9	3.0	4.7
	6	ASYE programmes have an equality and diversity framework in place to ensure their NQSWs and those supporting them are not treated unfairly or discriminated against because of their background or characteristics	3.9	2.5	5.0	3.9	3.0	4.7
	7	The organisation has mechanisms in place to gather, monitor data, that is reflective of the diversity of the organisations workforce; then take action where necessary so that employees from a diverse background are not disadvantaged.	3.7	2.5	5.0	3.7	2.8	4.5
	8	NQSWs are encouraged to engage with the National ASYE Framework via the quarterly NQSW online forums	3.5	0.0	4.9	3.4	0.0	4.7

Evaluation criteria theme 2: The ASYE programme is delivered in accordance with the AYSE framework and employer standards

The results for the statements in this section were reasonably high (see below). Ten of the fifteen statements scored an average, nationally, of at least 4 out of 5 ('Green'), with the remaining statements scoring an average, nationally, of 3.7 - 3.9 ('Amber'). The results are almost identical to those from last year.

		2023-24			2022-23			
		National average	Min	Max	National average	Min	Max	
The ASYE programme is delivered in accordance with the AYSE framework & employer standards	9	The transition from student to NQSW clearly identifies the individual support and development needs of NQSWs	4.0	2.5	5.0	4.0	2.9	4.8
	10	Every NQSW has a Personal Development Plan (PDP)	4.4	3.0	5.0	4.4	3.2	5.0
	11	The support and development needs of NQSWs are clearly identified, recorded, and reviewed via a personal development plan at each stage of the ASYE process	4.3	2.5	5.0	4.2	2.7	5.0
	12	NQSWs receive regular reflective supervision (i.e. weekly for first six weeks, fortnightly for first six months, monthly thereafter) from a registered social worker who has demonstrable skills and experience in developing others	4.1	2.5	5.0	4.1	3.0	5.0
	13	NQSWs receive workload relief appropriate to their stage in the programme. Complexity of case work is relevant to the individual NQSW and gradually increases through the ASYE. Overall, the level of workload does not exceed 90% (of the average case load)	3.7	2.0	5.0	3.7	2.3	4.8
	14	Protected time is made available for NQSWs to undertake personalised continuing professional development (CPD) activities, in line with Social Work England requirements, ASYE dedicated training events and other peer learning opportunities such as action l	3.9	2.7	5.0	3.9	2.7	4.8
	15	The support needs of supervisors/assessors are addressed in ways appropriate to them. Employers should make it possible for them to access peer support through such things as action learning sets and the quarterly ASYE Assessors' online forum	3.7	2.4	5.0	3.6	2.3	4.4
	16	NQSWs have access to learning opportunities relevant to their individual and collective development needs	4.2	3.0	5.0	4.2	3.2	4.9
	17	Supervisors/assessors have access to learning opportunities relevant to their individual and collective development needs	3.8	2.5	5.0	3.8	2.7	4.8
	18	Employers should make it possible for them to access peer support through such things as action learning sets and the quarterly ASYE Assessors' online forum	3.7	2.0	4.7	3.7	2.0	4.7
	19	All aspects of the ASYE programme place emphasis on the importance of critically reflective practice	4.2	3.0	5.0	4.2	3.0	4.8
	20	There is an emphasis on progressive development and assessment evidence is provided by different people, in different situations and over the duration of the ASYE	4.1	2.5	5.0	4.1	3.0	4.8
	21	Feedback gathered from people, including children and young people who need care and support, through direct observations is addressed within the assessment process	4.2	2.5	5.0	4.2	3.0	4.8
	22	Both NQSWs and supervisors have a clear understanding of what is required of them with regard to the sufficiency and quality of evidence	4.0	2.5	5.0	4.0	2.7	4.8
	23	Assessment outcomes are accurate, valid, robust and sufficient	4.1	2.5	5.0	4.0	3.0	5.0

Evaluation criteria theme 3: The ASYE programme ensures that PQS (previously KSS) and the PCF underpin NQSW professional practice

The results for the statements in this section were reasonably high (see below). One statement scored, on average, nationally, 4.2 ('Green') with the remaining four statements scoring, on average, nationally, 3.7 - 3.9 ('Amber'). The results are almost identical to those from last year.

		2023-24			2022-23			
		National average	Min	Max	National average	Min	Max	
The ASYE programme ensures that PQS (previously KSS) & the PCF underpin NQSW professional practice	24	Links are in place with partner universities so that students have understanding about the PQS in advance of their graduation	3.7	2.0	5.0	3.7	1.8	5.0
	25	The NQSW is informed about the PQS and the ASYE and the associated organisational expectations as part of the recruitment process	3.8	2.5	5.0	3.9	2.0	4.7
	26	All those involved in the ASYE (NQSWs, supervisors, managers) receive the support they need to understand their role in relation to the development of social work practice underpinned by the PQS and the PCF	3.8	2.5	4.7	3.8	2.5	4.6
	27	The PQS and the PCF are mapped against all the available learning and development opportunities provided by the organisation in relation to the ASYE	3.9	2.3	5.0	3.9	2.3	4.8
	28	ASYE assessment is based on the PQS and the PCF	4.2	3.0	5.0	4.2	2.9	4.8

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

The results for the statements in this section were reasonably high (see below). Two statements scored, on average, nationally, 4.0 or 4.1 ('Green') with the remaining four statements scoring, on average, nationally, 3.7 - 3.9 ('Amber'). The results are identical to those from last year.

		2023-24			2022-23			
		National average	Min	Max	National average	Min	Max	
The ASYE programme is integrated within the wider organisational system	29	The organisation takes ownership of the supervisor/assessor's assessment recommendations through an internal moderation panel	4.1	2.0	5.0	4.1	2.0	5.0
	30	A clear and transparent quality assurance and continuous improvement process is in place within the organisation. Identified improvement actions are monitored and reviewed	3.9	2.3	5.0	3.9	2.3	5.0
	31	The ASYE is embedded within the workforce strategy and forms part of clearly defined career and CPD pathways for qualified social workers	4.0	1.8	4.8	4.0	1.8	4.8
	32	The ASYE is integrated within human resources and performance management processes	3.9	1.0	4.8	3.9	1.0	4.7
	33	Senior management are aware of their key role as leaders in championing the success of the ASYE programme. This includes ensuring that NQSW's are not over-burdened with their caseloads and that protected CPD and development time is adhered to	3.7	2.0	5.0	3.7	2.5	5.0

3.7 Action learning sets for supervisors, co-ordinators and bespoke action learning interventions

Resources were available to offer self-managed action learning sets to 36 assessors/supervisors of NQSWs and 24 ASYE co-ordinators. These were delivered between April 2023 and March 2024.

The action learning sets for assessors/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 assessors/supervisors about action learning sets cover the factors that influence and challenge the delivery of action learning in organisations. These included: the lack of a robust learning and development strategy; multiple systemic issues; the absence of long-term thinking and goals to support more innovative approaches to problem-solving and the limited scope for inclusive dialogue amongst peers and line managers.

Their feedback also evidenced how the knowledge and skills gained from the training is going to be applied in changing the delivery of the programme, such as:

- encouraging new ways of thinking, including when addressing barriers to learning and development
- introducing problem-solving forums and action learning as a training option for practitioners
- supporting NQSWs to think in a more critical way
- developing supervision and reflection strategies
- using the power of questions to facilitate learning
- providing new methods for supporting problem-solving
- slowing down thinking and unpick a problem with different approaches to supporting NQSWs' enquiry
- supporting NQSWs to start their own action learning approaches.

The co-ordinator training focuses 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 action learning in developing NQSWs' critical thinking
- how to share knowledge and experience to develop solutions
- the importance of evaluating an established support style
- using action learning approach to explore dilemmas and issues
- gaining new skills to navigate problems
- a new approach for supporting NQSWs to reflect and learn from their experiences of practice

- learning from others and working collaboratively to tackle problems in a different way
- the importance of creating a culture of support and in maintaining this alongside others as well.

In 2023-24 we asked the Centre for Action Learning to work with several child and family organisations in a research project aimed at exploring: ‘...the professional and organisational conditions that impact on the development of the experience of NQSWs and assessors in the core dimensions of support, assessment and outcome of the ASYE programme’.

As far as practicable, the organisations represent the range of different provider settings offering the ASYE programme and also the different geographical areas across the country. The report is now complete and will be shared initially with the Department for Education before being shared with the sector.

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 support provided by self-managed action learning sets in developing their approaches to promoting NQSWs’ critical thinking and reflection.
- Assessors/supervisors are using the techniques and methods they have developed in the action learning sets training to promote collaborative problem-solving strategies in their different settings.

3.8 The annual ASYE survey

This section contains a first look at some of the data from the ASYE annual surveys conducted in January-March 2024. This includes data from the regular annual survey of ASYE leads*, as well as the surveys for ASYE assessors and NQSWs introduced in 2022-23.

(*the term ASYE leads is used in the surveys, elsewhere in this report referred to as ASYE co-ordinators)

Survey methodology

The survey links were emailed to ASYE leads, assessors and NQSWs registered on the ASYE portal on 7 February 2024. Reminder emails were issued on 21 February and 6 March and the surveys were closed on 15 March 2024. The table below shows the number of survey links successfully delivered, the number of responses received and the response rates.

	Survey link successfully delivered to	Responses received ²	Additional responses received ³	Response rate
ASYE leads	242	48	26	31%
ASYE assessors	1159	97	19	10%
NQSWs	2069	286	10	14%

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 are included in the sub-sections below.

Please note: We have yet to apply tests of statistical significance on this data which are required to ensure that observed differences are not caused by random chance. Therefore, when comparing the results across the three versions of the survey, it is important to remember that differences noted are not necessarily significant and should be treated with caution at this stage.

The ASYE leads survey was largely based on questions asked in previous surveys across child and family and adult services, including some newer questions that were added in 2022-23. The survey content was reviewed and pared back as far as possible in order to reduce the burden on respondents⁴.

The ASYE assessors and NQSW surveys were based on the ASYE leads surveys but were considerably shorter⁵.

ASYE leads survey

There are some 'core' questions that we have asked ASYE leads in previous surveys. The first relates to understanding of the assessment arrangements for the ASYE. 96% of ASYE leads said that they understood the arrangements very or fairly well.

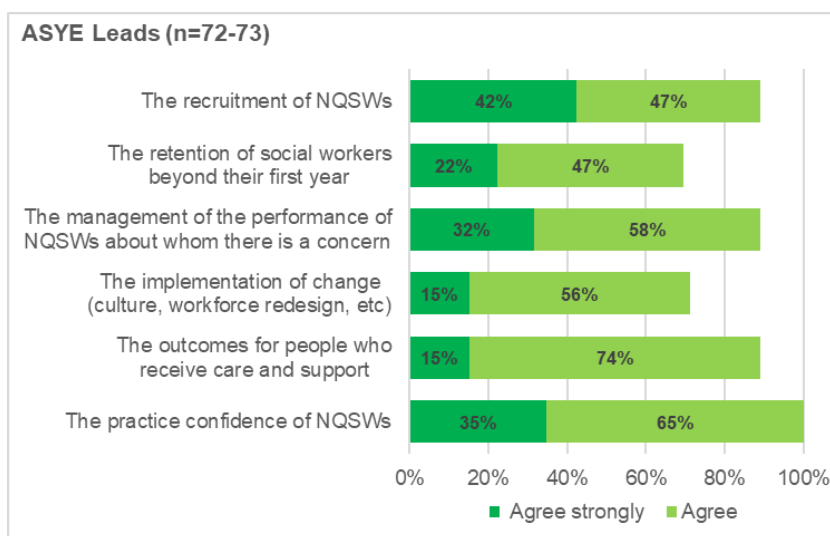
² People working in child and family services only

³ People working across both child and family and adult services

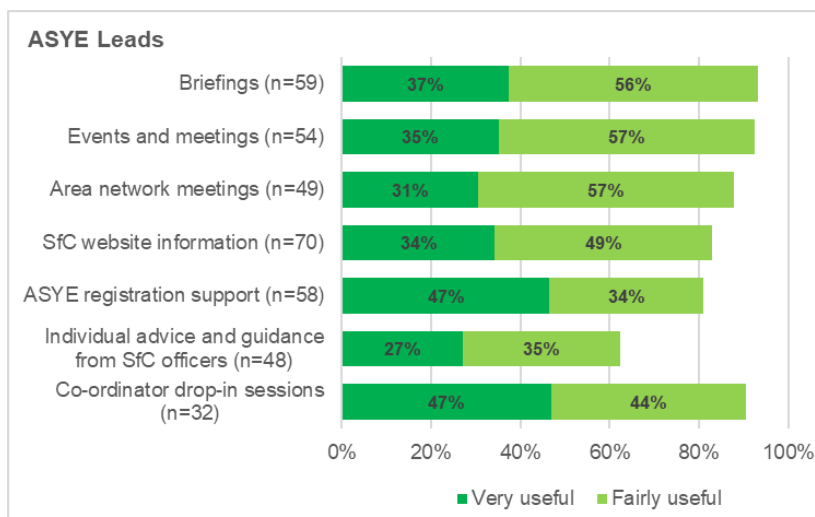
⁴ The estimated completion time was 10-15 minutes

⁵ The estimated completion time for the ASYE assessor and NQSW surveys was <10 minutes

The second relates to the perceived impact of the ASYE. Again, the results are overwhelmingly positive, with 100% of ASYE leads agreeing that the ASYE has had a positive impact on the practice confidence of NQSWs and 89% agreeing that it has a positive impact on outcomes for people who receive care and support, on performance management and on the recruitment of NQSWs. (see chart below).

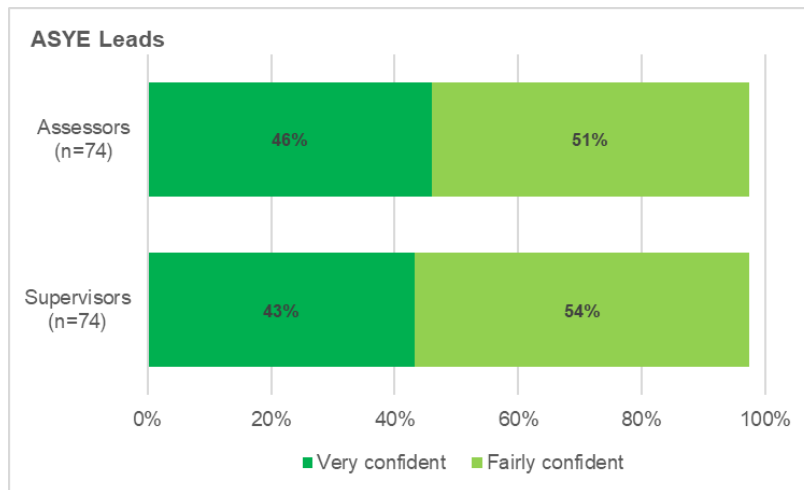


The third relates to the perceived usefulness of various types of support provided by Skills for Care⁶. The average usefulness score across seven types of support analysed was 84% (see chart below). Those who had not accessed the particular type of support have been removed from the analysis.

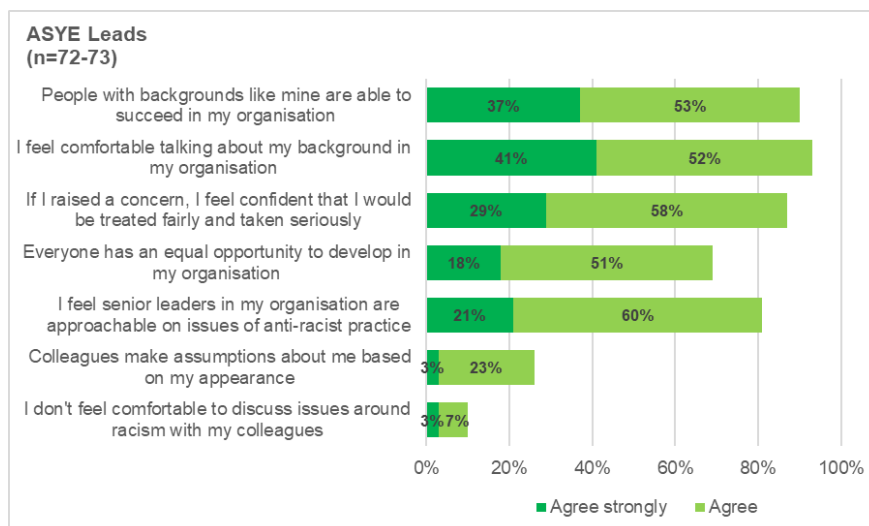


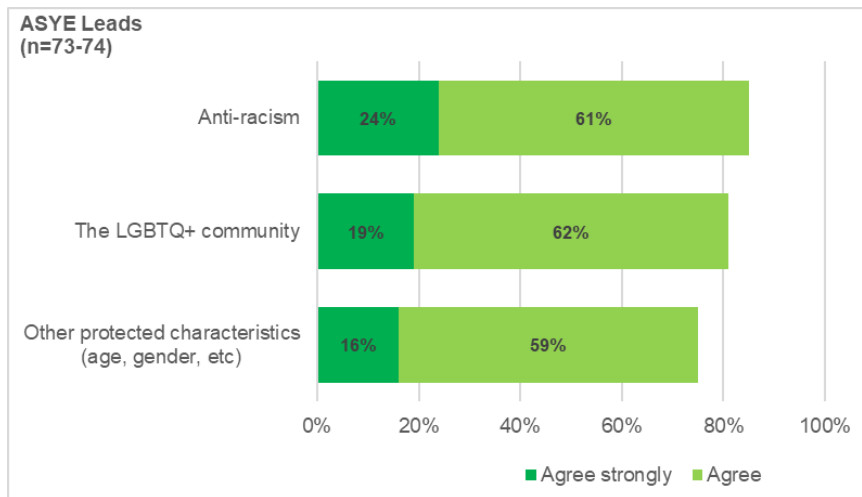
⁶ 2 other types of support were included in the question (QA visits and training for new ASYE co-ordinator) but the responses rates were too low (<30) to be included in the analysis.

In addition, the survey results showed that the majority of ASYE leads were confident in the capability of the ASYE supervisors and assessors within their organisation (see chart below).



The survey also includes a number of questions relating to equality, diversity and inclusion issues. For example, respondents were asked 'Thinking about your own ethnic background, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about equality, diversity and inclusion in your workplace?' and 'My organisation is clear about policy and practice in relation to anti racism, the LGBTQ+ community and other protected characteristics?' (see charts below). Owing to the small sample size we are unable to analyse these questions by the respondent's ethnic background.

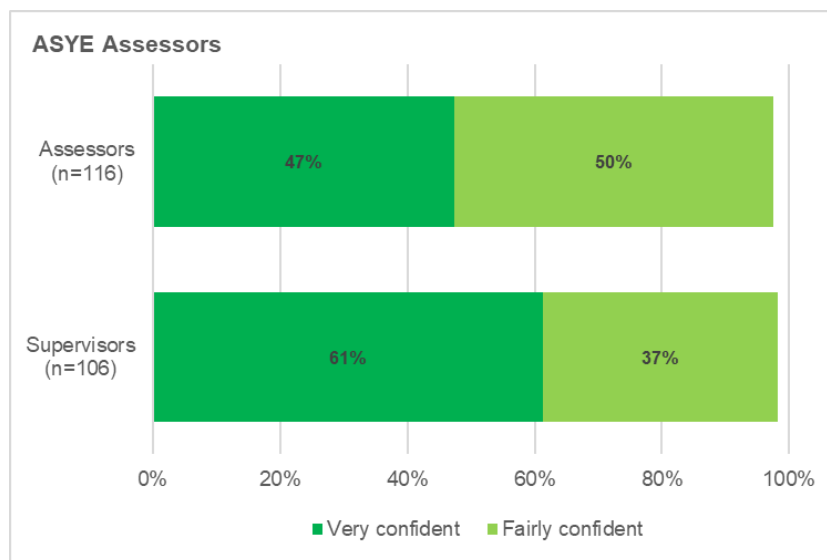




ASYE assessors

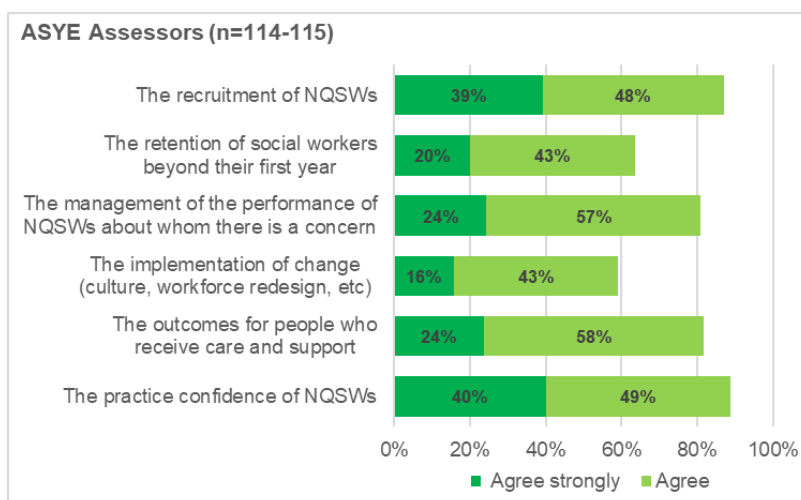
ASYE assessors were also asked about their understanding of the assessment arrangements for the ASYE. 100% said that they understood the arrangements very or fairly well.

In addition, the survey results showed that ASYE assessors were confident in their own capabilities in relation to ASYE supervision and assessment (see chart below). This perception was very similar overall to that of the ASYE leads – most rated themselves as being very or fairly confident.

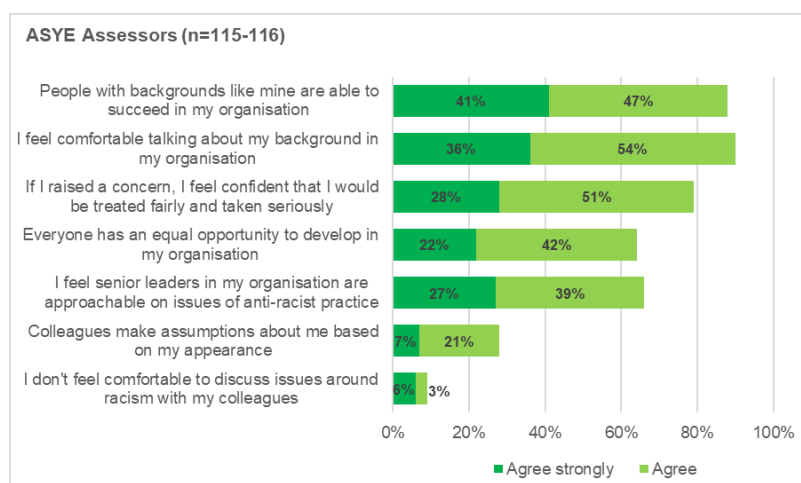


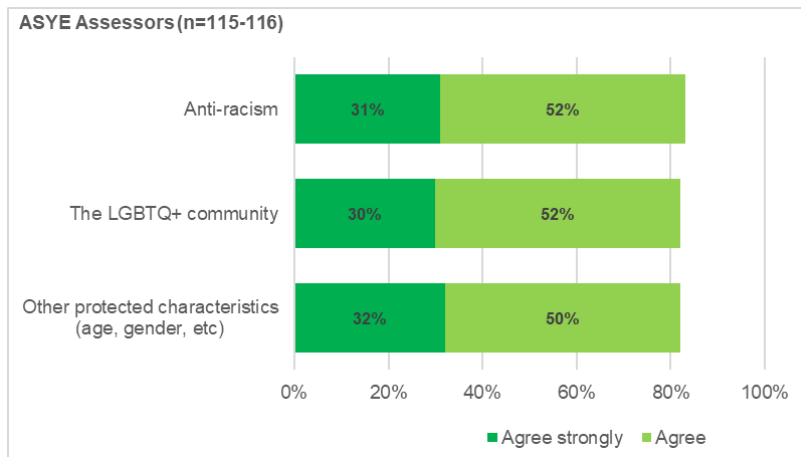
ASYE assessors were also asked their views on the perceived impact of the ASYE. They were slightly less positive than the ASYE leads (see chart below). Further exploration of the data is required to unpick why this might be⁷.

⁷ The differences might not be significant once statistical testing has been applied.



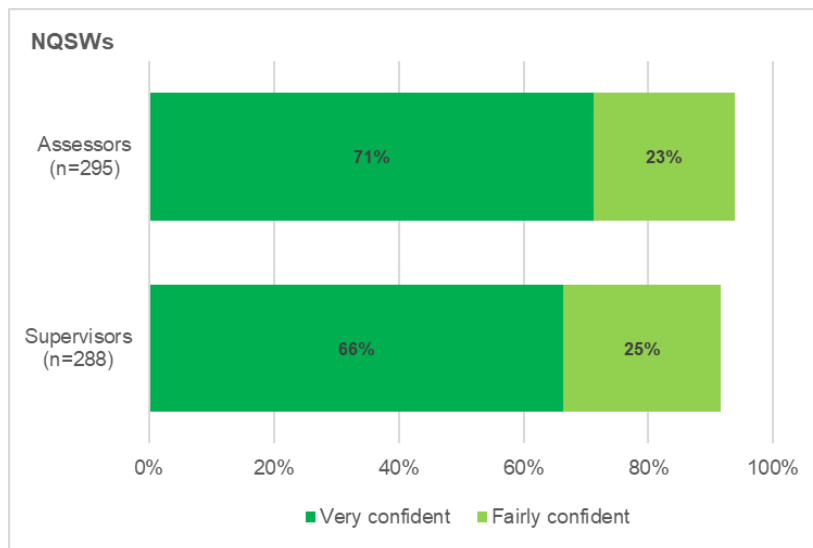
The equality, diversity and inclusion questions were also asked of ASYE assessors (see charts below). In respect of the first question their views broadly reflected those of the ASYE leads, apart from in relation to 'I feel senior leaders in my organisation are approachable on issues of anti-racist practice' (81% of assessors vs 66% of leads) 'Everyone has an equal opportunity to develop in my organisation' (75% of assessors agreed vs 64% of leads), and 'If I raised a concern, I feel confident that I would be treated fairly and taken seriously' (87% of assessors vs 79% of leads). Again, we will be undertaking further exploration of the data to unpick why this might be. In respect of the second question the ASYE leads and ASYE assessors answers very similar, although the assessors were more positive about the 'Other protected characteristics' category.



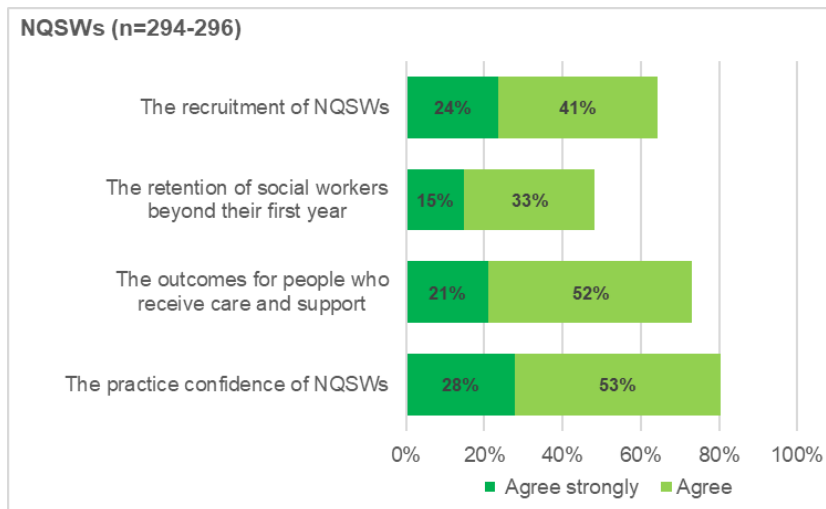


NQSWs

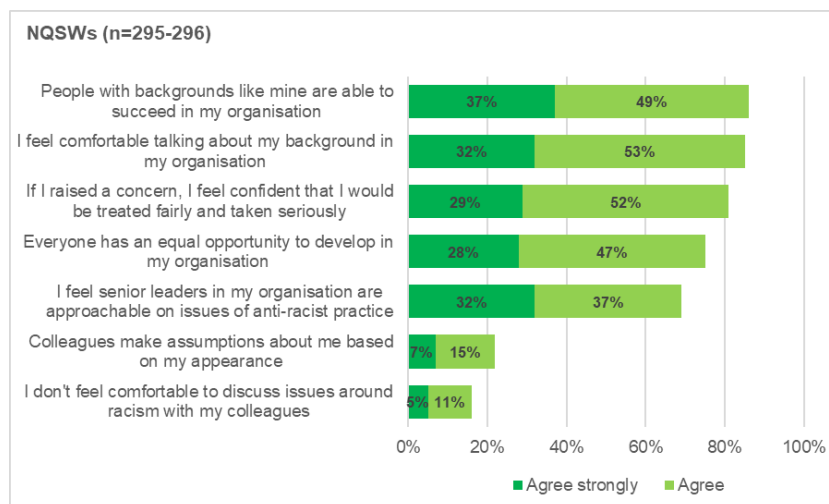
The survey results showed that NQSWs were confident in the capabilities of their ASYE supervisor and assessor (see chart below).

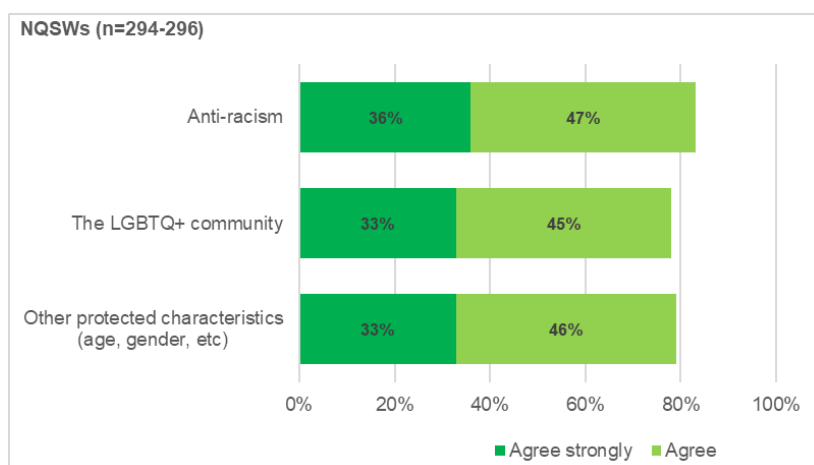


NQSWs were also asked their views on the perceived impact of the ASYE. They were less positive than the ASYE leads and ASYE assessors (see chart below). Further exploration of the data is required to unpick why this might be.



The equality, diversity and inclusion questions were also asked of NQSWs (see charts below). Their views in relation to the first question appear to be more closely aligned with the ASYE assessors than the ASYE leads, but this requires further, more detailed analysis to unpick why this might be. In respect of the second question, the views of all three groups are more closely aligned.





Key messages

- ASYE leads responding to the survey agree unanimously that the ASYE has had a positive impact on the practice confidence of NQSWs.
- The survey results showed that ASYE assessors were confident in their own capabilities in relation to ASYE supervision and assessment.

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, debate and feedback through forums and drop-in sessions, action learning and national events.

As has been reflected in other parts of this report, employers remain strongly committed to providing a programme which supports and develops the newly qualified social workers joining their organisations. The ASYE continues to be a feature of a broader set of strategic activities designed to enhance the recruitment and retention of social workers. From our ASYE related discussions it is clear that recruitment and retention challenge remain despite the small improvements in some of the national workforce numbers reported recently. Indicative of this is that numbers of NQSWs continue to rise across the profession as a whole, with registrations for ASYE funding in child and family services exceeding 3,000 this year.

In this context we continue to hear of inconsistencies in the experience of NQSWs as they join the workforce and undertake their ASYE programme. There is a built in tension to the ASYE programme between the nationally agreed framework and standards, and the delivery of employer led programmes which will inevitably differ from one organisation to the next. However, NQSWs continue to be impacted not only in comparison to what another employer might offer that is different to their own,

but also by differences of application and interpretation within organisations. For example, an NQSW needing access to work equipment appears just as likely to have a totally different experience of the length of time taken to assess and provide for their situation within an organisation and not just be comparing with another organisation where they knew someone had been helped quickly. It is also the case that despite the commitment to anti-racist practice that we continue to hear of continued instances of micro-aggressions as well as where racial and ethnic identity is positively promoted and celebrated.

4.1 Equity in the ASYE

Equity, equality, diversity and inclusion (EEDI) have always been a central focus of our discussions with ASYE co-ordinators, assessors and NQSWs. It is apparent that EEDI is at the forefront of the minds of many organisations and is being strongly promoted and monitored by employers.

More NQSWs than ever are disclosing additional support needs to their employers whilst on the ASYE. In many cases employers are responding appropriately through the policies and procedures within their organisation, and we are aware of cases where there are not structures in place, where they are working with NQSWs to develop a support plan which meets the NQSWs individual needs.

However, it is clear that there is still work to be done to improve this area. Whilst our observations are based on the ASYE, we do not believe this is just about the ASYE programmes, but it is clearly related to the approach taken within each individual organisation with many employers acknowledging what they still need to do. Not all NQSWs feel as though they are having an equitable experience or feel comfortable enough to disclose additional needs to their employer for fear of jeopardising their employment opportunities or their ASYE.

We encourage employers to put in place an EEDI framework within their ASYE that makes it clear from the outset what support is available to NQSWs and what the process is for gaining support. Employers should work with NQSWs to co-produce this framework and place the voice of the NQSW at the centre. The options available for what can be included in an EDI framework are limitless and therefore can be tailored to the individual's support needs, but we recommend that needs based on cultural and racial and/or ethnic identity should always be included. The February/March ASYE events focussed on developing and implementing EEDI frameworks and provided an opportunity for the ASYE community to learn together and share ideas.

4.2 Workload

Workload remains a constant theme in both discussions with NQSWs and assessors and is another area where NQSWs are not receiving an equitable experience.

Workload relief is very individual and impacted by the NQSW themselves as well as managers. Often, NQSWs feel a loyalty to their team and are willing to take on a higher caseload, even where there are good organisational policies in place to help manage workload allocation in line with ASYE criteria. Inevitably there remain issues with referral rates into social work teams being higher than ever and recruitment and retention continue to be key issues across the sector. However, the strain of taking on additional and more complex cases before they are ready does not support NQSWs to develop deeper learning that will support them within their career and can lead to early burnout. It is therefore crucial that senior managers are aware of this issue and are proactively instrumental in protecting development time for NQSWs and ensuring caseloads are at the appropriate level.

4.3 Wellbeing

4.3.1 Wellbeing conversations linked to individual NQSW needs and equity of experience have been dominated by issues of neurodivergence. Employers continue to report significant levels of self-disclosure and requests for access to work assessments in this area, and there are examples of good practice in supporting the employment of staff who are neurodivergent. However, it would appear that neurodivergent NQSWs are still reluctant to be open in the early stages of employment. This is understandable and poses challenges for employers and their ASYE programmes, even where they have excellent support structures in place

4.3.2 More broadly, and looking at the range of individual needs that might require an access to work assessment, NQSWs continue to report a variety of experiences where some receive timely and helpful responses but others are waiting for excessive periods of time to get the equipment or other support needed. This potentially could affect outcomes for those affected, if disadvantaged by not having the equipment needed to support the work they need to undertake.

4.4 Supervisory support

Another area where NQSWs consistently report they experience different levels of support is a marked difference in the direct support received from a manager, supervisor or assessor. Notwithstanding the variety of models employers put in place to provide supervision and assessment, NQSWs themselves can have really great personal and supervisory support or have been subject to having several supervisors/managers/assessors during the course of their first year.

This is clearly a result of the pressures on organisations to recruit and retain staff, and many of our quality assurance meetings highlight that there have been restructures, and the need for interim managers alongside the more usual levels of turnover and sickness that can also impact on this area.

While the majority of organisations take the matter of support and supervision seriously, the impact of individual and organisational change is still a challenge within ASYE programmes.

Key messages

- It is apparent that EEDI is at the forefront of the minds of many organisations and is being strongly promoted and monitored by employers.
- Employers should work jointly with NQSWs as equals to produce this framework and place the voice of the NQSW at the centre.
- NQSWs feel a loyalty to their team and are willing to take on a higher caseload, despite the general ASYE framework providing for protected development time and a reduction in workload.
- Employers continue to report significant levels of self-disclosure and requests for access to work assessments in this area, and there are examples of good practice in supporting the employment of staff who are neurodivergent.
- The majority of organisations take the matter of support and supervision seriously. However the impact of individual and organisational change is still a challenge within ASYE programmes.

Section 5. Appendices

Appendix 1

Following discussions about terminology, and in particular the GEMS acronym, participants were asked the following questions and their responses are as below:

Questions and response to GEMS poll, March 24:

1: As an NQSW have you been supported by your ASYE programme to attend the annual four GEMS sessions?

Responses: 85% were supported to attend and 15% answered no.

2. How many of the four sessions have you been able to attend? Please indicate the number.

Responses: 60% had been able to attend one session. 20% had attended two sessions. 12% had attended three and 8% had attended all sessions.

Note: it is worth noting that the NQSW community is a constantly changing one, as the programmes last for only 12 months. Attendance is therefore subject to them

having been informed of the GEMS sessions but also by other work pressures being balanced alongside availability to attend. One NQSW commented in the feedback:

“GEMS has been great. I only got to attend two sessions as the information about it was passed on very late. I am having massive problems on the ASYE programme, and attending GEMS has helped me feel like I am not alone. Great group.”

“ Today’s session was good; however this session was the only one I knew about which is sad since it is the last one.”

“This is my first session, so I’m gutted it’s the last one. I wasn’t aware of them and would be very happy for them to continue. Thank you for today, it’s been very insightful and supportive.”

3. How helpful has it been to get the opportunity to speak with Black, Asian and other ethnically minoritised NQSWs nationally, with 5 being most helpful.

Responses: There was 100% response to this question. 54% rated it as a 5. 32% at 4; 8% at 3, 3% at 2 and 3% scored this as 1.

4. Would you value the opportunity to continue attending GEMS?

Responses: 75% rated it a 5. 11% rated it a 4 and 12% rated it a 3. Only 2% (1 out of 65, answered this as a 1 and there was 0% response re a 2 rating.

5. GEMS is an acronym for Group for Ethnic Minority social work NQSWs, are you happy that this name is still fit for purpose? 94% answered yes and 6% answered no.

Appendix 2

A list of organisations involved in quality assurance review meetings 2023-24 (child and family services only):

- Brighton and Hove City Council
- Somerset County Council
- Staffordshire County Council
- Surrey County Council
- LB of Waltham Forest
- LB of Barking and Dagenham
- Gateshead Council
- SWAP Foster Care
- Brighter Futures for Children
- Medway Council
- Knowsley Council
- Warwickshire County Council
- Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
- Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea

- Bracknell Forest Council
- Westminster CC
- Five Rivers Child Care Services Ltd
- Shropshire Council
- Kirklees Council
- Integrated Fostering Service Ltd
- Olive Branch Fostering
- Darlington Borough Council
- Nottingham City Council
- Cafcass
- Hull Churches Housing Association Ltd
- HALTON Borough Council
- South Tyneside Council
- Luton Borough Council
- East Sussex County Council
- Trafford Council (carried over from 2023)
- Derbyshire (C&F)
- Thurrock Council
- Tees Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust