

Adult Social Care, Learning & Development Team, Somerset County Council

Newly qualified framework for social workers and occupational therapists

The Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) and Supported First Year In Practice (SFYP) are part of the wider People Strategy within the County Council intended to develop skills and capacity in the workforce. The Newly Qualified framework focuses on the support offered to newly qualified occupational therapists (SFYP) and newly qualified social workers (ASYE) to develop their professional skills, knowledge and confidence that will sustain them in their first year of practice and beyond.

Adult Social Care in Somerset provide a wide range of advice, information and services to support people, their families and their carers to remain as independent as possible, to enhance their wellbeing and where necessary help to arrange care and support in line with the Care Act (2014). Somerset ASC employs staff in multi-disciplinary teams which include social workers, occupational therapists, approved mental health professionals and non-qualified staff based in the local community and hospitals as well as a centralised safeguarding and first point of contact team.

What we wanted to achieve

Our principal aim was to develop an overarching framework which outlines the structure, support and learning opportunities to enable newly qualified (NQ) professional staff to develop the knowledge and skills they need to practice safely, effectively and ethically.

Our intention is to produce critically reflective practitioners who are able to use their professional judgement with confidence and authority to support people who use care services in line with professional and regulatory standards and values.

The Assessed and Supported Year in Employment and the Supported First Year in Practice are separate programmes provided by ASC in Somerset and there are differences between the two, most significantly, newly qualified social workers (NQSWS) are assessed formally against national criteria (Knowledge and Skills Statement, Adults: DoH, 2015). Nonetheless, we felt that were sufficient areas of commonality based on Health & Care Professionals Council (HCPC) standards of proficiency, conduct and ethics, and some very real opportunities to share learning, experiences and knowledge across the two staff groups. In particular, we wanted the framework to provide parity of offer not just to the NQ staff joining the organisation but also for those members of staff taking on the role of supervisor/assessor.

Based on ASYE guidance, we wanted to offer a consistent pattern of supervision and support for all NQ staff so that they received weekly supervision for the first six weeks, fortnightly supervision until the six month point and then monthly supervision for the remainder of the year.

We wanted to foster a learning culture within the organisation where NQ staff worked together in partnership to share good practice, exchange ideas and knowledge and so develop a good understanding of their different but complimentary professional roles in social care.

In shaping a NQ framework in this way, we hoped to encourage NQ staff to remain in their chosen career in ASC in Somerset.

What we did

The ASYE is shaped in large part by national guidance and NQSWs are assessed against the Knowledge and Skills Statement. In developing the SFYP in Somerset, we have drawn on College of Occupational Therapists NHS Preceptorship programme, HCPC requirements and the SCC OT Job description to form the Task and Skills Framework and this is used to evaluate the practice of newly qualified occupational therapists (NQOTs). We also incorporated our learning from the ASYE programme on the importance of creating opportunities for critical reflection on practice.

We designed dedicated development plans for both the ASYE and the SFYP extending across a 12 month period so that there are features common to both, including:

- A shared induction and CPD plan of mandatory training (with additional specialist training as needed e.g. moving and handling).
- A pattern of support and supervision common to both staff groups.
- Balanced and proportionate caseloads negotiated for NQ staff to allow them the space and time they need to develop professionally.
- Agreed protected study time for NQ staff to research and evidence their reflections on learning using a portfolio format.
- Balanced and proportionate workloads negotiated to allow the supervisor/assessor to support the NQ worker effectively. Protected time is given to them also to complete the relevant documentation in good time.

- Attendance on accredited training on Being a Reflective Supervisee to promote critical thinking about best practice and to reflect on the impact that reflective supervision can have on people who use care services and their families.
- Supervisors/assessors attend Promoting Reflective Practice in Supervision intended to support the skills needed to promote an effective and empowering learning environment.
- Practice Development Groups, open to both NQSWs and NQOTs, facilitated using action learning strategies intended to explore common themes such as professional identity, ethical dilemmas and values in practice.
- Observations of practice provide further evidence of professional capability but also act as a means to quality assure practice and so protect people and their carers from poor practice.
- An honorarium is paid to SW and OT supervisors in recognition of their work even though there is no external funding for SFYP.
- The NQ framework has been dovetailed with ongoing CPD opportunities via the in-house Career Pathway post first year in practice e.g. risk and decision making for both social workers and occupational therapists.
- Principles of the ASYE in house moderation process are applied to SFYP to ensure consistency of decision making by assessors/supervisors.

What we achieved

For the past two years, the NQ framework in SCC has supported NQ staff to successfully gather evidence of their progression and growth as practitioners in their chosen field. Using the key assessment outcomes from the KSS and capability statements from the Task and Skills Framework has enabled NQ staff to properly understand what is expected of them as professionals within their scope of practice.

Feedback from NQ staff evidence they highly value the support of their supervisor/assessor and team colleagues to make concrete links between learning and practice. They also welcomed the structured support and the opportunities to discuss common themes with their peers and so realise that they were not 'on their own'. They report greater confidence in their professional capabilities to make reasoned and reasonable decisions and feel more able to challenge themselves as well as others on behalf of people and their carers.

Reflecting on the views of people and carers who use social care services has been woven into the NQ framework, from influencing the design of training on reflective supervision, to active participation in the moderation process as well as being a key element of practice portfolios.

The moderation process has contributed to the thinking about quality assuring practice in a wider sense within the organisation. The value of direct observations as a means of assessing and quality assuring practice is recognised and has been embedded into our supervision policy as a consequence. Summary reports from the internal moderation panels also contribute to workforce planning within the organisation.

The NQ framework has enabled us to develop a robust programme to mentor and support NQ staff in their first year of practice. Further work is needed to evaluate the impact of the NQ framework but empirically, retention rates are high. Across the 2013- 15 programmes, 90% of NQ staff are still working for the organisation thereby ensuring a greater consistency of worker in teams which we believe will have a positive impact on services in turn.

What we learnt

NQ staff clearly demonstrated a willingness to share best practice and to learn in a collaborative way. Their assessors/supervisors have always maintained a commitment to supporting new staff but they welcomed the practical and financial acknowledgement of the amount of work that is involved.

Protected time for both NQ staff and their supervisor/assessor can be difficult to maintain particularly as the worker comes to the end of the year.

It is a measure of how well integrated and valued NQ staff are within teams, nevertheless it is necessary to reiterate the organisational commitment to protected time from the outset and ensure that this is clearly documented in the support agreement. Commitment and support for the NQ framework from the senior management team is critical and is represented here by the presence of the Principal Social Worker (Adults) as chair of the internal moderation panel.

There remains an inequity in that we ask NQOTs to complete the organisational norm of six month probation rather than the twelve months we ask of NQSWs but this is a reflection of the formal assessment element of the ASYE.

Assessment criteria and guidance for the ASYE has shifted over the past three years and as a consequence we found that there is not yet a widespread understanding of what the programme can offer amongst managers and supervisors. Our learning has been that it is not enough to set out a robust programme but it is also necessary to promote the benefits for staff, the organisation and people who use care services on an ongoing basis. A rolling programme of one off workshops for managers and assessors is intended to address this.

In contrast to newly qualified social workers, we recruit only small numbers of newly qualified occupational therapists in a given year and the NQ framework has opened up and cemented learning opportunities for NQOTs.

Reflection means that workers in social care are shining a light on their practice and looking at it. If they are not doing this then they are working in the dark. We do not want workers that are like this.

**Compass Disability Hub Group:
Promoting Reflective Skills in Supervision**

Moreover, working in this way has generated communities of practice in which joint activities and discussions have helped all NQ staff to not just support one another and share information but also to build relationships that enable them to learn throughout their professional career.

For more information please contact

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My first year in practice has been amazing first year. I have had many learning opportunities and have received excellent support from my assessor and my colleagues within my team...(who) have shared their knowledge and experiences to benefit my learning.

Nikki Evans NQSW:
Community Support Team

I have had a lot of very positive feedback from service users which has also helped my confidence to increase and also to know that I am practicing in a way which is useful and valued by individuals, families and carers.

Gayle Baldwin NQSW:
Mental Health Team

The newly qualified framework did give me time to put theory into practice and having the time to reflect on cases very beneficial, I was also given time from my supervisors to talk through cases and to look at the positives within my work.

Jessica Fox NQOT:
Health Interface Service

Skills for Care Recommends

We provide various products and resources to help employers to support their professional staff in their first year in practice and with their on-going continuing professional development:

Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (adults)

We can provide information and resources to help social work employers to implement the ASYE in adults services.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/asye

Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (child and family)

We can provide information and resources to help social work employers to implement the ASYE in child and family services.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/asyecf

Care Act

We have developed tools and training resources to support employers adjust to the expectations of the Care Act.

www.skillsforcare.org.uk/careact

The College of Occupational Therapists provide range of publications for occupational therapists and other health and social care professionals. To access these resources go to <https://www.cot.co.uk/cot-publications/cot-publications>

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