



# Post-qualifying Standards for Social Work Practice Supervisors in Adult Social Care

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# 1. Values and ethics

- 1.1 Practice supervisors will demonstrate knowledge of and commitment to, social work ethical principles and values and promote 'principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities,' which are fundamental British Values and central to the [national and international definition of social work practice](#).
- 1.2 They should be able to apply these principles confidently to their role as a critically reflective practice supervisor and have a reflexive ability to understand themselves and the fundamental values which influence their own practice, and change these where necessary. They should model and promote the application of professional values and ethics to decision-making.
- 1.3 Practice supervisors should adopt, model and promote the values of a reflective, partnership and collaborative approach to their role as a practice supervisor. They should ensure that they recognise and address discrimination, disadvantage and bias in all dimensions of their role as a practice supervisor, including the supervision and assessment process.

## **2. Influencing and governing practice excellence within the organisation and community**

- 2.1 Practice supervisors must be proactive in establishing and maintaining a position of influence within the organisation and across the wider health and social care community, with appropriate support from senior managers and be recognised for their expertise and values-based practice. They should shape and influence an environment which facilitates excellent practice by setting high professional standards and motivating social workers to do the same. They should support social workers to work within the relevant governance frameworks, both internal and external to the organisation.
- 2.2 Practice supervisors should design and implement measures to assure the quality of practice and the effective throughput of work. They will support social workers to be ambitious for people by promoting reflective, curious and inquisitive practice, use of appropriate interviewing techniques and encourage challenging conversations to ensure decisions are defensible and put into action.
- 2.3 Practice supervisors will support social workers to take the lead in upholding human rights, outcomes-focused and personalised approaches to adult safeguarding practice and ensure they are able to make positive interventions that prevent deterioration in health and wellbeing. In situations where a child or young person may be at risk, practice supervisors will support social workers to have the necessary knowledge and skills to identify risk of significant harm and ensure they are supported to take appropriate action.
- 2.4 Practice supervisors should build positive relationships with adults and their carers and other professionals through their professionalism and optimistic attitude, as appropriate and model this approach to others. Practice supervisors will lead by example, encouraging and promoting a holistic approach to practice which is both person-centred and outcomes-focussed and which demonstrates integrity, creativity, resilience and clarity of purpose, to positively influence decision-making. They will provide a safe environment within which social workers can be energised and effective. Practice supervisors will be visible and accessible to staff, adults and their carers and professional partners.
- 2.5 Practice supervisors should ensure the processes they are able to influence are functional and efficient. They should be pro-active in protecting social workers from unnecessary bureaucratic or hierarchical pressures and be able implement strategies to help manage them. They should recognise and articulate the dilemmas and challenges faced by social workers and use this expertise to guide, support and influence the provision of the organisation's services.

- 2.6 Practice supervisors must promote the effective and equitable use of organisational resources and identify and support use of resources that lie within families and communities. They should be open to creative solutions to promote well-being and independence, researching and identifying where new resources and preventative support could be developed in partnership with the community. Practice supervisors should support social workers to develop influential and respectful working relationships with partner agencies.
- 2.7 Practice supervisors should engage with the structures, pressures, priorities and levers within the organisation for influencing and shaping its thinking and actions. They should share their practice expertise to influence wider organisations that make-up the health and social care community, to help the system function positively for people.

### 3. Developing confident and capable social workers

- 3.1 Practice supervisors should recognise, respect and value the expertise of social workers and support the Principal Social Worker in developing and implementing a framework for effective social work practice, underpinned by social work values, theory, research, contemporary social work models and methods and the legislative framework. They should be able to articulate how this framework guides practice and explain and champion the framework to social workers, other professionals, adults and their carers throughout their community of practice. In particular, practice supervisors should encourage practitioners to adopt strengths and asset-based approaches, informed by the principles of the Care Act 2014, the Mental Capacity Act 2005 and the Mental Health Act 2007 and ensure that practice is focussed on achieving the best possible outcomes for individuals.
- 3.2 Practice supervisors should identify, assess and support the development of professional capabilities, articulated in the Professional Capabilities Framework and other professional standards, for example, assessing against the Chief Social Worker's [Knowledge and Skills Statement \(KSS\)](#) for social workers at the end of their Assessed Supported Year in Employment (ASYE). They should engage the social worker in the planning and development of assessment activities and use observation, critical reflection and feedback methods alongside the views of adults, carers and other professionals to develop and assess practice.
- 3.3 Practice supervisors must be able to demonstrate skills of looking, listening and meta-competence (*see glossary for definition*) in the identification and assessment of a social worker's practice dynamics, behaviour and intervention skills; in such observations of practice they must maintain objectivity and reflexivity, demonstrating an awareness of and ability to counter professional bias.
- 3.4 Practice supervisors must assess professional capability holistically. They should ensure that decisions are the outcomes of informed, evidence based judgements and that these are communicated clearly and timely to those being assessed. When assessing professional capability, they should ensure that evidence presented is relevant, valid, reliable, sufficient and authentic.
- 3.5 Practice supervisors should promote continuous professional development through critical reflection in the supervision process. They should support social workers to meet their learning needs through identifying and addressing barriers for learning and by regularly reviewing and co-constructing a professional development plan, which outlines relevant learning opportunities and resources. Practice supervisors should understand and apply learning theory to recognise when their role is to teach, when to mentor and when to coach.

- 3.6 They should develop a culture and community of learning and improvement, drawing on the expertise held within a practice team. Practice supervisors must invest available resources into staff and service development, drawing on the expertise of adults and their carers. They should contribute to the review of the service and the improvement of its provision, policies and procedures.

## **4. Assuring good social work practice and development**

- 4.1 Practice supervisors should confidently and consistently model professionalism and high standards of social work practice. They should critically reflect on and evaluate their own continuing professional development and ensure that their knowledge of social work practice, theoretical perspectives and research is current and maintained. They should develop systems for disseminating their knowledge and skills and for evaluating its impact on practice.
- 4.2 Practice supervisors should ensure that social workers apply a person-centred and holistic approach in their practice which is respectful and empowering for individuals and their carers. They should ensure that evidence based methods and tools are used by social workers in their assessments and interventions. They should ensure that a social worker's actions are proportionate to the identified risk and need and satisfy the procedural requirements of the organisation. Practice supervisors should model and ensure a personalised approach to safeguarding, maximising an individual's opportunity to determine and realise their desired outcomes.
- 4.3 Practice supervisors should use supervision to challenge the balance of authoritative intervention and collaborative engagement and to clarify how practice is achieving the best outcomes for adults and their carers. They should use an explorative questioning style to uncover assumptions and analyse judgments, to clarify the focus of the practitioner's work and to identify what changes the social worker needs to make in their approach e.g. more reflective or more active. They should ensure that individual and carer perspectives are sought, listened to and understood and that they are engaged in shaping plans and supported to carry these out to achieve positive changes to their well-being and independence; progress should be regularly reviewed and plans adjusted to achieve the desired outcomes.
- 4.4 Practice supervisors must implement effective strategies for ensuring the throughput of work and ensure no individual is unnoticed in the system. They should regularly review the requirement for continued involvement in the lives of people who use services and close cases in a timely manner, having considered the need for any ongoing support.

## 5. Promoting and supporting critical analysis and decision making

- 5.1 Practice supervisors should create a culture of focused and critical thinking which consistently explores and takes into account a wide range of contexts including individual, carer and professional stories, the chronology of critical events, social and economic circumstances and their own practice experiences.
- 5.2 Practice supervisors should support social workers to recognise multiple and sometimes conflicting hypotheses, interpretations or perspectives in reaching a professional judgement to take account of the complexity of people's lives, accepting that people are experts in their own lives.
- 5.3 Practice supervisors should understand and be able to apply different methods of critical reflection to promote the development of critically reflective practice in others. They should support and challenge social workers to apply reasoned discernment, making decisions based on observations and analyses, to explore differences between opinion and fact, address common bias in situations of uncertainty and to make clear conclusions and defensible judgements.
- 5.4 Practice supervisors should ensure that social workers are ambitious for people and are focussed on enhancing and promoting their wellbeing so that decisions are person-centred and outcome-focussed in accordance with the legislative framework. They should ensure, particularly in relation to safeguarding and mental capacity practice that the immediate and long-term impact of decisions is fully considered at each stage of planning and review and that social workers are able to clearly articulate and justify their plans, decisions and actions. Practice supervisors should promote and enable social workers to adopt a positive approach to managing risk which is underpinned, where necessary, by relevant legislation. They should ensure that social workers are responsive to meeting the assessed needs of people and their carers, and where expectations cannot be met, that disappointment is managed sensitively and appropriately.
- 5.5 Practice supervisors should establish recording processes which provide the full analysis underpinning decisions, making sure the rationale for why and how decisions have been made is comprehensive and well expressed.

## 6. Relationship-based practice supervision

**(Practice supervisors who have PEPS Stage 2 or PDE through externally moderated or quality assured programmes meet the requirements for this statement)**

- 6.1 Practice supervisors should be able to critically reflect on and apply a range of relevant supervisory models which recognise and address the power dynamics in the supervision relationship. They should develop a collaborative, supervisory partnership in which the relationships with adults in need of care and support have a central position. Practice supervisors should make specific use of practice observations and feedback from individuals, carers and other professionals to reflect on and improve the social worker's practice.
- 6.2 Practice supervisors should work in partnership with social workers to develop and regularly review a supervision agreement to support the supervision process.
- 6.3 Practice supervisors should be able to identify emotional or personal barriers affecting practice and recognise when to step in and proactively support individuals. They should promote reflective thinking to drive more effective discussions so that reasoned and timely decision-making can take place. Practice supervisors should demonstrate a high level of resilience within pressured environments, seeking professional support for themselves when necessary. They should be attuned to the effect of high emotion and stress and respond in empathic, compassionate, calm, measured and pragmatic ways.
- 6.4 Practice supervisors should recognise the impact the relationships with whom they are working may have on social workers, including people and their carers as well as other professionals, which can impact on the effectiveness of practice. They must provide high quality individual supervision that is responsive and restorative. Practice supervisors should promote approaches such as peer supervision and group case consultation to foster professional curiosity, to help identify common bias, to shift thinking and to generate the best outcomes for adults and their carers.
- 6.5 Practice supervisors should reflect on the confidence of their social workers and adapt their management and leadership style according to people's needs and to foster organisational improvement.

## **7. Effective use of power and authority as a practice supervisor**

- 7.1 Practice supervisors must apply a proportionate and ethical approach to the exercise of their authority and ensure that the approach of social workers enhances the involvement, choice and control of adults and their carers to improve their quality of life and well-being.
- 7.2 Practice supervisors should secure, maintain and model a current and working knowledge of the legislative framework, particularly the Care Act 2014, the Mental Capacity Act 2005 and mental health legislation and its related case law. They should ensure that practice is lawful and seek legal advice when required. They should demonstrate a critical understanding of organisational policy and procedures.
- 7.3 Practice supervisors should provide expertise and support to social workers to exercise statutory or other formal authority where their assessment and analysis indicates that an adult appears to be at risk of abuse or neglect. They should be able to work with and contain the emotions of social workers so that they are able to identify person-centred solutions to risk and harm, including practice situations where the person using services is assessed as having mental capacity and decides to make what might be an unwise decision. They should support social workers to communicate clearly the purpose and content of the care and support plan.
- 7.4 Practice supervisors should recognise the dynamics of relationships between professionals, identifying where these are likely to compromise the well-being of adults and take immediate and corrective action.
- 7.5 Practice supervisors will create a culture where challenge and debate is invited and encouraged to support transparency and accountability; they should be accessible and approachable to social workers, adults and their carers.

## 8. Performance management and improvement<sup>1</sup>

- 8.1 Practice supervisors should ensure practitioners understand the legal, regulatory, procedural and performance framework within which they operate and within which they are held accountable.
- 8.2 Practice supervisors must promote, build and model a culture that recognises excellent practice and professional leadership, enhancing social workers' confidence in their practice. They must challenge complacency with a commitment to continued improvement and confidently hold poor practice to account.
- 8.3 Practice supervisors should establish available capacity so that work is allocated appropriately across the staff group and ensure best use is made of resource, ability, interests and developmental aspirations.
- 8.4 Practice supervisors should strike a balance between employing a managerial, task-focussed approach and a reflective, enabling, leadership style to achieve efficient day-to-day functioning. They should draw on and share best practice within local and national contexts. Practice supervisors should implement communication channels with adults, their carers and other professionals inviting feedback and ideas for improvement. They must respond thoughtfully and proactively to complaints and mistakes, recognising that they can provide creative learning opportunities for development at all levels.
- 8.5 Practice supervisors should utilise data to understand historical patterns, current demands and likely future trends. They should implement systems which demonstrate effective practice and, when needed, which trigger quick corrective action. They should scrutinise system performance and devise and implement effective and timely improvement plans.

<sup>1</sup> DHSC published guidance on [Social Work in Integrated Settings](#) in 2017 which stated that: "professional leadership and supervision in social work (including reflective practice) is critical alongside line management, (while) coaching and mentoring can support professional development."

# Glossary

## Supervision

Professional supervision in social work is a regular and ongoing process involving a practice supervisor who has responsibility for overseeing the social worker's professional practice. It should take place regularly, usually as a one to one meeting, in an environment in which confidential discussions can take place.

The practice supervisor may also be the nominated line manager within the organisation; if the line manager is not a registered social worker, professional supervision will need to be provided separately. Supervision includes attending to managerial and performance functions, promoting professional development (including supporting the development of professional development plans) and supporting workers personally and emotionally and in developing resilience.

## Values

Values are beliefs about what is regarded as good or desirable in social work. They can range from those which are relatively superficial, to those which represent more fundamental beliefs. In social work they would include values about how we believe the world (and society) should be; what constitutes a good person; and how people should behave towards one another. These will normally be congruent with broader values in the society or culture, or the laws of the land. Professional ethics derive from values, and are normally more specific interpretations of how professionals should act in given situations. They are usually codified.

When we refer to values-based practice we are referring to social work practice which is conscious of the more fundamental value decisions which might be inherent in particular practice situations, and which strives to honour the values which are important to social work (e.g. care for human dignity; integrity; empathy; compassion; social justice). A practitioner who is working from a value base should be aware of the fundamental value decisions which are involved in the many different practice situations, and make an informed choice on the basis of these values. They will be aware that not all decisions can be made purely on the basis of evidence, or indeed that the evidence might sometimes contravene the value base. In some cases, it might seem impossible to make decisions which honour the desired values. Value-base social work practice would be aware of the contradictions and challenges, and strive to work with these, rather than deny the values involved.

## Critical reflection

Reflection, in simple terms, is learning from experience. It refers to the process of reviewing an experience and making new meaning and interpretations of it in the light of: other perspectives; new evidence; changes or new experiences or contexts; or new information. In its fullest sense it also involves devising new guidelines for action on the basis of this review. How it is done will

vary, depending on the theoretical framework used, or the model subscribed to (of which there are many). Some models are more structured and systematic than others. Using a reflective practice approach begins with searching for hidden assumptions. This act stimulates further examination of whether these assumptions are appropriate or desirable, providing the basis for changing them, or changing the actions associated with them. (Schön, D. (1983) 'The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action.' London: Temple Smith).

Many theoretical frameworks can be used to identify assumptions and to decide which are fundamental. Most prominent is the concept of reflexivity (discussed elsewhere in the glossary); post structural thinking (the role of language); critical theory (role of power) and spirituality (making of meaning).

Reflection becomes critical when it involves two aspects:

- When it is fundamental enough (goes deep enough) to effect transformative change
- When it is based on an analysis of power dynamics and strives to equalize power imbalances and maximize democratic relations

There is more complex understanding of a critical approach as embodied in critical social science. These understandings can make critical reflection transformative in function, allowing people who critically reflect to envisage and enact drastically new ways of thinking and practising.

## **Reflexive**

This is a term commonly used in conjunction with being reflective. Although the outcomes of both may be similar, reflexivity is a concept which derives primarily from social science research (whereas reflectivity as a concept derives more from professional practice and humanities traditions). Reflexivity is about being able to recognize the influence of oneself on a situation. This influence may involve the influence of: your own body (e.g. age, illness, physical, racial characteristics); other material considerations (e.g. your economic class); (psychological elements e.g. emotional and cognitive aspects of yourself); social aspects (e.g. gender, ethnicity); historical and cultural contexts; and structural factors (e.g. social class). In this comprehensive sense then being reflexive involves being able to locate and understand yourself from those above perspectives, which then enables you to be aware of whatever thinking, biases or blind spots might be influencing the way you interpret people and situations, and therefore the way you practice.

Clearly being able to be reflective, by being aware of your own assumptions, is related to being reflexive. Being reflexive should enable the practitioner to be aware of and appreciate different perspectives. This in turn should enable the practitioner to work in more flexible and responsive ways, in changing and sometimes unpredictable situations.

## **Person-centred practice**

This term is used in this document in conjunction with outcomes focused practice (also outlined in this glossary). In person-centred practice, the person who is being worked with is always at the centre of the work. This does not mean necessarily that whatever the person wants is what happens. What it does mean though is that the relationship with the person is first and foremost, so that when there might be differences of opinion about what should happen, or when there are limitations as to what can be done (e.g. because of the rights of other people, policy or legal restrictions), there can always be dialogue about these. When this cannot happen, practice should still be person-centred in that the person's particular situation and capabilities must be taken into account.

Person-centred practice is also differentiated from practice which is more routinized, and seeks primarily to implement policies and regulations. In person-centred practice the person as a unique individual, with a unique history, in unique circumstances, is always factored into the way policies and regulations are implemented appropriate to the person and their situation.

## **Outcomes focused practice**

In this document, outcomes focused practice refers to practice which always aims towards appropriate outcomes, within the primary relationship focus of practice. An outcome focus ensures that practitioners are always mindful of different outcome options for people, and that outcome options will be devised in terms of people's desires and capabilities, with the policy and legislative context.

## **Strengths and asset-based practice**

Strengths-based approaches in social work practice focus on the assets of people, as opposed to their deficits. This also involves working in partnership; working "with" as opposed to "doing to or for." It is also associated with the concept of resilience, seen as a capacity for people to develop and grow in the face of challenges. Some would argue that this is a type of "self-righting" capacity, but which does require a protective and nurturing environment. Particularly important about the concept of resilience, is that it instils a sense of hope.

## **Holistic assessment**

Holistic assessment is best suited to assessing the complex interplay of technical, reflective and developmental progress that is required in the social work role. Holistic assessment brings together the views of several key stakeholders, e.g. supervisor, adults, carers and other professionals. Holistic assessment will chart and evidence progress over a period of time. Progression between levels is demonstrated by complexity, risk, ambiguity and increasingly autonomous decision making.

## **Meta competence**

Meta competence refers to the higher order overarching skills that are required by social workers as they develop their professional practice within the complex social work role.

Meta competence includes how the social worker understands and conceptualizes their practice and the theoretical approaches, knowledge, values and skills that underpin it. The demonstration of meta competences would also include critical thinking and reflective abilities; use of self; understanding of relevant factors, emotions and factors that impacted on their understanding and ability to articulate their judgments and decision making.

Meta competence can be separated out from procedural competence which refers to the skills and underpinning knowledge demonstrated in relation to relevant policy and procedure; and establishing and maintaining a purposeful and focused intervention through the use of communication and interpersonal skills.

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# Appendix

## Frameworks underpinning the KSS for adult social work practice supervisors

It is important that the underlying principles of the KSS ('the eight statements') are identified clearly to provide a guiding framework.

As stated earlier, the approach to supervision is both reflective and relationship based. These approaches and the values which are integral to them are seen as central to good social work.

### Developing integral core skills

However, there is also a need to articulate a framework for identifying the actual knowledge and skills (as well as values) which are important to good competent social work practice (and supervision); the different levels of practice which can be identified (from beginner to expert); and of course, the means for developing through the different levels. Such a framework can provide a guide for supervisors in assessing individual social workers, but can also be used to identify the skills needed to provide successful supervision. These levels are already identified in the PCF.

Perhaps less clear are the more generic professional skills which form an integral core of skills for most professionals, regardless of setting. In addition, how these skills are developed and how practitioners are enabled to progress from one level to another is also less clearly defined.

In brief, professional social workers need to progress with regard to several different dimensions of practice, including:

- Substantive knowledge ('knowing that')
- Procedural knowledge ('knowing how')
- Skills and values

The degree to which practitioners are also able to demonstrate the following skills are also important elements towards developing an expert level of practice:

- Flexibility
- Able to use and adapt theory
- Able to be reflexive
- Able to analyse and act contextually

Professionals typically progress by learning how to create their own theory which is contextually appropriate (as opposed to applying abstract rules); and to recognise their own ability to act within a situation.

### **Critical reflection**

The ability to critically reflect is crucial in developing expertise in these different dimensions. It allows the practitioner to learn from their own experience and thus adapt their knowledge and theory responsively in changing contexts. In this sense they are effectively creating their own theory, which they use in conjunction with other pre-given theories or knowledge, to be more responsive to particular situations.

A critically reflective ability can also ensure that the practitioner is aware of fundamental values and beliefs, and is able to review whether and how these are being acted upon. If the reflection is deep enough, transformational change can occur. This means that practitioners may be enabled to challenge deeply held, often taken for granted thinking, which may have constantly given rise to problematic actions or common dilemmas in the past. Such changes have the capacity to improve organisational cultures and processes.

### **Reflective supervision, assessment and observation**

Reflective supervision involves helping, through supervision processes, to create an environment which enables such learning and reviewing to take place. This means first and foremost that a reflective supervisor needs to model a critically reflective ability in their own approach to relationships in the organisation. A reflective supervisor needs to be able to create an open, challenging but supportive environment where practitioners are encouraged to learn how to learn from their own personal and professional experience (a mixture of thinking, acting and feeling) to be able to take risks in exposing their limitations or dilemmas, and to remake new knowledge accordingly. They become open to learning from “mistakes” and participating in a learning environment more broadly. In this way the reflective supervisor helps practitioners to improve their practice by also becoming self-directed learners in partnership with their supervisors.

Reflective supervisors should also develop the relevant skills to assess practitioners’ practice and performance in a reflective way and to assess the critical reflective ability of practitioners. Accordingly, other core supervision skills should also be developed to be practised in a reflective way, such as observational and feedback skills. In general, a reflective way of relating as a supervisor does not necessarily mean that the supervisor might not give concrete or critical or negative feedback on performance when needed. It does mean however that such feedback is given within a spirit of collegiality, democracy, and reflexive awareness on the part of the supervisor.

There will be obvious commonalities between a reflective approach and a relationship-based approach. Both approaches emphasise the importance of partnership and collegiality, as much as possible and relevant. Discussions should be held as dialogue, with maximum openness to

differing perspectives. Prime importance is placed on the quality of the relationship between supervisors and practitioners, using this as the main tool to effect change, and to arrive at mutual understandings. In both approaches it is assumed that supervisors and practitioners bring unique backgrounds and expertise, which should be recognised, respected, and taken into account when working together. This assumes that a reflexive self-awareness and understanding should inform interactions between supervisors and practitioners. In both approaches the supervisor assumes, as much as possible, an enabling role, using the trust and respect built up in the relationship to create the learning conditions to help practitioners to see different and new perspectives, and to improve their practice accordingly.