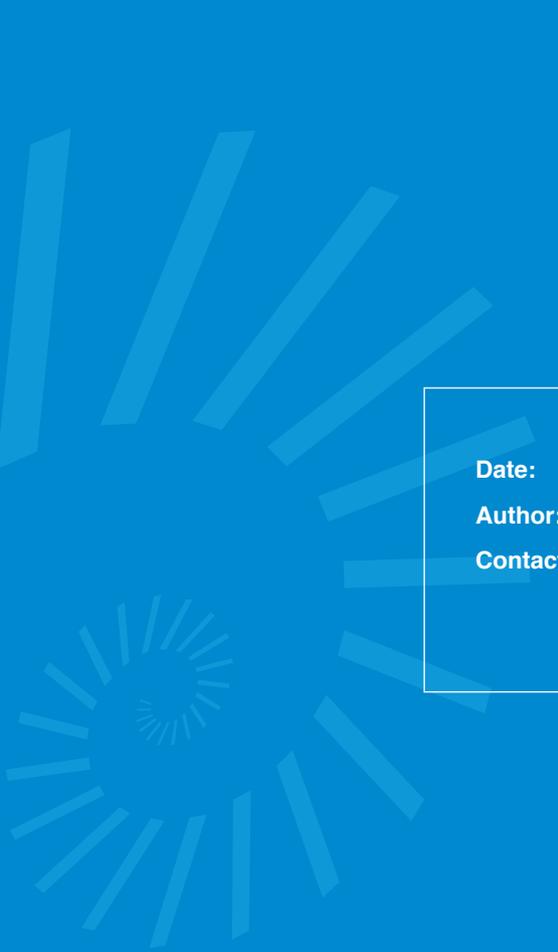




DDDD UK Supervision Policy



THE BRITISH ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS



Date: May 2011

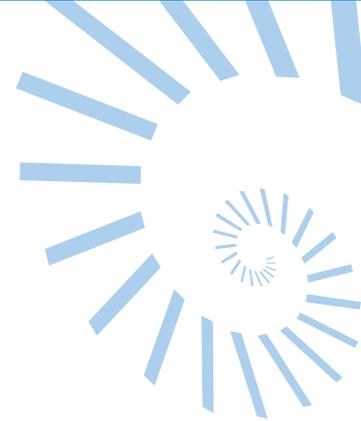
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UK Supervision Policy

Summary	4
Purpose	5
Context	6
Definition.....	7
Statement	8
References	10



The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) is producing a range of UK policy statements and documents to guide members and to support best practice, campaigning, lobbying and publications. The aim of the statements is to support social work professionals to have a strong sense of identity and to uphold the integrity of the profession based on the Code of Ethics.

The purpose of the supervision policy is to clarify what BASW considers to be the professional rights of social workers in relation to supervision and the responsibilities of the agency, the worker and the supervisor. Supervision needs to be seen in the context of widespread agreement among professional social work bodies globally about the purpose, functions and importance of supervision.

Social workers must be able to exercise professional discretion and judgement based on the Code of Ethics¹, to carry out their responsibilities. Supervision is the systematic, reflective process which supports social workers to make ethical decisions. It also improves confidence, competence and morale, leading to a better service for those who use social work services.

There are 12 key policy statements about supervision based on the principles that all social workers should:

- *Receive regular, planned, one to one, professional supervision from registered and appropriately experienced social workers.*
- *Have routine opportunities for peer learning and discussion in the workplace and through professional networks.*
- *Develop and maintain the relevant skills, knowledge and understanding to do their job through continuing professional development.*

Supervision must be seen as a priority to ensure quality of service to service users within relevant country legislation and practice governance, codes of standards and ethics. Employers need to make a positive commitment to a strong supervision culture with a strategic lead social worker responsible for making sure that effective supervision happens.

Employers and managers must take into account individual capacity, experience and workload of supervisees and supervisors. Managers should arrange appropriate professional supervision for social workers, particularly in multidisciplinary teams or specialist roles. Social workers need to take responsibility for ensuring they have access to and use professional supervision and discussion. There is a wide range of practice guidance, theory and research on supervision some of which is referenced at the end of the statement, where possible with web links.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to clarify what BASW considers to be the professional rights of social workers in relation to supervision and the responsibilities of the agency, the worker and the supervisor in relation to supervision.

In carrying out their professional practice responsibilities, social workers must be able to exercise professional discretion and judgement based on the Code of Ethics². Ethical decision making is the systematic, reflective process by which dilemmas can be resolved. Social workers need to be aware of possible influences on their professional judgements³ including their own worldview, moral, cultural, historical, political, religious, spiritual, societal and professional values and biases.

Professional autonomy is about working independently, yet often sharing decision making as part of a team. It is about taking responsibility for assessment and actions, yet accepting scrutiny from peers, service users, the agency and the profession. The joint BASW/UNISON Scotland Position Statement on Supervision 2006⁴ states that: “No Social Worker can work with entire autonomy and professional supervision is the key process for balancing professional autonomy with responsibility to the client, professional

ethics and standards along with accountability to the agency and society at large”.

BASW believes that lack of supervision or the over emphasis in recent years on the managerial aspects of supervision, has led to the reduction in the reflective aspects of supervision, loss of professional autonomy in decision making and a poorer service for service users. “Professional supervision has often been misunderstood as an oppressive rather than supportive process geared towards quality assurance, improvement and protection.”⁵

However good quality supervision should improve social worker’s capacity, confidence, competence and morale, leading to a better service for those who need social work. Effective supervision also improves recruitment, retention and job satisfaction.

“Working with people where meeting need, assessing risk and ensuring human rights are respected is a skilled task. Whilst workers are responsible for their own level of decision making and recommendations they need access to good quality supports and supervision to do the job.”⁶

Context

There is widespread agreement among professional social work bodies globally about the role and importance of supervision, for example:

- ▶ The American National Association of Social Work states that social workers should receive supervision from those who are competent in the techniques of social work. NASW Code Of Ethics 1.04(b).
- ▶ The Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers Education and Training Standing Committee outline helpful headings for the purposes of supervision.
- ▶ The Australian Association of Social Workers has national practice standards in supervision⁷, which includes minimum standards for different levels of experience.

Important lessons were learned about supervision from Social Work – a 21st century review in Scotland 2006, the Social Work Task Force in England (2009)⁸ and the Northern Ireland Child Protection Report (2007)⁹. One in four children’s social workers and one-third of adults’ social workers miss out on monthly supervision, according to

a survey by the Social Work Task Force (2009)¹⁰ and this was reinforced by BASW England’s on-line survey in 2010¹¹. Supervision is a whole organisation responsibility and there should be a strategic lead social worker at the top of the organisation responsible for making sure that professional supervision happens.

BASW agrees with the Social Work Reform Board that:

“all organisations employing social workers should make a positive, unambiguous commitment to a strong culture of supervision, reflective practice and adaptive learning.”

Practice guidance for social workers on supervision:

There is a wide range of guidance, theory and research on supervision some of which are referenced below, if possible with web links.

Definition of social work supervision

The BASW definition of supervision below includes the definition and description of supervision in the Skills for Care¹² and CWDC guidance on supervision and the definition of professional supervision in the Scottish Association of Social Work Manifesto.

Supervision is a regular, planned, accountable process, which must provide a supportive environment for reflecting on practice and making well informed decisions using professional judgement and discretion. Supervision should enable social workers to:

- ▶ Be accountable for their practice and ensure quality of service for people who use services (adults, children, young people, families, carers) within relevant country legislation, codes of standards and ethics.
- ▶ Uphold professional standards.
- ▶ Build purposeful, professional relationships and communicate effectively.
- ▶ Make sound professional judgements based on good practice.
- ▶ Manage risk and protection alongside their duty to respect rights and address need.¹³
- ▶ Reflect on, analyse and evaluate their practice.
- ▶ Manage the emotional impact of their work.
- ▶ Share, debrief and identify any further required resources to address responses to stressful situations.
- ▶ Challenge constructively in the interests of client, worker and agency.
- ▶ Develop the knowledge, skills and values required for their own role, professional development and as part of an integrated, multi-professional or multi-agency team or service.
- ▶ Contribute to research and use knowledge and experience to explore new ways of working.
- ▶ Identify and manage stress factors that may impinge on the worker, service user or agency.
- ▶ Ensure peer and management review of professional decisions and to encourage mutual learning and development.
- ▶ Communicate with their line manager on organisational issues.
- ▶ Manage realistic workloads and caseloads.

Policy on Supervision

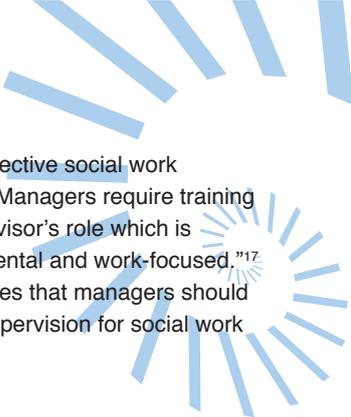
- 1** The provision of regular, planned, good quality supervision is central to the development and maintenance of high standards of social work practice.
- 2** The supervision process must provide a supportive, safe environment for reflecting on practice and making ethical and informed decisions.¹⁴
- 3** The word supervision has a specific meaning in the social work profession with interrelated functions including line management and accountability, professional supervision and continuing professional development.
- 4** All social work practitioners have the right to receive formal, one to one, professional supervision in relation to practice and personal development from registered and appropriately experienced social workers. This includes those working in integrated structures, multi disciplinary teams and specialist roles.
- 5** Social workers should also have routine opportunities for peer learning and discussion in the workplace and through professional networks.
- 6** Social workers need to take responsibility for ensuring they have access to professional supervision and discussion.
- 7** Supervision should be provided weekly for newly qualified social workers and then fortnightly. Supervision should never be less than monthly even for advanced practitioners who are dealing with the most complex cases.
- 8** Supervision should enable social workers to learn from and respect other's contribution, work together across all sectors and agencies and address any challenges arising from partnership working.
- 9** Supervision must identify and contribute to continuing professional development. It should ensure social workers have the relevant skills, knowledge, understanding and attributes to do the job and progress their careers.

10 Employers and supervisors must take into account individual capacity, experience and workload. This requires transparent and effective systems to allocate work and manage caseloads that realistically match capacity to expected agency standards. The standards need to be clearly articulated and professionally valid.

11 Any organisations, that employ social workers, should have a strategic lead social worker with responsibility for developing a strong supervision culture and making sure that supervision happens. This will be achieved through:

- *A clear supervision policy with agreed standards across partnership agencies, with practice that supports the policy.*¹⁵
- *Recognition of the importance of the several functions of supervision.*
- *A strong lead and example by senior managers.*
- *Performance objectives for supervision practice in place for all managers.*
- *Supervision agreements or contracts.*
- *Effective training of supervisors.*
- *Monitoring and audit of actual practice – frequency, quality and outcomes.*¹⁶

12 BASW recognises that providing effective social work supervision is a highly-skilled task. Managers require training and support to undertake the supervisor's role which is "educational, supportive, developmental and work-focused."¹⁷ The BASW Code of Ethics also states that managers should arrange appropriate professional supervision for social work staff.



References

- ¹ BASW Code of Ethics (2002).
- ² BASW Code of Ethics (2002).
- ³ Taken from AASW Code of Ethics (2010).
- ⁴ *Professional Supervision in Social Work* (2006) UNISON Scotland position statement for 21st Century Review www.unison-scotland.org.uk/socialwork/supervision.html
- ⁵ *Helping People Change their Lives: Supervision and Workload Management for Social Work – a negotiating resource* (2009) BASW Scotland/Unison.
- ⁶ *Helping People Change Their Lives – the Social Work Manifesto for frontline staff in Scotland* issued in June 2009 by UNISON and BASW.
- ⁷ National practice standards of the Australian Association of Social Work (2000).
- ⁸ *Building a Safe and Confident Future: the Final Report of the Social Work Task Force* (Nov 2009).
- ⁹ DHSSPSNI Inspection of Child Protection Services (2007) www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/ssi/oss-child-protection.htm
- ¹⁰ Baginsky, M, Moriarty, J, Manthorpe, J, Stevens, M, MacInnes, T and Nagendran, T (2009) 'Social Workers Workload Survey: Messages from the Frontline' Social Work Taskforce.
- ¹¹ Godden, J (Nov, 2010) Paper on supervision in social work, with particular reference to supervision practice in multi disciplinary teams, Birmingham: BASW.
- ¹² Leay, D, McDonnell, F and Zutshi, H (2007) 'Providing Effective Supervision' Skills for Care/CWDC www.skillsforcare.org.uk/developing_skills/leadership_and_management/providing_effective_supervision.aspx
- ¹² Bates, P and Lymbery, M (2011) 'Managing risk in a risk averse society' (Chapter 2) *Early Professional Development for Social Workers* Edited by Raymond Taylor, Malcolm Hill and Fergus McNeill, Birmingham: BASW/Venture Press.
- ¹⁴ O'Sullivan, T (2011) *Decision Making in Social Work* [2nd ed.] BASW Practical Social Work Series, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- ¹⁵ McDonnell, F and Zutshi, H (2010) *Inspiring Practice. A Guide to Developing an Integrated Approach to Supervision in Children's Trusts* CWDC www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/assets/0000/9005/CWDC_Supervision_Guide.pdf

¹⁶ Hawkins, P and Shohet, R (2006) *Supervision in the helping professions* Open University Press (p 216).

¹⁷ BASW Code of Ethics 4.4.2 h (2002).

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www.scie.org.uk/publications/guides/guide01/section1/index.asp

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Social Care Councils Codes of Practice:

England [ww.gsc.org.uk/codes/Get+copies+of+our+codes/](http://www.gsc.org.uk/codes/Get+copies+of+our+codes/)

Northern Ireland <http://www.niscc.info/CodeofPractice-10.aspx>

Scotland <http://www.sssc.uk.com/sssc/homepage/codes-of-practice.html>

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