

The assessors and supervisors toolkit



The professional supervisory relationship

Main themes

All supervisory relationships aim to create a productive environment that facilitates learning and self disclosure. Your relationship with your NQSW is no different, and the skills you bring to this will be based on your experiences of supervision elsewhere – either as supervisor or supervisee.

As a supervisor or assessor, you'll have a key role in providing critically reflective supervision to all the staff you supervise, and you may already feel confident in this area. But it's important to be aware of the contribution reflective supervision should make to the holistic assessment decision about your NQSW.

There are four levels of reflection that can occur in supervision:

Technical or surface reflection, where the purpose is compliance and/or comparison of performance with standards, policies or procedures e.g. a supervisor checks a worker has completed an assessment task within required timescales.

Practical reflection, where experience is described and used as a source of evaluation and insight, predominately to solve problems e.g. the supervisor helps a worker to think about how to construct a report, but does not address any anxieties they may have about writing it.

Process reflection, where the supervisor begins to increase the worker's awareness of how the worker's thoughts and feelings can have an impact on their judgements and decisions e.g. the supervisor notes that the worker has described a service user negatively in a report, and probes further into what might lie behind this.

Critical reflection, where the supervisor takes the scrutiny of the worker's knowledge and practice one step further, challenging them to think more deeply about the experiences of the service user (drawing where possible on their feedback), the validity of the knowledge and theories they have used and the power dynamics of the relationship e.g. the supervisor helps the worker explore the model of disability and assumptions that underpin the assessment in their report.

While your NQSW may need to experience all these levels of reflection as they learn to manage work that is increasingly complex and demanding, you'll need to take responsibility for ensuring critically reflective supervision is an integral part of all your sessions. You should see the evidence of this in your NQSW's **critical reflection**.

Social Work England's standards recognise the important role that [supervision](#) has in professional development.



SCIE's guide on effective supervision involved a variety of settings and outlined a supervision cycle, based on the learning cycle. It encourages the supervisee to reflect by moving through several stages:

- experience and description of what happened
- reflection on feelings and responses to what happened
- analysis of meaning and context
- action planning as a result of the reflection and analysis

Each stage requires a different approach from you as the supervisor or assessor. You may need to be challenging and persistent in the questions you ask to ensure the process does not get stuck at the early stages. You may also need to bring in feedback from service users and carers to provide different perspectives that your NQSW might experience as difficult or uncomfortable, or information gained from direct observations undertaken by yourself or other professionals.

Reflective supervision is central to your holistic assessment decision, in two important ways:

- Critical reflection is ultimately about learning and gaining fresh insights, through making connections between facts, feelings, assumptions, norms, values and perceptions. In terms of the holistic assessment decision, it's a means of demonstrating **progression**.
- Critical reflection involves being open to a range of information sources to shape professional opinion, including seeking and reflecting on feedback from service users and carers to develop practice. In terms of the holistic assessment decision, it's a means of demonstrating **meaningful engagement of the NQSW with feedback**.

Good supervisory relationships are open, and based on trust and honesty. However, there are many potential blocks and tensions that can affect the formation of this open relationship. The supervisor and supervisee have to manage their dialogue across a range of differences which, if they are not fully acknowledged, can lead to miscommunication and mistrust.

These differences can lie in power, culture/race and/or approaches to learning and practice. As the supervisor or assessor of a NQSW, there's an inherent power differential built into your relationship, as you're responsible for making a holistic assessment decision that will affect your NQSW's professional future. The implications of this have to be managed alongside the possibility that you and your NQSW are also working with different cultural lenses, or learning styles or underpinning values or priorities for practice.

The way you and your NQSW engage with each other at the start of your relationship is a critical way of laying down the foundations for the quality of the supervisory experience that follows. You should each have a clear understanding of the potential challenges and risks that need to be addressed, to ensure your relationship remains constructive and achieves the outcomes intended for it. This is why the creation of your learning agreement with each other is so important.



As part of developing your learning agreement with each other, it can be helpful to explore areas such as:

- Previous training, placement and supervisory experiences and their effects on the way each perceives and approaches supervision.
- What the NQSW would find helpful from the supervisor in the light of their previous experiences of supervision and the expectations of the ASYE programme. What does the NQSW need the supervisor to recognise in terms of their background, needs, abilities, culture.
- Expectations around the handling of authority and conflict within supervision.
- How the NQSW learns best and the degree to which this matches the way the supervisor or assessor prefers to learn.
- The beliefs each bring about the nature, purpose and rationale of the work.
- The approach of each to service user and carer involvement and the use of authority in practice.

These elements should be integrated into a discussion about the rights and responsibilities of each regarding the ASYE and agency accountability for the NQSW's practice. The outcome of these discussions are recorded in the **record of support and progressive assessment (RSPA)**, including your individual learning agreement.

The RSPA can be found on [our website](#).

Whilst producing a formal written record is important, a learning agreement is also necessary, because it is arrived at through negotiation and addresses issues that are unique to the NQSW and supervisor/assessor involved. Laying good foundations to the supervisory relationship will provide a strong framework for reflective supervision to take place.

Further information

It's important for you to develop the confidence and authority to engage in a constructive supervisory relationship with your NQSW that will also provide you with evidence for your holistic assessment decision. You may have substantial previous experience of supervision and assessment (as a line manager or practice educator) that will assist you greatly in this role. But you could also be a newly appointed supervisor or assessor, possibly recruited specifically for your local ASYE scheme.

Your principal social worker will have responsibility for developing your organisation's capacity to support ASYE. They'll be able to tell you about local training resources.

Having identified your gaps and areas for further development, the resources on supervision skills identified in this section will help you focus on any specific development areas you have identified.

Self audit checklist

- Is a learning agreement provided by your organisation or ASYE scheme? Does it enable you to lead a discussion with your NQSW that will give a good foundation to your relationship?
- Have you reflected on your own experiences of reflective supervision and what you will bring to your supervisory relationship with your NQSW in terms of expectations, learning preferences, and attitudes to power, culture and disability?
- How can you ensure your NQSW's workload is kept to the agreed level?
- Do you have any learning needs linked to establishing a supervisory relationship, providing reflective supervision and progressive assessment? How will you address these?