

Transition from student to NQSW



COVID-19 presented challenges to newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) graduating in 2020 and those who graduated after. Whilst some of these challenges meant that NQSWs did not have the placement experience they were anticipating, they may have gained alternative learning experiences that supported their development as professional social workers. The ongoing shift in working practices since 2020 continues to shape the experiences of newly qualifying students today.

From work with the sector, the following principles were developed to support NQSWs before they begin work as social workers, at the start of their ASYE year, and during the year too. These principles apply equally now as they did when first developed.

Preparation for the ASYE year



Consider employing NQSWs in unregulated roles between completion of their degree and registration with Social Work England. This enables workers to continue to develop the knowledge and skills they would have on placement and avoid a gap in practice, it also supports the development of professional confidence.



Employing NQSWs in cohorts can help to provide them with peer support. A cohort approach offers mutual support for NQSWs allowing them to gel as a group and continue to provide support to each other outside of formal sessions.



Self-assessment and/or the final placement report should be used to identify any gaps in knowledge and experience. Open and honest discussions are essential, and it should be reinforced with NQSWs that having 'gaps' will not be perceived negatively, but as areas for development.



The Critical Reflection Log and Record of Progressive Assessment should already provide the framework to identify gaps on Skills and Knowledge if used effectively.



Consider the strengths that NQSWs will have gained from virtual working alongside any gaps created by less face to face interactions than normal.



NQSWs working from home can become more confident and autonomous more quickly than previously when they were office based, and could be less reliant upon others to assist with decision making.



Shadowing opportunities need to be more 'planned' as they are less likely to occur organically. This needs to be built into the learning and development opportunities planned for the NQSW.



Consider providing support to assessors to ensure they understand how their role in ASYE during COVID-19 may be different and how they can best support the NQSW through supervision, direct observations and working in different ways.



Assessors should be supported to use different cues in observations, for example, focussing on active listening skills and empathy in the voice to supplement the loss of non-verbal signals.



Online support workshops can be offered to increase the ability of assessors to develop reflective supervision skills.



Proactive support can be offered to the NQSW to compensate for the loss of the informal office environment.

Commencement of ASYE



Detailed preparation should be undertaken prior to the NQSW commencing employment; ensuring IT is available from day one, pre-planned and structured induction including virtual 'meet and greet' with key people.



Identify a buddy for each NQSW to act as a support/mentor. Buddy systems allow NQSWs to gain informal support from team colleagues and allow them to ask for support and advice from someone other than their manager and/or assessor.



Induction can be made real by filming key staff to explain their role to students and NQSWs.



Assess the needs of each NQSW and consider if time in the office would support the NQSW's wellbeing and professional development.



Develop and deliver wellbeing sessions for NQSWs which include self-care and resilience.

During ASYE



Provide increased frequency of supervision with managers, assessors and peer supervision.



Ensure a greater focus on wellbeing including regular 'wellbeing calls', non-work related 'drop in' virtual meetings and WhatsApp groups.



Plan learning and assessment outside of the office environment. This involves greater creativity and planning between the NQSW and the assessor to create opportunities, e.g. virtual shadowing.



Consider the use of 'virtual drop in' where NQSWs can attend on an ad hoc basis. This is an informal event where they can support each other and aims to reduce their isolation, rather than necessarily being work related.



NQSWs, along with others in their team, are likely to need additional training, for example how to conduct an assessment/work with individuals and families virtually.



Continuing support beyond ASYE avoids NQSWs experiencing a 'cliff edge of support'. This can include enhanced support including additional supervision and Action Learning.



Consider using the 9 month review to check on progress of NQSW and to ensure support is in place if required and learning opportunities are available.

