

**Definitions of employer  
support:  
an employer's commitment to  
newly qualified social workers.**

**September 2023**

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## The role of employers

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

The employer's support details the minimum expectations of what employers should provide for NQSWs. They have been identified through evaluation<sup>12</sup> and research<sup>3</sup> as necessary to support transitions into the workplace and the development of competent and confident social workers.

When implementing the NQSW Supported Year employers should ensure that the employer support is in place and that it is accessible to NQSWs. Employers of NQSWs will demonstrate a commitment to the Codes of Practice for Social Services Employers and demonstrate a commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion. They will work to reduce the barriers NQSWs face in seeking support or accessing support, particularly NQSWs with protected characteristics or are neurodivergent.

## Induction

A formal induction programme will provide the NQSW with an understanding of the expectations of their employer and their own responsibilities, including familiarisation with policy and procedure, requirements, legislation and recording systems.

Induction will also include familiarisation with the immediate contexts of professional social work practice; people who use services, communities, wider inter-professional services, and multi-agency partnerships with a focus on the professional role once registered. 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.

## Professional development

The NQSW Supported Year provides a platform for 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 for registered social workers. Formal development discussions, reviews and individual development planning will happen within six weeks of commencing a social worker role and at the mid and end of NQSW Supported Year.

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<sup>1</sup> [Gordon, J et al \(2020\) Evaluation of a pilot project for Newly Qualified Social Workers in Scotland](#)

<sup>2</sup> [SSSC \(2020\) Learning from the NQSW pilots and next steps in developing a supported year](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Grant et al \(2022\) Newly qualified social workers in Scotland – a five-year longitudinal study](#)

Employers will ensure that NQSW and supervisor have protected time to identify and regularly review development needs, to plan continuous professional learning (CPL) opportunities and to consider evidence of consolidation and advancement against the core learning elements for social workers<sup>4</sup>. The allocation of protected time (see protected time section) must be sufficient to meet the needs of the NQSW, and to ensure that supervisors are afforded the time and support required to conduct the role.

The approach is intended to provide regular developmental feedback to NQSWs and at the end of the NQSW Supported Year, supervisors will be asked to validate the NQSWs progress against the core learning elements for social workers and employers endorse this decision.

## Professional supervision

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

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

Supervision will take place in line with an effective organisational supervision policy and professional governance context. It will support NQSWs to meet the core learning elements for social workers and evidence their adherence to the SSSC Codes of Practice.

During the NQSW Supported Year, employers will plan 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 the initial stages of the NQSW Supported Year this may be more frequent to reflect the developmental needs of the NQSW.

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<sup>4</sup> The core learning elements were known as NQSW Standards during the early implementation phase. Language updated to reflect the changes to continuous professional learning requirements for all SSSC registrants.

Employers should put in place necessary contingencies to ensure supervision is provided in the absence of the named supervisor, and NQSWs will be encouraged to report/ raise concerns about frequency of supervision. Regular support such as guidance and case discussion would be expected to take place in-between any formal supervision meetings.

## **Continuous professional learning (CPL)**

The core learning elements for social workers provide a framework for supervisors and NQSWs to co-produce an Individual Development Plan (IDP) detailing how NQSWs' professional development needs will be met including any required CPL activities. IDP's should build upon the strengths and areas of development identified in individual learning plans (ILPs) completed as part of their social work qualifying programmes. 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.

The IDP will be used to record and review the identified development needs and progress in line with the core learning elements for social workers. 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.

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.

The overall learning opportunities that an NQSW engages with must meet the requirements for continuous professional learning as set and published by the Scottish Social Services Council, including their responsibility for contributing to the protection of children and adults from harm.

## **Protected caseload**

NQSWs will be allocated a protected caseload that reflects their level of professional development. As their competence and confidence in the role increases, they will be able to take on greater responsibilities during the NQSW Supported Year.

Overall workloads will also include protected learning time in line with the requirements of the Supported Year. This time will equate to approximately 10% of the NQSWs work time and line managers and supervisors must factor this into caseload allocation.

It is vital that NQSW do not have excessive or overly complex caseloads. They will not undertake a lead role in child protection or adult support and protection investigations for the duration of the NQSW Supported Year.

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 process for managing/ allocating workloads 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 given protected learning and development time to allow them to fully engage in their identified learning needs as agreed in IDP's (individual development plans) for the duration of the NQSW Supported Year. Their identified learning needs may take different forms and can take place in or outside the workplace. The NQSW and supervisor or manager will jointly agree how protected learning time is used and should not include time spent in professional supervision.

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. NQSWs who work less than 35 hours per week will have 18 months to complete the NQSW Supported Year and be entitled to the pro rata equivalent of a half day per week protected learning time.

Protected learning time needs to be negotiated clearly as part of caseload management and NQSWs should be encouraged to access this opportunity. The pattern of protected learning time will be determined by individual and service needs and in line with organisational policy.

## **Peer support and mentoring**

Research<sup>5</sup> consistently identifies peer support as one of the most significant sources of support for NQSWs and positively impacts on wellbeing. It can include formal and informal individual and group support.

Employers and supervisors will have arrangements in place to ensure NQSWs have access to and are encouraged to access regular peer support with an identified peer(s). There will be clearly defined expectations of the peer support role and identified peers will not be the NQSWs' direct line manager or supervisor.

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<sup>5</sup> [Grant et al \(2022\) Newly qualified social workers in Scotland – a five-year longitudinal study](#)

Employers will also encourage a culture of wider informal peer and colleague support where 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 and contribute to the development of a supportive learning environment.

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 workable 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 and an agreement of how they will work together to support the NQSW.



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