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# Mentor Tool

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# Introduction

The post-qualifying standards for social work supervisors in adult social care (PQS) were developed in 2018 to recognise, support and strengthen supervision. The standards can be used as a framework in practice to support supervisors and build consistency and excellence in supervision. One way to do this is for supervisors to participate in their employer-led programme of support and assessment against the post-qualifying standards.

*Participating in the pathway will support employers and practice supervisors to demonstrate their capability and develop their professional confidence. The aim is to develop national consistency in supervision practice and knowledge.*  
(Skills for Care)

Supervisors who are undertaking professional development and completing a portfolio of evidence using the PQS require a **mentor**.

This tool has been developed to provide information about the mentoring role and to introduce some ideas, tips and resources to establish and support the mentoring relationship. It is primarily aimed at mentors and will also be useful for supervisors and organisational leads. It is not intended as a complete compendium of resources and should be used as a starting point for mentors.

## The mentor role

### What is a mentor?

*A mentor is someone who takes a personal interest in another's career and acts as a guide or sponsor.*  
(Tsui, 2005: 27)

Mentoring is often used interchangeably with coaching and, at its heart, involves developing a relationship built on trust, respect, commitment, reciprocity and engagement. Whilst definitions can vary, in contrast to a coach, a mentor is usually at a more experienced stage in their career; they share their professional values, skills and knowledge to support the development of the person they are mentoring (Tsui et al., 2017).

Key to the success of the role is to develop a collaborative and learning relationship. Often, the knowledge that informs a new supervisor's practice comes from their previous experiences of being supervised (Hair, 2013). The mentoring relationship can offer an opportunity to explore and share experience and expertise in this context, helping to develop supervision practice.

### What is a mentor in the context of the PQS?

The mentor's role is to support the supervisor and help them to evidence their supervisory practice against the PQS framework. All practice supervisors participating in their employer-led programme should have a mentor. Skills for Care's **guidance** outlines the **minimum requirements for a mentor**:

*The mentor should be a registered social worker with a minimum of two years relevant post-qualifying experience in a supervisory role. The role of the mentor is distinct from the line manager and, where it is possible within your organisation, the same person should not be both the mentor and line manager.*  
(Skills for Care, 2021)

Organisations will need to decide locally who will be best placed to take on the mentoring role. The duality of the mentor role, in providing support and assessment of the supervisor, draws on the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment assessor role.

# Support for the mentoring role

This section proposes what mentors will need to support them in their mentoring role, with some suggested resources.

## 1. Familiarity with the Post-Qualifying Standards for Social Work Supervisors (PQS)

Mentors need to be familiar with the *Post-Qualifying Standards for Social Work Supervisors in Adult Social Care* (PQS). They provide the description of what a good practice supervisor looks like and cover eight areas.

- > Values and ethics.
- > Influencing and governing practice excellence within the organisation and community.
- > Developing confident and capable social workers.
- > Assuring good social work practice and development.
- > Promoting and supporting critical analysis and decision-making.
- > Relationship-based practice supervision.
- > Effective use of power and authority as a practice supervisor.
- > Performance management and improvement.

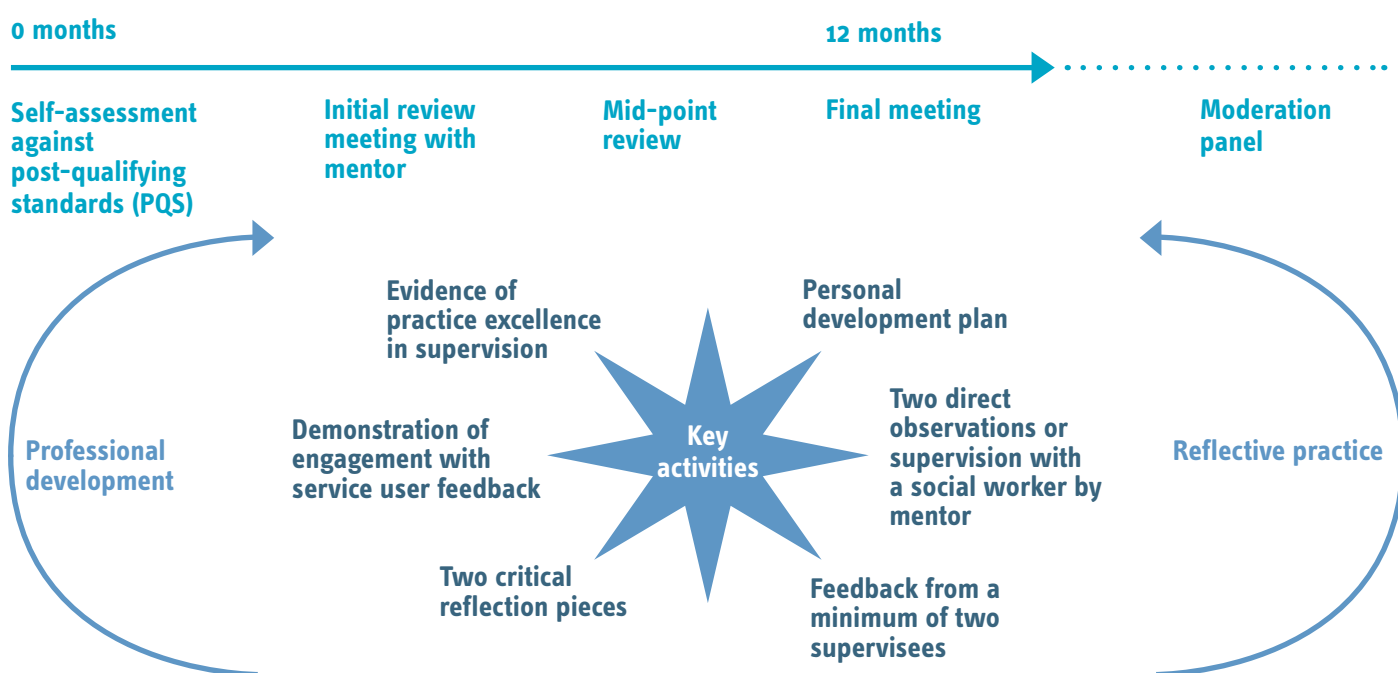
[www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Documents/Learning-and-development/social-work/PQS/PQS-guidance-document-February-2021.pdf](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Documents/Learning-and-development/social-work/PQS/PQS-guidance-document-February-2021.pdf)

## 2. Understanding the assessment and learning pathway for the supervisor

### Assessment

Mentors should be clear about what is expected of the practice supervisors undertaking the assessment pathway. The following infographic developed by Skills for Care outlines the key points in a supervisor's assessment journey and will help the mentor to understand the minimum requirements.

### Post-qualifying standards for social work practice supervisors in adult social care



For more information visit [www.skillsforcare.org.uk/pqsupervisorstandards](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/pqsupervisorstandards)

Further information is also available in the Skills for Care [guidance](#) and [website](#):

### Learning

Individual organisations will have their own learning and development approach to support practice supervisors undertaking the pathway. It will help mentors to be familiar with the learning activities supervisors will be undertaking and any support programme in place.

Research in Practice has developed a range of resources to support the supervisor development programme:

<https://adultsdp.researchinpractice.org.uk/about/>

### Portfolio

Practice supervisors undertaking the [pathway](#) will be developing a portfolio of evidence. A portfolio template is available on the Skills for Care website. Mentors will need to be familiar with the evidence that is needed and support supervisors to gather this. This includes undertaking a minimum of one initial formative observation and two direct observations.

These observations are similar to those that are carried out in the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment. Mentors may need support from peers who have carried out observations before, for example to shadow an observation or to prepare and debrief with a more experienced colleague.

### 3. Space to think about the mentoring role

Practice supervisors need reflective supervision - this influences the quality of the supervision they provide for their staff which, in turn, influences the support practitioners provide to the adult and families with whom they work. The role of the mentor largely mirrors the supervisor role:

- > modelling good supervisory practice
- > creating a space for reflection and exploring
- > sharing resources.

Some of the resources and activities suggested in this tool can be used as part of the mentoring relationship and will also be useful for the supervisor to develop their own supervisory practice.

This resource from the Children's **Practice Development Supervisors' Programme (PDSP)** is helpful in thinking about the importance of supervision culture in an organisation:

*[Building a positive supervision culture.](#)*

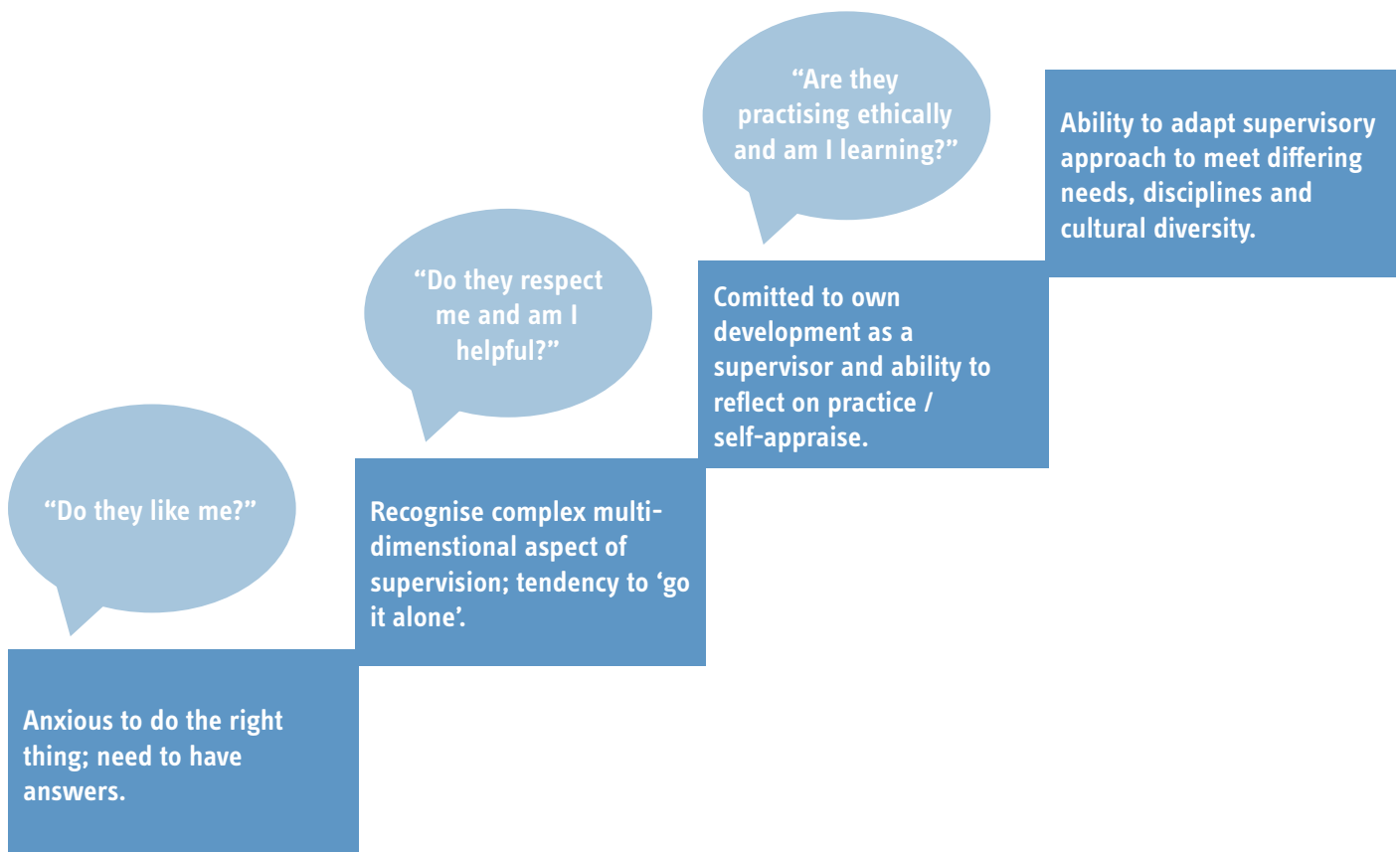
Many of the tools and resources suggested in this mentor toolkit will also be useful for practice supervisors.

## 4. Tools and resources to support the mentoring relationship (support)

The resources shared in this section can be used by the mentor to build and develop the relationship with the practice supervisor. They also model good practice and can be shared with the practice supervisor to use in their development as supervisors and with the people they supervise.

### > *Meeting the supervisory needs of practice supervisors*

This **Knowledge Briefing** is from the PSDP and is aimed at those supervising supervisors. It contains lots of reflective prompts and questions that could support mentors and their work with supervisors.



Adapted from Stoltenberg and Delworth, in Hawkins and Smith, 2006, p.140 and from Davys and Beddoe, 2010, p.108-9.

- > **Tool 1:** Social GGRAAAACES
- > **Tool 2:** Identity exercise
- > **Tool 7:** My strengths in relationship-based practice supervision
- > **Tool 36:** Supervision relationship  
You can use this tool to discuss how you will work together, as preparation for a supervision agreement
- > **Tool 37:** Person-centred approaches (important to me and for me).
- > **Tool 31:** Reflective supervision audit tool.

## 5. Tools and resources to support developing and evidencing practice (assessment)

The mentor provides feedback to the supervisor to help them develop their practice and is expected to carry out some observations of the supervisor in supervision.

- > **Tool 24:** Giving feedback
- > **Tool 26:** Supervision observation
- > The PSDP also has some useful resources around observing and giving feedback on supervision:
  - Preparing to observe a supervision session and give feedback**
  - Template to guide you when observing supervision**
- > This **guidance** developed by Skills for Care - and is set within the context of observing practice in the pandemic. It has useful information on observing practice remotely and best practice in direct observations that can be adapted to the context of the PQS.
- > **Tool 33:** Supervision audit
  - This audit helps to identify how far supervision practice reflects the evidence of, and standards for, good supervision. The tool also supports practice supervisors to consider their supervision practice and to gather feedback on their practice, as part of collecting evidence for the Knowledge and Skills Statement.
- > A tool (from PSDP) to help supervisors evaluate the quality of their supervision by seeking feedback from those they supervise (or are supervised by):
  - Reviewing your supervisory relationship with a practice supervisor**

### Checklist for mentors

The following checklist summarises some of the main points from this resource and may be useful when preparing for the mentor role. It may also assist organisations with choosing and supporting mentors as part of their implementation of the PQS:

- Are you familiar with the Post-Qualifying Standards for social work supervisors?
- Do you understand the Supervisor Pathway from Skills for Care and its local implementation?
- Are you ready to share your knowledge, skills and experience as a supervisor, and open to learning from the experience?
- Are you clear about your role as a mentor?
- Do you have someone to talk to about the mentor role? (for example, your supervisor/manager, organisational learning or practice development lead, peer network of mentors or assessors)?
- Do you know the supervisor you are mentoring? Have you started to think about how you will approach building the mentoring relationship?
- Are there other PQS mentors in your organisation or local regional area who you can link in with?
- Have you identified any areas of development you might need as a mentor? [You can use this learning to evidence your CPD for Social Work England.]
- Do you have access to any training or resources or refresher workshops?
- What other resources might you need?

## References

Hair, H. (2013). The Purpose and Duration of Supervision, and the Training and Discipline of Supervisors: What Social Workers Say They Need to Provide Effective Services. *British Journal of Social Work*, 43 (8), 1562–1588.

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Tsui, M. (2005). *Social Work Supervision: Contexts and Concepts*. Sage Publications.

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