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Overview of NQSW Supported Year Implementation 2023-24

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Introduction

The Office of the Chief Social Work Adviser (OCSWA) intends for the Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) Supported Year to become mandatory across Scotland from September 2024.

The NQSW Supported Year is a best practice model to support NQSW transition to the workforce which ensures an increasingly confident and competent workforce for people who use services and their families.

The development of the NQSW Supported Year has been informed by the evaluation of pilot activity, research¹ and the context of adapting and responding to the challenges and potential opportunities of studying and working within the COVID-19 pandemic.

This document provides an overview of the NQSW Supported Year and the definitions of the core elements of support employers will be responsible for providing. Many employers will have some of the core elements already in place. Further detail and support will be offered to the implementation areas by the SSSC NQSW project team.

Overview of NQSW Supported Year

It outlines the approach NQSWs, supervisors and employers will follow to meet their respective responsibilities in addressing the minimum support, continuous professional learning (CPL) and development requirements of NQSWs.

The NQSW Supported Year builds on the existing responsibilities of course providers, NQSWs, employers and the SSSC, including supporting transition to employment, induction, professional supervision and appraisal, and the management of registration requirements.

The approach locates progression and validation of the NQSW's development with supervisors and employers. It is intended to align with existing supervisor responsibilities and employer appraisal systems or to support the creation of one. It is not intended to replace an employer's performance management processes which can encompass matters of a wider nature.

¹ Further detail on underpinning research and evaluation activity available via [Newly Qualified Social Workers - Scottish Social Services Council \(sssc.uk.com\)](https://www.sssc.uk.com)

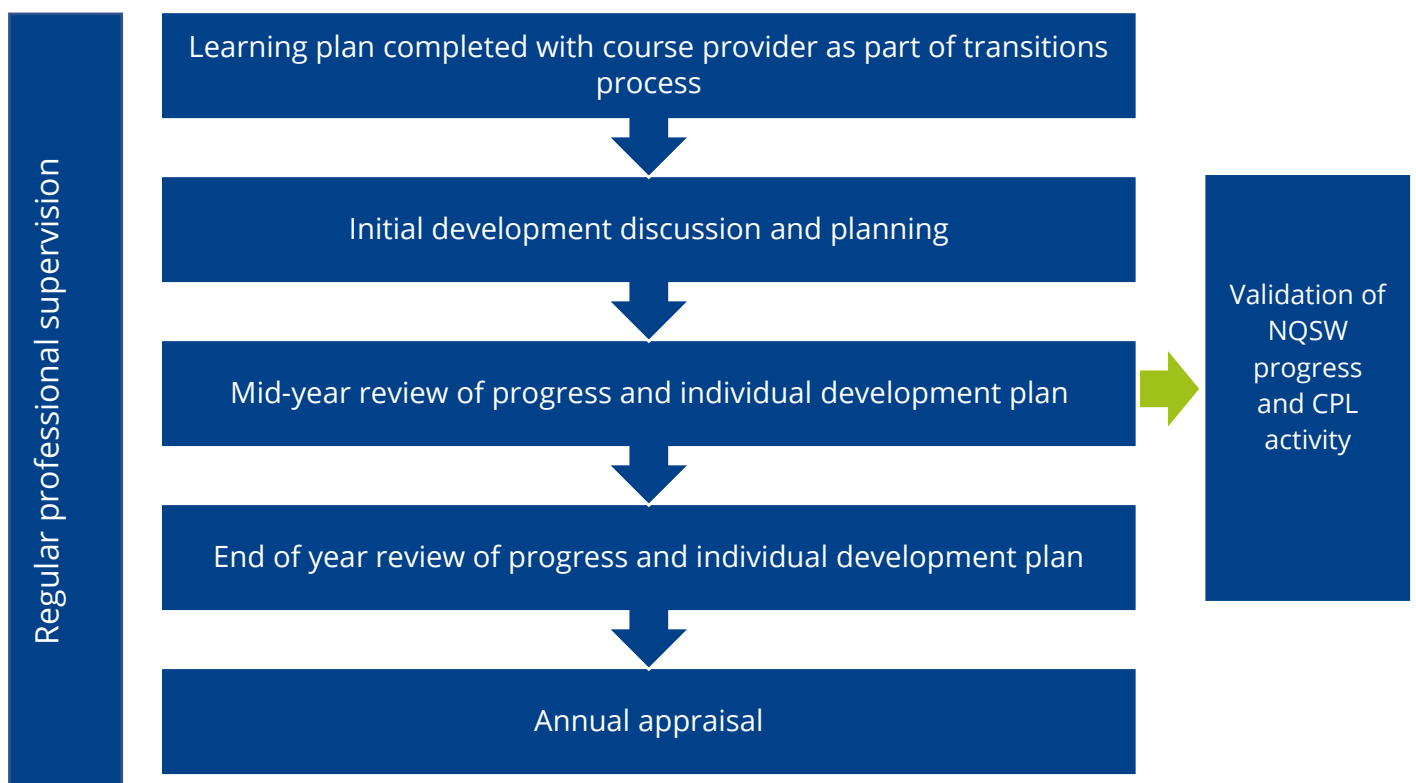
It is formative in nature and focused on evidencing the incremental consolidation and advancement of an individual’s social work professional practice during and beyond the NQSW Supported Year.

NQSWs and supervisors will use structured professional development discussions to plan and formally review the development of the NQSW against the agreed set of [NQSW Standards](#) at three fixed points:

- within six weeks of commencing social work role
- at mid-year
- and at the end of the NQSW year².

This will be in addition to regular supervision (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Overview of NQSW Supported Year process



The initial professional discussion will consider the transferable skills, experiences and learning needs identified during the NQSW’s transition from qualifying training to employment. Course providers are currently working on developing and embedding an

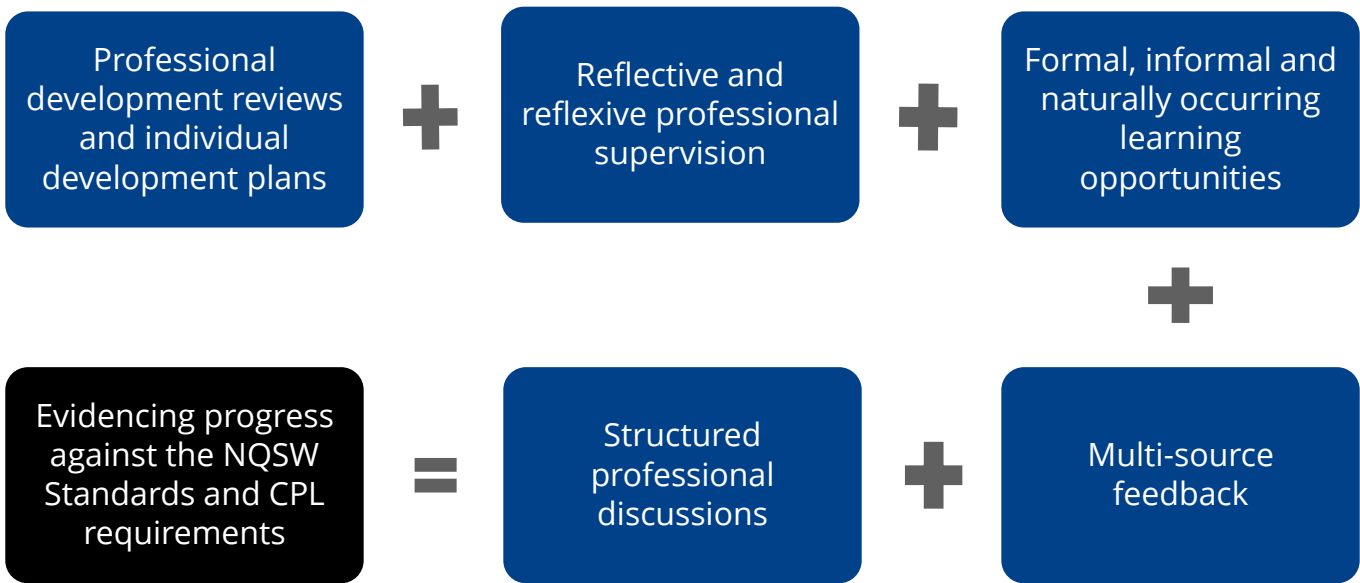
² The NQSW Supported Year is aligned to current registration timescales, 12 months if a NQSW works 35 hours or more and week and 18 months if they work less than 35 hours a week.

agreed transitions approach to improve consistency in the development and use of these plans.

The NQSW’s development will be looked at holistically and appropriate learning opportunities identified and agreed with their supervisor. These may support evidence of advancement against one or any of the eight NQSW Standards.

NQSWs will be given time and opportunity to engage with, reflect on and evidence their learning from a range of formal, informal and naturally occurring learning and development opportunities that arise within their professional role or are created to meet a specific need. NQSWs are expected to retain and share evidence of their learning and development throughout the NQSW Supported Year with their supervisor. Figure 2 provides an outline of how NQSWs will evidence progress during the NQSW Supported Year.

Figure 2 Evidencing progress during the NQSW Supported Year



By the end of the NQSW Supported Year, the NQSW will be able to confidently articulate their progress against the NQSW Standards through a structured professional discussion with their supervisor.

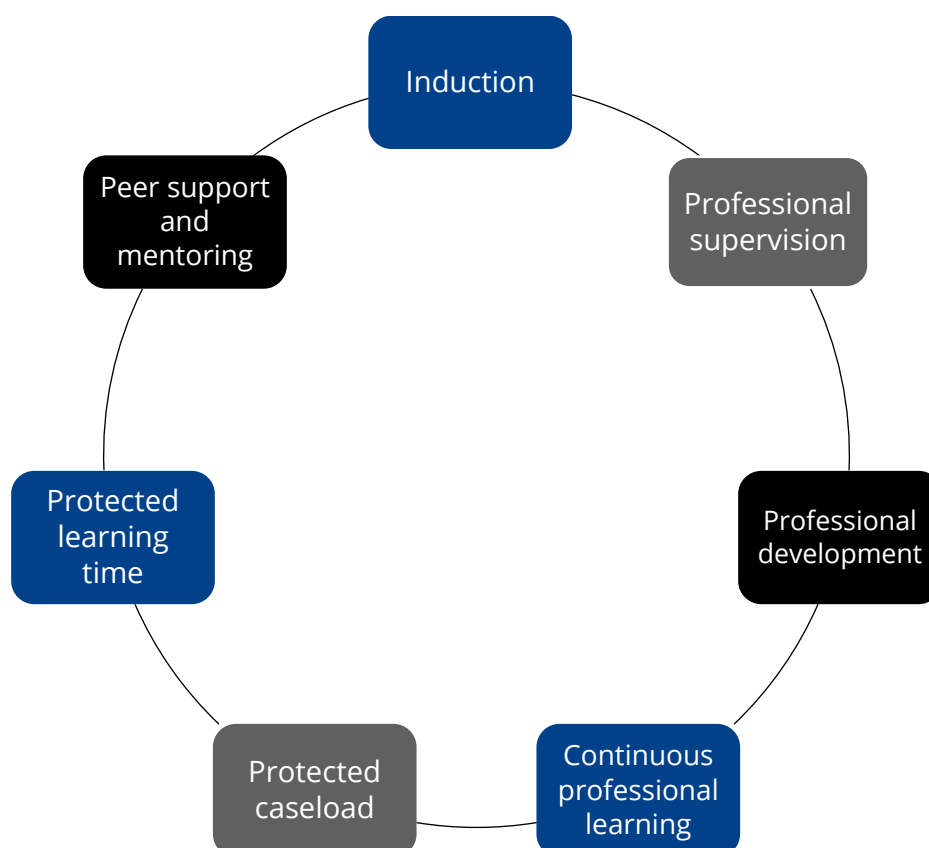
Quality assurance arrangements at a local and national level will ensure that there is a shared understanding and consistent application of the approach. Quality assurance measures will include the use of benchmarking and sampling of completed professional development discussions, validation and endorsement at a local level and submission of specified documentation by the NQSW to the SSSC.

Core elements of support to be provided by employers of NQSW

The NQSW Supported Year outlines the minimum support and learning opportunities required to ensure that an NQSW can evidence development of their social work professional practice in line with their responsibilities as an employee and as a registered social worker.

Employers will make arrangements to ensure NQSWs are able to access the support and learning opportunities outlined in Figure 3. These supports have been consistently identified in research and evaluation as necessary to support NQSWs to successfully navigate the competing pressures, demands and expectations of the professional role. They will also help the NQSW to meet their registration requirements and progress against the NQSW Standards.

Figure 3 Core elements of NQSW Supported Year



<p>The following definitions of the core elements of support are under review, final definitions will be confirmed at the end of summer 2023.</p>

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 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.

Professional supervision will take place in line with an effective organisational supervision policy and professional governance context. It will support NQSWs to meet the NQSWs 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's 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 starting the NQSW Supported Year and at the mid and end of NQSW Supported Year.³

The NQSW and supervisor will have protected time to identify and regularly review development needs, to plan CPL opportunities and consider evidence of consolidation and advancement against the NQSW Standards. The allocation of protected time 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 (IDP) will be used to record the identified development needs and progress in line with the NQSW 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 NQSW's progress against the NQSW Standards and achievement of the CPL requirements.

Continuous learning opportunities

The NQSW Standards provide a framework for supervisors and NQSWs to create an IDP. The IDP will include agreement of formal, informal and naturally occurring learning

³ The NQSW Supported Year is linked to registration as a social worker. All NQSWs are encouraged to register with the SSSC as soon as practicable on accepting or starting employment as a social worker.

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.

NQSW and supervisors are encouraged 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 critical incident analysis tools to office arrangements that are conducive to peer support.

The overall learning opportunities that an NQSW engages with must meet the CPL registration requirements of 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 NQSW Supported Year. This time will equate to approximately 10% of the NQSW's work time and must be factored into caseload allocation⁴.

It is vital that NQSW do not have excessive or overly complex caseloads. 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. Workload management will be informed by the professional judgement of line managers. The regular review of workload distribution for staff including NQSWs will

⁴ Example [Standard 3 - Safe workloads and case allocation | Local Government Association](#)

provide a process to ensure NQSWs have 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 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 half a 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.

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.


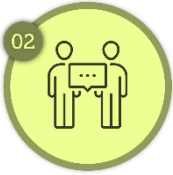

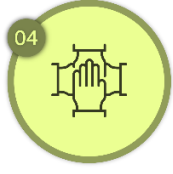


NQSWs can learn informally from colleagues and peers through offers such as shadowing, informal debrief or general assimilation of the ethos and culture of an individual or wider team. They also have a valuable contribution to make to the learning of others through the exchange of knowledge.

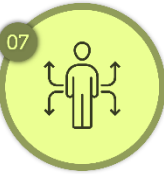
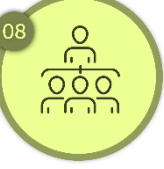
Where employers have an existing mentoring scheme, NQSWs may benefit from provision of mentoring during the NQSW Supported Year. Mentoring provides opportunities to discuss work related issues and generate possible solutions to challenges. There are several definitions of mentoring, many evolving to 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.

NQSW resources

The NQSW website hosts information and resources for employers, NQSWs, line managers and supervisors.

Appendix 1. Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) Standards

	<p>Ethics, values and rights-based practice – develop an understanding of and apply ethical principles and values to all aspects of professional practice. Recognise sources of social inequality and take action to protect and advocate for human rights and social justice.</p>
	<p>Communication, engagement and relationship-based professional practice – demonstrate knowledge and skills to support effective communication, collaboration and relationship-based practice in a range of settings. Actively involve and support the involvement of people receiving services, their families and carers to plan, implement and evaluate interventions.</p>
	<p>Critical thinking, professional judgement and decision making – develop competence and confidence in applying critical thinking, analysis, research and best practice to inform professional judgement and decision making in all areas of practice including assessment and review.</p>
	<p>Promoting wellbeing, support and protection – demonstrate and apply understanding of responsibility to actively promote the wellbeing, support and protection of children and adults at risk of harm, regardless of setting or context.</p>
	<p>Working with complexity in unpredictable and ambiguous contexts – develop competence and confidence in managing complexity, risk, and uncertainty in professional decision making.</p>
	<p>Use of knowledge, research and evidence in practice – demonstrate commitment to continuous professional learning and inquiry which supports evidence informed practice and a wider culture of learning.</p>

	<p>Self-awareness and reflexivity – recognise the impact of the demands of professional social work practice on self and others and develop the use of reflexivity to contribute to personal wellbeing and effective and sustainable practice.</p>
	<p>Professional leadership – develop personal and professional authority as a social worker including when working collaboratively across agency and professional boundaries.</p>



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