

**Before starting please consider how this example impacts upon NQSWs, assessors or ASYE programmes.**

**Title of your good practice/case study (one short line what it is about)**

Key components of Surrey Children's Academy ASYE programme

**More detail of your good practice/case study**

**If your good practice is about a person/people please share more about them and what they've done.**

**If your practice is about an activity(s) or process please tell us more about this activity(s)/ process and what it involved.**

**What difficulties (if any) did you overcome and how did you do this?**

Located in the southeast of England, we are a large local authority with a mix of urban and rural areas and a population of over 1.2 million residents. According to the ONS 2021, Surrey residents identified their ethnicity as Black 1.7%, Multiple Ethnicity 3.4%, Asian 7.7%, White Other 8.9% and White British 76.6% - our children's workforce differs to our resident population, with increased numbers of staff from global majority backgrounds. Our Children's Services employs over 500 social workers, of which NQSW are a key part of our staffing strategy, with an annual target of up to 45 places on the ASYE programme. Surrey Children's Academy seeks to recruit, develop and retain a high-quality workforce and overseeing the ASYE programme is a core function of our work. Key components of our approach are as follows:

#### Assessment and support

Arrangements for the assessment of NQSWs sit outside of the operational teams, with ASYE assessors employed as advanced social workers located within the central Children's Academy. In practice this means the NQSW has an increased support network and means busy team managers can focus their work overseeing NQSWs and their children, young people and families, without the administration of the ASYE portfolio.

Having this offsite model also increases our capacity for the number of NQSWs we can recruit and support. With assessors employed on permanent contracts within the Children's Academy, overseen by a team manager (the ASYE co-ordinator), this means greater consistency of assessment, reports, and support plans and the ASYE offer is tied into learning and development for the directorate. We note there are positive outcomes of workforce recruitment and retention. Recent figures (as of Jan 2026) show that over 80% of those who passed ASYE since 2023 remain working in our teams.

Clear understanding of roles and strong communication are essential for effective working in this model. We offer a manager's briefing led by the ASYE co-ordinator prior to the programme starting, and assessors make use of the support and assessment agreement meeting once ASYE has begun. We also provide a guidance document NQSW Support Offer which sets out roles and responsibilities,

allocation guidance and the different elements of the ASYE programme. NQSWs have secure access to their SharePoint hub, which includes the ASYE handbook and work folders where they can and collaboratively develop their portfolio with their assessor and team manager.

Previous guidance defined workload as a percentage of the team average, however this created inequity for NQSWs placed in different teams across the county, as highlighted in the 2022/23 end of programme evaluations. To address this, the guidance was reviewed by senior management, and a numbers-based cap was introduced for 2023/24 to ensure equity across the county and to protect learning and development time. For each review stage of the ASYE, the guidance outlines capped numbers and recommended complexity levels, with NQSWs working up to 90% of identified workload by end of ASYE. It also sets out the process for referring for additional support from the best practice leads in the audit and practice standards team, who can offer 1:1 support on a new piece of work. The wider CFLL coaching and mentoring offer is also available to NQSWs.

### Induction

Running twice a year, new cohorts begin on fixed dates in Spring and Autumn. The two-week Children's Academy Induction marks the start of NQSW's ASYE programme. In 2025 our local authority introduced a new approach to corporate induction, and the academy has worked with central departments to provide consistent messaging to new staff, working together as 'one council'. The ASYE co-ordinator and assessor team design and deliver content together with a variety of subject matter experts. Content ranges from portfolio and ASYE understanding, wellbeing and EDI, children and young people's voices through to practice standards, practice models and developing NQSW's understanding of their social work identify and role.

Induction in 2024/25 expanded further by the Children's Academy pre-booking specific trainings, to ensure these are prioritised in the early stages of the NQSW's employment. This supports foundational knowledge when starting work and alignment with our practice models. Induction also includes time spent in operational teams, following feedback from previous cohorts that this reduced their anxiety about joining their teams later. Feedback also tells us that NQSWs value having peers who are further ahead in their ASYE or second year post qualifying, involved in their induction. We arrange for these colleagues to share experiences, peer advice and learning, which NQSWs find especially helpful.

### Learning event cycle

NQSWs receive two days per month protected development time, one for portfolio work, and one to attend large group learning. This programme is delivered by the academy assessor team over the course of 12 events, each linked to a KSS theme and including evaluation. Recognising the importance of refreshing content, since 2024 the assessor team have been meeting monthly to review feedback and update content where applicable, thus demonstrating continual improvement.

Examples of learning events include:

- KSS1 - co-delivered with previous NQSWs sharing good examples and direct work tools.
- KSS 2 - invites guest speakers from different services and those with lived experience to explore working with different people in a child's life.
- KSS3 – half day extending knowledge of child development in the morning, with group reflective supervision in the afternoon.

A new addition for 2025 is a bespoke court skills training, to ensure the cohort are prepared for the increased responsibilities in following year.

The final event in the learning event cycle is the end of year evaluation, which is led by the ASYE co-ordinator and feedback invited on the ASYE overall, the programme design, the organisation and 360 feedback on assessor's practice (which then contributes to their own performance conversations). The ASYE co-ordinator oversight helps draw themes for the continuous action plan for improvement and development of cycle for the subsequent cohort, plus messages to leadership and organisation. The evaluation session is also opportunity to give clear messages on next opportunities for the NQSWs – their celebration event and Post Qualifying Year 2 (PQ2).

#### Celebration event

Held annually, in November for all that year's finishers (Spring and Autumn cohorts), this event is arranged by the Children's Academy and invites to NQSWs and their team managers to celebrate their achievements. Guest speakers are former ASYE graduates and our Executive Director of Children, Families and Lifelong Learning. The event is well supported by the leadership team who present certificates, a small gift of thanks and make themselves available for a Q&A session. The event includes direct quotes from internal moderation processes that recognise the good practice of each NQSW.

#### Post Qualifying Year 2

In the year following ASYE we provide a further programme of support, learning and development. This was first piloted as a 'Consolidation Year' in 2022/23, internal evaluation in 2023 and 2024 helped shape our PQ2, which has been endorsed by senior leaders. PQ2 aims to support the retention and development of early career social workers consistently and equitably through a programme of activities, academy support and protected time.

Evaluations from previous ASYE cohorts recognised that the transition after ASYE can feel daunting, particularly as work becomes greater in volume and complexity. Therefore, a core element to PQ2 is its focus on wellbeing, peer support and learning to enable best practice. We believe our PQ2 offer provides strong foundations for future changes to the ASYE programme as indicated by DfE.

In 2025 we joined our local Teaching Partnership as primary partners. This strengthened relationship has provided further training resources for our PQ2 cohort on a variety of topics including stress and resilience, time/workload management, culture and identity and trauma-informed practice.

**What has been the positive impact of this for the ASYE programme, NQSWs, assessors, wider workforce, your organisation, or people who draw on care and support?**

Data drawn from evaluations in 2025/26 shows:

Previous NQSW feedback

- Many NQSWs experienced supportive managers, teams and peers. ASYE Assessors were consistently described as supportive, approachable and helpful. Group spaces helped build connection.
- Protected workloads and protected development days were major positives, reducing anxiety and supporting growth.
- The two-week induction was highly valued and helped build early confidence and relationships. Training was generally seen as relevant with clear portfolio guidance. Opportunities such as group supervision and reflective learning days strengthened critical thinking.

Senior management feedback

- The off-site ASYE assessor model provides NQSWs with stronger support and more consistent assessment.
- the assessor team's position in the academy strengthens learning and development links and improves NQSW practice quality. Communication from the ASYE Team supports team managers to understand their roles in supporting NQSWs.
- Overall, the ASYE induction is responsive to organisational and NQSW needs, with acknowledgement of areas to develop.
- The ASYE celebration event can support connections across the service and help build a positive learning culture.

Team manager feedback

- The off-site model where ASYE assessors manage NQSW portfolios increases the support network outside the team manager.
- The ASYE programme gives NQSWs structured time and space to consolidate learning. This can have a positive impact on families.

Current NQSWs, social workers in their PQ2 year and ASYE assessor's feedback

- The induction builds early confidence, provides a strong foundation for practice and creates a support network with other NQSWs.
- Learning events are welcomed as protected development time.
- The celebration event provides a good opportunity to ask questions to senior leaders in the organisation.
- Social workers agree that the PQ2 programme has positive impact.
- Social workers say the programmes positively impact children, young people, and families by providing a breadth of training, reflective space, and

peer support which builds confidence and skills, and a gradual increase in workload helps workers give their best to families.

**Supporting quote(s) (Please add quotes from members of your team/people who you support about this person/activity/process)**

**NQSWs and PQ2 commented on:**

- “being paired up with practitioners where they shared their experiences and helped us with families/children we are stuck with I found this really useful”
- “the (learning event) session was incredibly amazing both assessors were exceptional”.
- “learning events are well thought through and cover a range of different areas of practice. The Assessors always want feedback ... and are very receptive to this... the content of the induction was very well thought through, and helpful in preparing NQSWs for practice. I also think the protected workload is implemented well”
- “I find it helpful, I use the time slow down and reflect on my practice, with my colleagues from different teams. It protects my training and development. I enjoy sharing experiences and practice with other peers and we learn from one another.”

**Assessors:**

- “Linking the learning events back to specific KSS helps the NQSW understand what they are being assessed against within the ASYE year. It also provides peer support to aid development and provide safe challenge to practice. Group and individual activities within learning events helps consolidate learning and provides practical knowledge for the roles within their teams.”

**Team managers:**

- “One of the biggest strengths is the way it gives newly qualified social workers structured time and space to consolidate their learning. That protected workload, alongside regular reflective supervision, means ASYE practitioners can slow down enough to develop confidence, curiosity and good social work habits from the outset. When workers have room to think and reflect, the quality of their direct work improves - children feel heard, families feel respected, and decisions are more proportionate and considered.”

**Senior managers:**

- “Surrey Academy offers a superb support programme. The benefits are palpable. They go above and beyond and are completely committed to and invested in NQSWs.
- “Recruitment and retention of social workers in Surrey Children's Services has improved significantly over the last few years - permanent SW numbers have increased from 59% in December 2024 to 78% in December 2025, and turnover has reduced from 30% in July 2022 to 6.9% in December 2025. There is no doubt that the support provided to NQSWs and the

additional support to those in their Post-Qualifying Year 2 has contributed to this.”

**Organisation name**

Surrey County Council – Children's Academy

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New and Developing Social Worker's Team Manager – ASYE Co-ordinator

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