

Overview of NQSW Supported Year for early implementation 2021-22

**Contents**

[Introduction 2](#_Toc72516743)

[Overview of NQSW Supported Year 3](#_Toc72516744)

[Core elements to be provided by employers of NQSW 6](#_Toc72516745)

[Appendix 1. Newly qualified social worker (NQSW) standards – early implementation version 12](#_Toc72516746)

# **Introduction**

In response to policy and research findings, the Scottish Government commissioned the SSSC to provide recommendations on the design, implementation and delivery of a sustainable and accessible Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) Supported Year. The Scottish Government will determine if the NQSW Supported Year is to become a national approach, however, the Office of the Chief Social Work Adviser has indicated support for this to be a mandatory year with Scotland-wide implementation in financial year 2022/23.

The development of the NQSW Supported Year has been informed by the evaluation of pilot activity, research[[1]](#footnote-2) and the context of adapting and responding to the challenges and potential opportunities of studying and working within the COVID-19 pandemic.

The programme of work is overseen by an Implementation Group comprising of representation from key stakeholders including Office of the Chief Social Work Adviser (OCSWA), Social Work Scotland (SWS), employers, NQSWs, Scottish Association of Social Workers (SASW), Social Work Education Partnership (SWEP), universities, SSSC and more recently Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) and the Care Inspectorate.

The core elements of the NQSW Supported Year have been agreed in principle by the Implementation Group with the final detail to be confirmed during early implementation phase. Chief Social Work Officers have also indicated support for the NQSW Supported Year.

Funding has been allocated by the Scottish Government to support a small-scale early implementation of the NQSW Supported Year which will inform any further refinement of the approach and the final recommendations to be submitted to the Scottish Government in March 2022.

Employers and senior leaders will have a critical role to play in the successful implementation and delivery of the NQSW Supported Year and in achieving the aim of a consistent and robust appropriate experience for NQSWs joining the social work profession. Given the current context, it is more critical than ever to have a nationally agreed approach to supporting the professional identity of social workers and retaining them within the workforce.

This document provides an overview of the NQSW Supported Year and the definitions of the core elements 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 early implementation areas by the SSSC NQSW project team.

# **Overview of NQSW Supported Year**

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.

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 at this stage of registration.

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.

It is aligned to the SSSC registration period and the responsibilities and entitlements that are afforded under the protected title status. It is intended to replace the current process for NQSWs to evidence the CPL registration requirements and satisfy the SSSC regulatory responsibilities.

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 support the creation of one. It is not intended to replace an employer’s performance management process which can encompass matters of a wider nature.

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 Standards (appendix 1) within 4 weeks of commencing employment or SSSC registration, mid-year and at the end of the NQSW year. This will be in addition to regular supervision (Figure 1).

 Figure 1 Overview of NQSW Supported Year process

Learning plan completed with course provider as part of transitions process

Initial development discussion and planning

Regular Professional Supervision

Mid-year review of progress and individual development plan

Validation of NQSW progress and CPL activity

End of year review of progress and individual development plan

Annual appraisal

The initial professional discussion will consider the transferable skills, experiences and learning needs identified during the NQSW transition from qualifying training to employment. This is critical to individual development planning given the disruptions to and variations in learning experiences due to COVID-19. Course providers are currently working on developing and embedding an agreed transitions approach to improve consistency in the development and use of these plans.

The NQSWs’ development will be looked at holistically and appropriate learning opportunities identified and agreed with their supervisor. These may support evidence of advancement against several Standards at the same time or focus on a specific Standard.

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, including multi-source feedback. Figure 2 provides an outline of how NQSWs will evidence progress during 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 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 the required CPL evidence, validation by a counter-signatory at a local level, submission of specified documentation by the NQSW to the SSSC in line with regulatory requirements and sampling of the required CPL evidence.

# **Core elements to be provided by employers of NQSW**

The NQSW supported year outlines the minimum support and learning opportunities required to ensure that NQSWs can evidence consolidation and 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 Standards.

Figure 3 Core elements of NQSW Supported Year



**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 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.[[2]](#footnote-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 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) designed to meet their needs including any mandatory CPL activities required to evidence meeting the Standards. The IDP will include agreement of formal, informal and naturally occurring 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 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 tools, 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 allocation[[3]](#footnote-4).

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 ½ 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 dedicated NQSW website is being developed to support NQSWs, line managers and employers with the implementation of the supported year. This will support consistency for the NQSW supported year.

It will provide:

* details of the Standards and requirements for employers and NQSWs
* 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.

# **Appendix 1. Newly qualified social worker (NQSW) standards – early implementation version**

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|  | **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. |
|  | **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.  |
|  | **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. |
|  | **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. |
|  | **Working with complexity in unpredictable and ambiguous contexts -** develop competence and confidence in managing complexity, risk, and uncertainty in professional decision making. |
|  | **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. |
|  | **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.  |
|  | **Professional leadership -** develop personal and professional authority as a social worker including when working collaboratively across agency and professional boundaries.  |

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/supporting-the-workforce/newly-qualified-social-workers/) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. 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 commencing employment. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Example [Standard 3 - Safe workloads and case allocation | Local Government Association](https://www.local.gov.uk/standard-3-safe-workloads-and-case-allocation) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)