

NQSW Supported Year employers' commitment to NQSWs

Employers have a critical role in the successful implementation and delivery of the newly qualified social worker (NQSW) Supported Year in Scotland.

A committed employer will provide the following for NQSWs.

<u>Code of practice for employers</u>	A commitment to the Code of Practice for Social Services Employers.
<u>Induction</u>	A comprehensive induction tailored to individual needs, organisational expectations and standards of practice.
<u>Professional supervision</u>	Regular supervision by a qualified and suitably senior registered social worker, min. once every 4 weeks
<u>Professional development</u>	Structured professional development discussions, individual development planning, feedback and reviews at fixed points during the year.
<u>Continuous learning opportunities</u>	Support to access a wide range of formal, informal and naturally occurring workplace learning opportunities to support professional development against the NQSW Standards.
<u>Protected caseload</u>	A protected caseload which takes account of NQSW's developing experience, confidence and competence in managing complexity
<u>Protected learning time</u>	Time in the working week to allow NQSWs to fully engage in their identified learning needs as part of the NQSW Supported Year.
<u>Peer support and mentoring</u>	Arrangements in place for formal peer support for an NQSW and encourage a culture of wider informal peer and colleague support. Access to any formal mentoring schemes in existence within the organisation.
<u>Equality, diversity and inclusion</u>	Demonstrate a commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion and recognise the barriers NQSWs face in seeking support or accessing support.

Employers' commitment to NQSWs - definition of the core elements of support in NQSW

Induction

Induction activities will provide the NQSW with an understanding of the expectations of their employer, familiarity with policy and procedure, requirements, legislation and recording systems. It will also include familiarity with the immediate contexts of professional practice; people who use services, communities, wider inter-professional services, and multi-agency partnerships.

In addition, induction will be sufficiently flexible to encompass a more generic understanding of the role and contribution of social workers to the wellbeing and protection of adults and children from harm regardless of their role or setting. The induction may be provided through a formal induction programme and/or arrangements determined by the individual setting.

Professional supervision

Regular professional supervision is an essential component of accountable social work practice and in line with the SSSC (Scottish Social Services Council) Codes of Practice. When carried out effectively it will support safe professional practice. It involves reflective dialogue and exploration clearly linked to practice and outcomes for people using services, closely associated with reflexivity, learning and resilience.

Supervision will take place in line with an effective organisational supervision policy and professional governance context. It will support NQSWs to meet the Standards and evidence their adherence to the SSSC Codes of Practice. During the NQSW Supported Year, arrangements will be made for professional supervision to be provided by a qualified social worker with supervisory responsibilities as part of their role. This is likely to be their line manager, however in some settings alternative arrangements should be made in line with effective professional governance.

Formal professional supervision will be provided no less than four-weekly, and in initial stages of the NQSW Supported Year this may be more frequent. Regular support such as guidance and case discussion would be expected to take place in-between any formal supervision meetings.

Supervision will be structured to focus on:

- NQSW wellbeing
- Professional development and learning
- Reflective and reflexive case discussion
- Systemic and management issues

Professional development

The NQSW Supported Year will focus on the professional development of the NQSW from qualifying education to competent and confident social worker.

The approach requires a structure that specifically focuses on development at fixed points over the course of the NQSW supported year. Formal development discussions, reviews and individual development planning will happen within the first four weeks of commencing the NQSW supported year and at the mid and end of NQSW supported year.¹

The NQSW and supervisor will have protected time to identify and regularly review development needs, to plan CPL (continuous professional learning) opportunities and consider evidence of consolidation and advancement against the Standards. The allocation of protected time (see protected time section) will be sufficient to meet the needs of the NQSW, and to ensure that supervisors are afforded the time required to carry out the role.

The Individual Development Plan will be used to record the identified development needs and progress in line with the Standards. Professional dialogue about NQSW development and progress will be an integral part of the ongoing supervision and line management processes. The associated documentation will provide a record of this.

The process is intended to be developmental in nature and at the end of the NQSW supported year, supervisors will be asked to validate the NQSWs progress against the Standards and achievement of the CPL requirements.

Continuous learning opportunities

The Standards provide a framework for supervisors and NQSWs to create an Individual Development Plan (IDP) detailing how their professional development needs will be met including any mandatory CPL activities. The IDP will include agreement of formal, informal and naturally occurring workplace learning opportunities provided by employers or identify how employers will support NQSWs to access them.

NQSWs will engage with these opportunities and seek out additional learning opportunities, such as experiential learning, self-directed study, research, and peer support.

In planning, NQSW and supervisors are encouraged to revisit [how social workers learn in the workplace](#) and to value and use naturally occurring learning opportunities. Naturally occurring learning opportunities happen through everyday activities and allow the analysis of knowledge and skills required. This is most likely to happen when there are relevant, accessible tools/ frameworks and opportunities to support critical analysis. This can range from a critical incident analysis tool to office arrangements that are conducive to peer support.

The overall learning opportunities that an NQSW engages with must meet the stated CPL Registration requirements including responsibilities for contributing to the protection of children and adults from harm.

Protected caseload

NQSWs will be given a protected caseload which reflects the level of professional development and an increasing competence and confidence in the role and responsibilities during this period.

Overall workloads will also include protected learning time and time for supervision in line with the requirements of the supported year. This time will equate to approximately 10% of the NQSWs work time and must be factored into caseload allocation².

It is vital that NQSW do not have excessive or overly complex caseloads. In particular, they will not ordinarily be undertaking a lead role in child protection or adult support and protection investigations.

Given the diversity of services that NQSWs might be employed in, defining the appropriate parameters and levels of work for allocation to NQSWs will vary within and across organisations. Having an appropriate workload management system in place, informed by the professional judgment of line managers or supervisors, and regularly reviewing this will provide employers and supervisors with a process to determine the proper workload distribution for staff including NQSWs and the resources they require to enable them to undertake their work role safely and effectively.

Protected learning time

NQSWs will be afforded protected learning and development time in each working week to allow them to fully engage in their identified learning needs as part of the NQSW Supported Year. Their identified learning needs may take different forms and can be undertaken within or outwith the workplace. The form of the learning time should be developed in collaboration with the NQSW.

As a minimum, NQSWs who are working full-time will get the equivalent of a half day per week protected learning time during the NQSW supported year. This needs to be negotiated clearly as part of caseload management. The pattern of protected learning time will be determined by individual and service needs.

NQSWs who work less than 35 hours per week will have 18 months to complete the NQSW Supported Year. They will be entitled to the pro rata equivalent of a half day per week protected learning time during their NQSW Supported Year. This needs to be negotiated clearly as part of caseload management. The pattern of protected learning time will be determined by individual and service needs.

Peer support and mentoring

Peer support has been consistently identified as one of the most significant sources of support for NQSWs. Employers and supervisors will make arrangements for formal peer support for an NQSW with an identified peer. They will also encourage a culture of wider informal peer and colleague support.

NQSWs can learn informally from colleagues and peers through offers such as shadowing, informal debrief or general assimilation of the ethos and culture of an individual or wider team. They also have a valuable contribution to make to the learning of others through the exchange of knowledge.

Where employers have an existing mentoring scheme, NQSWs may benefit from provision of mentoring during the NQSW supported year. Mentoring provides opportunities to discuss work-related issues and generate possible solutions to challenges. There are several definitions of mentoring, many evolving to suit the context and purpose of the individual setting, however, all models will have the mentee firmly at the centre, with reflective practice the cornerstone. If mentoring is used, there needs to be clearly defined roles for the mentor and the supervisor.

Codes of practice for employers

Employers of NQSWs will demonstrate a commitment to the Code of Practice for Social Services Employers. Employers and supervisors will demonstrate a commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion and recognise the barriers NQSWs face in seeking support or accessing support.

NQSW Supported Year resources

The dedicated NQSW website is being developed to support NQSWs, supervisors and employers with the implementation of the supported year. This will support consistency for the NQSW Supported Year.

It will provide:

- details of CPL registration requirements
- details of the Standards for NQSWs and requirements for employers
- information and resources for employers, NQSWs, line managers and supervisors
- support for effective transitions from student to NQSW
- a suite of materials to support effective professional supervision
- learning resources which span the key areas and characteristics of NQSW practice; and
- clear signposts to existing national resources.