



Capabilities, consistency and outcomes: Using the *Post Qualifying Standards* for Practice Supervisors to strengthen adult social care

Gerry Nosowska

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Introduction

This briefing supports leaders to **understand and implement the *Post-qualifying Standards for Practice Supervisors in Adult Social Care (PQS)***, so that they can improve supervision in their organisation.

It is aimed at senior leaders, primarily Directors and Assistant Directors of Adult Social Services, as well as Principal Social Workers, and other practice leaders and workforce development leads.

*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.*** (DHSC, 2018).

This oversight is an essential mechanism for ensuring:

- > lawful, empowering practice that promotes the well-being of adults, carers and communities
- > attention to wellbeing of staff and the sustainability of their roles
- > continuous improvement of the organisation's delivery
- > positive working relationships across the organisation and attention to equality, diversity and inclusion.

The PQS offer an opportunity to recognise, support and strengthen practice supervision. The PQS enables organisations to develop the capabilities of practice supervisors, build consistency of supervision across the organisation, and – through supervision – enable better outcomes for adults and carers.

Supervisors are a vital part of the social care workforce, supporting practitioners, overseeing practice and enabling outcomes for adults and carers, as well as providing input to the organisation's aims and development. They are under pressure, particularly as a result of managing demands and supporting staff during the Covid-19 pandemic. They need and deserve attention and support from their organisation.

Although the PQS is aimed at social workers who supervise other social workers, the capabilities that it highlights are transferable to supervisors with other professional backgrounds and/or that supervisor other practitioners. All supervisors, whatever their level of seniority, can use the PQS to reflect on and improve the supervision that they offer.

What are the *Post Qualifying Standards for Practice Supervisors in Adult Social Care*?

The *Post-Qualifying Standards for Social Work Supervisors in Adult Social Care* (PQS) were published in 2018.

They provide a description of what a good Practice Supervisor looks like. **The PQS covers eight areas:**

1. Values and ethics

This includes upholding lawful practice, promoting human rights and meeting equality duties, and modelling effective partnership working.

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

This includes setting clear expectations of good practice, monitoring practice, enabling practice and using resources well.

3. Developing confident and capable social workers

This includes making the most of social work expertise, encouraging strengths and asset-based approaches, and contributing to individual and organisational development.

4. Assuring good social work practice and development

This includes promoting the use of evidence, and using critical reflection and questioning to assure professional judgements.

5. Promoting and supporting critical analysis and decision-making

This includes support and challenge to enable defensible judgements, analytical recording, and balanced interventions around needs and risks.

6. Relationship-based practice supervision

This includes modelling good relationships, responding to individual supervisee's needs, and providing appropriate support to build organisational resilience.

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

This includes ensuring lawful practice, involving adults and carers, and transparently fulfilling statutory duties.

8. Performance management and improvement

This includes recognition of practice, response to difficulties with performance, and contribution to organisational learning.

The PQS describes Practice Supervisors who provide supervision that clearly contributes to organisational priorities, including:

- > Practice with adults and carers that is lawful and fulfils statutory duties.
- > Practitioners working in strengths-based and asset-based ways.
- > Working in partnership with adults and carers to achieve outcomes.
- > Defensible decision-making, oversight and recording.
- > Good working relationships between practitioners and management.
- > Evaluation of practice and organisational improvement.
- > Proactive approach to enabling good performance.
- > Wellbeing and retention of staff.

Implementation so far

Skills for Care published initial guidance on the implementation of the PQS in early 2019. This set out a proposed pathway for Practice Supervisors to evidence that they meet the PQS, based on learning from pilots across the country.

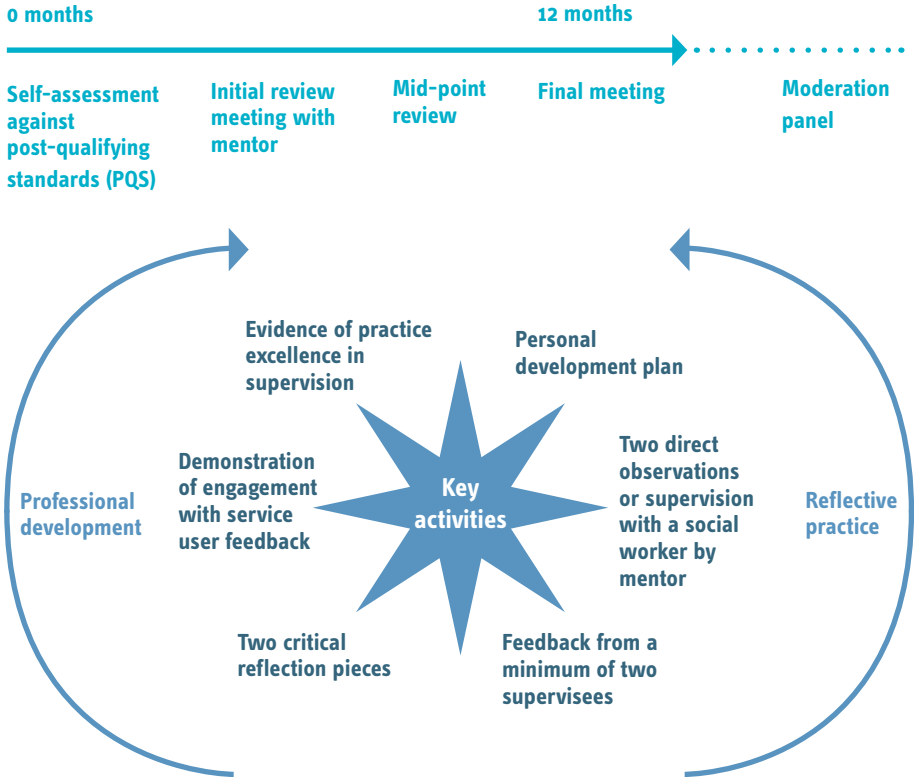
During 2019 to 2020 a Regional ‘Train the Trainer’ Programme was delivered by Research in Practice. Each local authority had the opportunity to send a representative to a three-day programme in their region, to support them to understand the PQS and to identify how they might use it in their organisation. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the programme moved online part way through. By April 2021 it had completed in each region. The programme covered:

- > Foundations of supervision
- > Developing capability
- > Promoting practice excellence and embedding the PQS.

The Department for Health and Social Care asked Research in Practice to develop national resources to support organisations to implement the PQS. These include this Leaders’ Briefing, an Implementation Pathway, and other tools, as well as some facilitation to regions.

In March 2021 Skills for Care published their Post-qualifying standards Supervisors’ Pathway to help supervisors to use the PQS (see next page). This sets out a one-year timeline with milestones (in light blue), together with key activities that will contribute to the Practice Supervisors’ development and enable them to evidence their work.

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



For more information visit www.skillsforcare.org.uk/pqs-supervisor-standards

Although there are no mandatory standards around implementation of the PQS, it is expected that organisations will start to use it, and many local authorities have already taken some actions to do so.

Why do the *Post Qualifying Standards for Practice Supervisors in Adult Social Care* matter?

The importance of supervision

The PQS matters because supervision matters. Organisations dedicate a huge amount of time and resource to supervision. Evidence shows that good supervision contributes to the overall aim of adult social care - to promote the wellbeing of adults and carers.

Supervision helps supervisees to be fit for engaging in decision-making by attending to their wellbeing, learning and role. Supervision offers a space for reflection and learning (Kettle, 2015), allowing critical thinking and the use of evidence (Hawkins & Shohet, 2000) and helping identify outcomes to support adults and carers (Johnstone and Miller, 2010). Supervision provides a safe and trusted space to reflect on the emotional impact of the work (Hawkins & Shohet, 2000) and an environment for individuals to explore what is happening for them and how to thrive in their role.

The importance of supervisors

Supervisors are a vital part of the social care workforce, supporting practitioners, overseeing practice and enabling outcomes for adults and carers, as well as providing input to the organisation's aims and development.

A good supervisor is able to model the kind of relationship practitioners are expected to build with adults and carers. For adults and carers there is some limited evidence that supervision can promote service user empowerment and participation, reduce complaints and increase positive feedback. Supervisees state that reflective supervision helps facilitate effective direct practice, and helps support safe and proportionate decision-making. (Earle et al., 2017)

Retention and wellbeing of supervisors

Adults and carers have identified the importance of supporting the well-being of practitioners – “Make sure they’re ok, so we’re ok” (Research in Practice, 2018).

Supervisors and the practitioners they support were already under pressure prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Research on working conditions (Ravalier & Boichat, 2018) highlighted workload pressures, stress and intention to leave. This was affected by inadequate supervision particularly of complex work. Research that explores the aftermath of disasters or shocks, similar to the Covid-19 pandemic, identifies the importance of supporting practitioners and those who support them in the acute and rebuilding phase of the shock (King’s Fund, 2021).

Practice supervision enables and is enabled by an organisational culture that prioritises wellbeing. The provision of relational, reflective supervision improves working conditions (Ravalier & Allen 2020). Good supervision helps to strengthen morale, job satisfaction, organisational commitment and retention (Kavanagh et al., 2003; Mena & Bailey, 2007; Kettle, 2015). In particular, supervision supports an organisation-wide approach to reducing the adverse impact of work pressure on staff (HSE, 2017).

Practice supervisors need and deserve attention and support from their organisation. This is timely in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic and in the light of pressures on adult social care. In particular, leaders must respond to growing evidence of inequality (ADASS, 2020) by supporting a diverse and thriving Practice Supervisor cohort, offering good supervisor support to practitioners, and, through supervision, enabling thoughtful practice that uses the law and evidence to combat inequality.

How the PQS can help

Your organisation can use the PQS to:

- > **Develop Practice Supervisors** – for organisational improvement, equality and diversity in the workforce.
- > **Support Practice Supervisors** – for staff wellbeing, good supervisory practice and retention.
- > **Recognise Practice Supervisors** – for organisational wellbeing, resilience and improvement.

The PQS is aimed at social work Practice Supervisors – that is, supervisors who are social workers and who supervise social workers. Social workers need to have professional leadership and supervision from social workers (including reflective practice). This may be separate from line management, particularly in integrated settings (ADASS, DH and PSW network, 2017).

Although the PQS was created to strengthen social work supervision, the standards and description of good supervision are relevant to supervisors from different professional backgrounds and who supervise non-social workers.

Practice Supervisors are also not just those who supervise practitioners. Those who are not in first-line management also have a clear line of sight to what happens in practice. The PQS is valuable for supervisors at any level in their career.

Implementing the PQS is not a luxury. It is an integral part of supporting capable Practice Supervisors to deliver consistent supervision for better outcomes. Implementing the PQS will help your organisation to develop, support and retain Practice Supervisors at a time when they are under great pressure. It is both ethical and effective to implement the PQS.

Practice Supervisors and practice leads who attended the Research in Practice programme told us that:

- > They valued having space to think about supervision practice, share ideas, and reflect on their own and their organisation's practice
- > They found the national tools to support supervision relevant and useful
- > Working regionally supported supervisors to gain peer support and insight
- > Time was needed to allow consideration of the barriers to implementation and to identify ways of overcoming these
- > Each organisation had its own needs and priorities in using resources to implement the PQS.

The main barriers identified nationally to implementing the PQS were limited time, competing priorities and staff capacity. Practice supervisors highlighted the importance of organisational buy-in and leaders giving permission and setting expectations about using the PQS.

How organisations can implement the *Post Qualifying Standards for Practice Supervisors in Adult Social Care*

The PQS and other standards

The PQS fits with a number of other standards that exist to support good practice and oversight in adult social care.

All regulated staff must meet **regulatory standards** for public safety – these are set by Social Work England for social workers. **Gathering evidence to meet the PQS helps Practice Supervisors to meet the regulatory standard of continuing professional development.**

Social workers in any role develop generic capabilities for social work practice throughout their career. These are set out in the nine domains of the **Professional Capabilities Framework** that was developed and is owned by the social work profession (BASW, 2018).

Practice Supervisors at Advanced and Strategic levels, can use the Professional Capabilities Framework to holistically consider their professional practice, and then focus in on the PQS to identify ways in which they can develop capabilities that relate to supervision in Adult Social Care.

Professional Capabilities Framework



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The **PQS** is a set of capabilities that relate to a particular role. It was developed by government because of the importance of the Practice Supervisor role and created in partnership with social workers.

Practice Supervisors can use the PQS to develop specific capabilities that enhance their supervisory role in adult social care.

Practice Supervisors also have a **job description** relating to their particular job role. **At appraisal, Practice Supervisors review how they are contributing to the organisational vision and aims through their job role.**

A way of making sense of these standards is for Practice Supervisors to use their annual appraisal and supervisions at the half-way point in the year to:

- > Look at the nine domains of the Professional Capabilities Framework and identify their strengths and areas of development.
- > Focus in on the PQS and consider the specific strengths and areas of development that they have as supervisors.
- > Review their job description and consider how they are acting in their role and as a professional to meet organisational aims.
- > Identify goals for the year to build on their strengths and develop their capabilities, together with the actions they will take to fulfil these and how they will evidence this – the evidence will help them meet the Continuing Professional Development standard for registration with the regulator. This planning for the year ahead could be done by using the Supervisors' Pathway (see next page).

The Supervisors' Pathway

The PQS comes with a Supervisors' Pathway (Skills for Care 2021). This Supervisors' Pathway can be built into existing activities for example appraisal (see above) or induction to a new role.

The Supervisors' Pathway sets out steps that a Practice Supervisor would take to meet the PQS and to demonstrate this. It is similar to the pathway for Newly Qualified Social Workers during the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment.

- > Once Practice Supervisors are identified, they are given a Mentor.
- > Practice Supervisors undertake self-assessment against the PQS, and create a Personal Development Plan.
- > Practice Supervisors undertake learning and development alongside creating a portfolio.
- > The plan is reviewed and updated at two points over a year, and evidence for the portfolio is gathered including observations of practice.
- > Once the portfolio is created, it is moderated and the Practice Supervisor is recognised as meeting the PQS.

The Implementation Pathway

There is no set organisational way to enable practice Supervisors to use the Supervisors' Pathway. Priorities and actions will depend on the organisational context. **Leaders can use the Implementation Pathway (Research in Practice 2021) to identify how they will embed the PQS in line with their organisational priorities.**

The Implementation Pathway helps organisations to move their implementation of the PQS along the continuum below.

The actions that an organisation takes to implement the PQS will be different depending on where they are already on the continuum and what else is happening for them. The Implementation Pathway offers a range of ideas and tools so that organisations can achieve a consistent outcome in a tailored way.

The principles of implementation for the PQS are similar to the principles of good supervision or good practice:

- > Equity and diversity – different approaches are needed for different organisations to achieve similar outcomes.
- > Strengths-based – implementation is about recognising good practice and enabling people to develop.
- > Community of Practice – implementation is supported by sharing ideas and learning.

The Pathway sets out outcomes for each step:

- > **Awareness**
Ensure stakeholders are aware of what the PQS is.
- > **Understanding**
Ensure stakeholders are aware of why the PQS matters.
- > **Preparation**
Identify priorities for supporting supervision and for PQS implementation.
- > **Initial action**
Begin to take actions to support supervision and to implement the PQS.
- > **Full implementation**
Build on initial actions to develop a culture of excellent supervision and wide implementation of the PQS.

The Pathway provides ideas and resources to support each step of implementation. Each step has a Reflective Question to help identify priorities and an Action Plan to capture these.

Examples of implementation

Local authorities identified priorities for implementation across two areas:

1) Foundational improvements in supervision, including:

- > Communication from leadership about the importance of supervision.
- > Review of the supervision policy.
- > Introducing supervision agreements.
- > Updating agendas and recording of supervision.
- > Strengthening audit or evaluation of supervision.
- > Identifying specific tools to use in supervision for example to promote resilience, support critical reflection, aid decision making or manage performance.
- > Learning and development sessions or programmes for supervisors and supervisees.

2) Implementing the PQS, including:

- > Sharing the PQS with supervisors.
- > Identifying cohorts of Practice Supervisors and Mentors.
- > Introducing the PQS self-assessment as part of appraisal.
- > Embedding elements of the PQS in policies, procedures and job descriptions.

Key messages

Supervision is an essential part of developing and ensuring good practice, supporting practitioners, and aligning practice with the organisation's vision. It influences the outcomes for adults and carers.

Supervisors need to be able to provide good quality, reliable supervision to their supervisees. This requires organisational support and input.

The PQS sets the standard for good supervision. It describes good supervision by social workers for social workers but is applicable to other roles.

Your organisation can use the PQS to develop, recognise and support your Practice Supervisors.

The Implementation Pathway helps you to implement the PQS in the way that best supports your organisation's aims and priorities.

Implementing the PQS is not a luxury. It is an integral part of supporting capable Practice Supervisors to deliver consistent supervision for better outcomes.

Implementing the PQS will help your organisation to support, develop and retain Practice Supervisors at a time when they are under great pressure. It is both ethical and effective to implement the PQS.



Reflective questions

- > How does supervision support our organisation's aims, including well-being and retention of staff, and practice priorities such as strengths-based practice?
- > How can we link supervision to our vision and strategic priorities?
- > What do we know about the quality, consistency and impact of supervision in our organisation?
- > Who can tell us more?
- > What is the experience of Practice Supervisors in our organisation?
- > How able are they to give good quality supervision?
- > What would make the biggest difference to supervision in our organisation?
- > How can the PQS help us?
- > What are our first steps for implementing the PQS?
- > How can we use the Implementation Pathway to help us?



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Author:

Geraldine Nosowska

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Silvia Jansen

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Research in Practice

The Granary, Dartington Hall

Totnes, Devon, TQ9 6EE

tel: 01803 869 753

email: ask@researchinpractice.org.uk

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