



IASW

Irish Association of Social Workers
Cumann na hÉireann um Oibrithe Sóisialta

Promoting Quality Professional Supervision

IASW Standards for Social Workers

Working Document

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Part 1: An Overview of Professional Social Work Supervision

1.1 Background and Context

Supervision as a professional practice is well embedded in social work and has been integral to the development of the profession (Kadushin, 1992; Hanlon, 2007; Morrison & Wonnacott, 2000; Bruce & Austin, 2000; Taylor, 2014; Tsui, 2005; O' Donoghue & Tsui, 2013; Halton et al, 2014). The IASW, similar to Laming (2003), views supervision as the cornerstone of safe, high quality social work practice. Supervision is seen as essential for both practitioners and managers as a way of managing casework and clinical issues, caseload management, continuous professional development and managing the emotional impact of the work (Hanlon, 2009).

In recent times, the IASW has received numerous queries from members seeking guidance in relation to professional supervision, in part due to the impact of changing organisational structures and contexts. Many queries related to the implications of CORU registration for professional supervision. A common theme to emerge was the high value placed on effective professional supervision and the need for standards to promote best practice. Some of the identified needs have been met with a range of responses from the IASW including:

1. Developing and circulating an information leaflet entitled "Coru Registration and Professional Supervision: Information for IASW Members".
2. Advocating for reporting and governance structures to facilitate social work line management supervision overseen by a Principal Social Worker within each clinical area of practice.
3. Revising and re-circulating the IASW CPD Policy and related resources to members in early 2016. Professional supervision is a key focus of the reviewed policy, and learning through supervision a core element of CPD.
4. Updating the "IASW Guidance for Private Supervision".

Given the acknowledged significance of supervision for safe, high quality service provision (HSE, 2015) and in response to the needs and requests of members, the IASW has developed this standards document to promote best practice and strengthen standards of professional supervision for all professionally qualified social workers.

Standards and policy publications from the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom, United States, Australia and New Zealand were consulted during the drafting of the document. "Supervision Standards - 2014" published by the Australian Association of Social Workers emerged as a robust, coherent, comprehensive and succinct framework and was heavily relied up for drafting parts 2 & 3 of this document, Standards for Supervisors and Standards for Supervisees. As the first professional supervision standards published by the IASW, this publication will be used as a foundation for further development and continuous improvement in the pursuit of excellence in social work supervision within the evolving Irish context. All feedback in relation to this publication is welcomed and it will be formally reviewed in June 2018.

This document was drafted by the Vice-Chair of the IASW, Aisling Coffey and the IASW CPD sub-committee, Frank Browne and Clíona Murphy. The draft was reviewed by IASW members, Elizabeth Hamilton, Carmel Halton, Majella Hickey, Nora Mannion and Fidelma Beirne, in the capacity of 'critical friends' before being circulated to Board and Council for further feedback. The IASW Board signed off on the document in May 2016. To make it easier for members to use this document, supervision resources from the IASW CPD Folder have been included as appendices.

1.2 Social Work Values

As a regulated profession, social workers are required to comply with the CORU "Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics for Social Workers" (SWRB, 2011). Section 22 of the Code addressed the supervision expectations for the profession and states:

"You should seek and engage in supervision in professional practice on an on-going and regular basis".

"You must seek support and assistance from your employer if you do not feel competent to carry out any aspect of your work or if you are unsure how to proceed in a work matter". (SWRB, 2011: 11)

Professional supervision, as an integral part of professional practice, requires social workers to comply with the Code when engaging in supervisory processes. Therefore the values informing these standards are consistent with the Code and are as follows:

- 1) Respect for the inherent dignity and worth of persons
- 2) Pursuit of social justice
- 3) Integrity of professional practice
- 4) Confidentiality in practice
- 5) Competence in practice

1.3 Definition of Supervision

The definition of supervision chosen by the IASW for this standards document is as follows:

"a process in which one worker is given responsibility to work with another worker(s) in order to meet certain organisational, professional and personal objectives. These objectives are competent, accountable performance, continuing professional development and personal support" (Harries, 1987)

This commonly cited definition is used by two statutory agencies employing social workers, the Child and Family Agency (Child & Family Support Agency (CFSA), 2013: 4) and the Probation Service (2014:5), as well as by prominent writer on staff supervision within social work, Tony Morrison (2005; 2009; Morrison et al, 2009; Morrison & Wonnacott, 2010).

More recently CORU has defined supervision as "*an interactive process between two or more practitioners within a safe/supportive environment, designed to enable a continuum of reflective critical analysis of care, to ensure quality health and social care services*" (SWRB, 2015: 38), placing a key emphasis on the critical reflective component integral to supervision. The key role of reflection within supervision is discussed in Section 1.5.

1.4 Purpose and Functions of Supervision

The purpose or aim of supervision is to ensure the provision of safe, quality services, delivered by employees who are supported, engaged and participate in continuous professional development (HSE, 2015). CORU's definition similarly highlights the key role of supervision in ensuring the provision of quality health and social care services.

Tony Morrison (2005) highlights the four functions of supervision as:

1. Competent, accountable performance (managerial function)
2. Continuing professional development (developmental / formative function)
3. Personal support (supportive/restorative function)
4. Engaging the individual with the organisation (mediation function).

The role of the social work supervisor is to integrate and balance these four functions within supervision. Please refer to appendix 1 for further elaboration on the four functions of supervision.

1.5 Reflective Practice

Reflective practice was developed in response to the complexity of social work practice and the consequential demands placed on professionals who work in uncertain, unpredictable and contested professional environments (Ruch, 2007). Reflection is of fundamental importance to ensure that social workers have the necessary knowledge and skills to understand such complex situations, engage in critical thinking and provide effective intervention (Wilson, 2011; Brandon et al, 2008; Morrison, 2005). CORU have similarly articulated the connection between reflective critical analysis and ensuring the provision and maintenance of quality health and social care services (SWRB, 2015), deeming reflective practice to be one of the "defining characteristics of professional practice" (SWRB, 2015: 39).

Boud et al (1985: 19) define reflective practice as the "*intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understanding and appreciation*". More recently, CORU defines it as "*the engagement of the practitioner in analysis of experiences leading to new insights into him/herself and/or his/her practice*" (SWRB, 2015: 39). These definitions both place emphasis on the role that critical reflection on experience plays in practitioner learning and development and the promotion of quality practice.

While social workers can engage in reflective practice in a variety of contexts, a number of national and international standards and policy documents view supervision as a key mechanism through which workers develop the skills and capacity for reflective practice (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, 2015; Australian Association of Social Workers, 2014; Probation Service, 2014; CFSA, 2013; Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 2008).

However despite the acknowledged importance of, and centrality of reflective practice to social work (SWRB, 2015; Durville et al, 2013; Ixer, 2010; Ruch, 2007), there is evidence that social workers are not getting the opportunity to reflect on their practice and that supervision can be overly managerial and prescriptive, driven by statutory requirements and risk management (Hanlon, 2007; Morrison & Wonnacott, 2010; Noble & Irwin, 2009; Beddoe, 2009; Beddoe, 2010; Halton et al, 2014).

Reflective practice within supervision provides an important forum for engaging in critical inquiry, a necessary requirement to ensure best practice in complex, risky and unpredictable circumstances (Beddoe, 2010; Ruch, 2007; Ixer, 2010). Reflective practice within supervision can help to preserve practitioner self-confidence in the face of uncertainty, conflict and competing interests (Beddoe, 2010). Uncertainty is inherent in social work practice and effective practice is linked to enhancing practitioner capability for "wise-reasoning" rather than attaining formal knowledge alone. By developing skills of critical reflection a social worker will be better prepared to defend external challenge of their judgements (Ixer, 2010).

1.6 Regulatory and Agency Requirements

As a regulated profession, social workers are legally obliged to *"seek and engage in supervision in professional practice on an on-going and regular basis"* (SWRB, 2011: 11), thereby making engagement in supervision a legal requirement for all registered social workers regardless of their agency setting. Additionally CORU lists supervision as a potential learning activity for which registered social workers can gain CPD credits (SWRB, 2015).

Many agencies employing social workers provide policy and / or guidance around professional supervision. The three largest employers of social workers in the Republic of Ireland, the Child and Family Agency, the Probation Service and the HSE have published policy and guidance documents.

There are robust supervision guidelines, standards and policies within the Child and Family Agency. Both "Children First: National Guidance for the Protection & Welfare of Children" (Department of Children & Youth Affairs, 2011) and Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) "National Standards for the Protection and Welfare of Children for Health Service Executive Children and Family Services" (HIQA, 2012) highlight the requirement for social work supervision. In 2013 the Child & Family Agency published a staff supervision policy and standards document that made supervision mandatory and sought to ensure consistency and effectiveness in supervisory processes and practices (CFSA, 2013).

The Probation Service similarly has a "Staff Supervision Policy" (2014) which makes supervision mandatory for social workers employed by the Service.

The HSE, which employs social workers in medical, disability, mental health, primary care and safeguarding vulnerable adults services, does not have a current policy on social work supervision but published the "HSE/Public Sector Guidance Document on Supervision for Health and Social Care Professionals (HSCPs) in 2015 (HSE, 2015). This guidance document acknowledged the role that supervision plays in the provision of safe, quality services, but did not make the practice mandatory for HSCPs.

1.7 Supervisory Arrangements in Different Social Work Settings

While social work had a long history of supervision being provided by the line manager and within the agency, supervisory arrangements for social workers in the Republic of Ireland and internationally have become varied. While supervision remains a line management function within the Child and Family Agency (CFSA, 2013) and the Probation Service (2014), the HSE (2015) identifies a number of different approaches to supervision that are commonly used across various healthcare professions, including:

- Professional supervision
- Clinical supervision
- Line manager supervision
- Peer supervision
- Group supervision

While all forms of supervision hold value, the IASW recommendation is that social workers have access to individual line management supervision, provided by a suitably trained and experienced social work supervisor. Section 2.3 outlines the standard in relation to supervisor training and continuing professional development. Where line management supervision is not possible, the IASW recommends that social workers seek and engage in other approaches to supervision to meet their needs and ensure their continuous professional development.

Examples of alternatives to individual line management supervision include:

- Principal Social Workers engaging in peer supervision to address their needs.
- Social workers accessing clinical supervision from a trained and experienced supervisor, who is not their line manager.

Given the acknowledged significance of social work supervision to safe, high quality service provision, the IASW believe there is an onus on the employing organisation to facilitate supervision.

The IASW also acknowledges the value of unplanned supervisory activities such as receiving advice by telephone and debriefing after a critical incident. Where decisions are made or actions planned in relation to a service-user during an unplanned supervisory process, these decisions and / or actions must be recorded similar to recording formal supervision.

1.8 Frequency and Duration of Supervision

The IASW position is aligned with that of the Child & Family Agency (CFSA, 2013) in recommending that as a minimum standard social workers receive planned supervision every four to six weeks for 1.5 hours - 2 hours. For social workers in their first year of practice, the IASW recommends a minimum of supervision fortnightly for the first three months and every four weeks for the remainder of the probationary period.

1.9 Virtual Supervision

Virtual supervision refers to any supervision arrangements that occur when the supervisors and supervisees are in separate locations and utilise an electronic means to communicate, such as email, telephone, and teleconference in the case of group supervision (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, 2015).

Virtual Supervision can be a practical way for supervision to occur in a timely manner to address specific issues. The IASW recommends that Virtual Supervision should not be the sole method for conducting supervision, but should be an additional means to complement face to face supervision.

Virtual supervision is recorded in the same manner as face to face supervision and the IASW recommends that supervisors and supervisees adhere to all work place communication and confidentiality policies and so ensure that all reasonable precautions are in place to ensure the privacy of communications.

Part 2: Standards for Supervisors

As previously referenced, "Supervision Standards - 2014" published by the Australian Association of Social Workers was heavily relied on for drafting Parts 2 & 3 of this document, Standards for Supervisors and Standards for Supervisees.

2.1 Professional Ethical Responsibilities

As referenced in Section 1.2, supervisors must uphold their professional ethical responsibilities when engaging in the supervisory relationship.

This standard requires that:

- Supervisors model and ensure clear professional boundaries with supervisees.
- Supervisors do not engage in supervision of practitioners where close personal, social, business, therapeutic or sexual relationships are contemplated or have existed.
- Supervisors maintain the confidentiality of the supervisees, including client and organisational information discussed in supervision, unless circumstances arise which limit such confidentiality. Such circumstances include, but are not limited to, potential or actual risk of harm, legal and ethical obligations to disclose information.
- Supervisors negotiate with supervisees and management in the employing organisation on limits to confidentiality that will exist in the supervisory relationship, in line with requirements in the "Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics for Social Workers" (SWRB, 2011), legislation and organisational policies.
- Supervisors manage any suspected or actual misconduct or unethical behaviour of supervisees by raising these matters in the first instance with supervisees, where appropriate, to seek a resolution. Where it is not appropriate to raise the issue directly with the supervisee, or if the issue is not resolved after discussion with the supervisee, supervisors decide if the matter needs to be reported to an appropriate person, in line with the supervision contract, organisational policy and / or the CORU "Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics for Social Workers" (SWRB, 2011). It is important for supervisors to also seek their own professional supervision in relation to this matter.

2.2 Contracts and Recording

Supervisors establish a written supervision contract and maintain a record of all supervision sessions for the duration of the supervisory relationship. Please see appendices 2 & 3 for templates of a supervision contract and supervision record. Soft copies of both documents are also available to members from the IASW CPD resources section of www.iasw.ie.

This standard requires that:

- A supervision contract is negotiated between the supervisor and supervisee, and management in the employing organisation if appropriate, and finalised within the first three supervision sessions.

- The IASW recommends that the supervision contract includes:
 - Mandate for supervision.
 - Structures agreed between supervisor and supervisee including frequency, length, location, timeframes for contract reviews, recording of sessions and storing of supervision records.
 - Focus of supervision.
 - Expectations of the process including wishes, contributions and responsibilities of supervisor and supervisee.
 - How difficulties arising when working together in supervision will be managed.

2.3 Training and Continuing Professional Development

Supervisors are appropriately trained and experienced to provide supervision and demonstrate a commitment to professional practice and to maintaining up-to-date professional knowledge.

This standard requires that:

- Supervisors have professional qualifications in social work recognised by CORU and have an up to date registration with CORU.
- Supervisors are / have been employed at a Senior Social Worker / Team Leader or Principal Social Worker grade, have a minimum of 3 years post qualifying experience and possess the knowledge and skills to assist others in their learning.
- Supervisors have a clear understanding of the contemporary professional and practice issues, legislation and policy relating to the supervisee's field of practice.
- Supervisors engage in continuing professional development for the provision of professional supervision and undertake relevant continuing professional development to ensure up to date knowledge in the relevant fields of practice.
- Supervisors engage in their own professional supervision as part of their commitment to professional practice.

2.4 Supervisory Relationship

Supervisors manage the dynamics of a supervisory relationship appropriately

This standard requires that:

- Supervisors remain aware of the power differential within a supervisory relationship and manage this in an honest and respectful way by encouraging open feedback from supervisees within a supportive and trusting relationship.
- Supervisors ensure that supervision sessions are scheduled and that they attend all sessions scheduled with their supervisees. A time and place that is free of interruptions is set aside for supervision.
- Supervisors work to resolve any conflict that might arise in the supervisory relationship or within a group supervision setting.

2.5 Purpose and Functions of Supervision

Supervisors facilitate a process designed to achieve the purpose and functions of supervision, as outlined in Section 1.4.

This standard requires that:

- Supervisors recognise their own supervisory style and bias and work to ensure they engage in a balanced way with all of the four functions of supervision.
- Supervisors work with supervisees to identify learning needs and professional goals and how these might be addressed through supervision.
- Supervisors facilitate a learning process that supports practitioners to critically reflect on their practice and identify ways to enhance their positive impact for service users. This includes the application of research findings, theoretical perspectives, social work methods and working through ethical issues or dilemmas.
- Supervisors encourage supervisees to discuss work/practice issues of concern, offering support and guidance to resolve these issues.
- Supervisors assist supervisees to identify circumstances and access resources when external assistance with personal matters may be required, particularly when these issues interfere with work practice.
- Supervisors work with supervisees to understand their practice within the broader goals and context of their employing organisation, field of practice and policy, legislative, social, economic and political environment.
- Supervisors engage with supervisees to examine their roles and responsibilities in their particular practice setting, their accountability to service users and their employer, and how this accountability can be enhanced.
- Supervisors promote anti-discriminatory practice and an understanding of cultural diversity.

Part 3: Standards for Supervisees

3.1 Professional Ethical Responsibilities

As referenced in Section 1.2, supervisees must uphold their professional ethical responsibilities when engaging in the supervisory relationship

This standard requires that:

- Supervisees maintain confidentiality and uphold the privacy of service-users and colleagues when engaging in individual, group or peer supervision, except where legislation and / or organisational policy require and / or permit the sharing of information with a supervisor
- Supervisees maintain clear professional boundaries at all times when engaging in a supervisory relationship.
- Supervisees will remain open to receiving respectful developmental feedback on their practice or behaviour.

3.2 Active Participation in Supervision

Supervisees actively participate in the supervisory process

This standard requires that:

- Aligned to the "Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics for Social Workers" (SWRB, 2011) supervisees engage in supervision in professional practice and seek such supervision if it is not available in the workplace.
- Supervisees attend all scheduled supervision meetings.
- Supervisees seek and respond openly to feedback and actively contribute to the agenda for supervision sessions.
- Supervisees come prepared for supervision sessions by compiling records and evidence relating to practice such as case studies, feedback or research literature to support the reflective learning process.
- In cases where the supervisee believes that the IASW Supervision Standards or their learning needs are not being met, they take responsibility for alerting their supervisor / line manager as a means of addressing this issue in the first instance. If the matter is not successfully resolved the supervisee should inform the relevant authority as referred to in their supervision contract.

3.3 Establishing a Relevant Supervisory Process

Supervisees take an active role in establishing supervisory processes that meet their needs

This standard requires that:

- Supervisees contribute to the maintenance of the supervisory relationship and use supervision to critically reflect on their practice.
- Supervisees use supervision to identify learning and continuing professional development needs, to set work and career goals and to plan for how these needs and goals will be addressed, either within the supervisory context or through other means.
- Supervisees use supervision to review current work load and responsibilities, monitor accountability and competence in their practice and discuss any organisational requirements in relation to their work role.
- Supervisees discuss and reflect on their relationship with their organisation, field of practice and profession, identifying how their role relates to broader goals, standards, legislation, policies and ways to engage more fully with these requirements.

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Appendix 1: Tony Morrison's (2005) Functions of Supervision

Morrison (2005) outlines four functions of supervision. These are:

1. The Management Function which aims to ensure:

- Overall quality of the employee's performance.
- Agency policies and procedures are followed.
- Employee understands his or her role and responsibilities.
- The purpose of supervision is clear.
- Work is reviewed regularly
- Records are maintained

2. The Development Function which aims to develop:

- The employee's professional competence
- An understanding and assessment of the employee's theoretical, skill, knowledge and value base.
- An understanding of the employee's training and development needs.
- The employee's ability to reflect on his or her work.
- An open and honest relationship where both parties give constructive feedback.

3. The Support Function aims to:

- Validate the employee both as a professional and as a person.
- Create a safe environment for the employee to look at his or her practice and its impact on him or her.
- Debrief employees and allow them to express feelings.
- Monitor the overall health and emotional functioning of the employee especially with regard to stress.
- Help the employee reflect on difficulties in colleague relationships and assist in resolving conflict.
- Clarify when the employee should be advised to seek external counselling.

4. The Mediation Function aims to:

- Negotiate and clarify the team's role and responsibilities.
- Represent employees' needs to higher management.
- Clarify or contribute to policy formation.
- Consult employees about organisational developments.
- Involve employees in decision making.
- Deal sensitively but clearly with complaints about employees.

Appendix 2: IASW Supervision Contract Template

Line Manager Signature	_____ _____
Supervisee Signature	_____ _____
Date for review	__ / __ / ____

1. The mandate for supervision

The IASW recommends that all social workers have regular supervision, ideally at monthly intervals. Key functions of the supervision process include;

- a) To ensure that the supervisee carries out his/her job responsibilities to the organisation's required standards
- b) To ensure that the supervisee understands their roles and responsibilities (supervisee job description should be available as a basis for this discussion)
- c) To assist with the professional development of the supervisee
- d) To be a primary source of support for the supervisee recognising the various demands of the job and mediate on his or her behalf when necessary
- e) To provide both regular and constructive feedback to the supervisee on their performance.

2. The structure we have agreed on is as follows:

a) Frequency of session:
b) Length of each session:
c) Location of session:
d) Recording of session will be by:

e) Supervision records will be stored by:
f) How we will agree the agenda:

3. The focus of supervision should be based on:

- a) Matters the supervisee wishes to include
- b) Matters arising from previous supervisory sessions
- c) Reviewing the supervisee's work through discussions, reports and observations
- d) Objective feedback on work undertaken
- e) Agreeing future action plans and agreeing who is doing what
- f) Discussion of the development of supervisee's skills, knowledge and value base
- g) Time for supervisee to reflect on his or her experience of and feelings about work
- h) Time for supervisee to identify new and enhanced learning in the preceding time period arising from both planned and unplanned learning opportunities and to demonstrate same in CPD portfolio
- i) Opportunity for supervisee to give feedback on his or her experience of and expectation of supervision

4. Expectations: the process of supervision

Following the preparatory discussion about supervision these are the ways we have agreed to work together in order to get the most out of supervision:

a) What I want from you as my supervisor:
b) What I am willing to contribute as a supervisee:

c) What I want from you as the supervisee:

d) What I am willing to contribute as the supervisor:

e) The things I have responsibility as the supervisor for:

f) The things I have responsibility as the supervisee for:

g) What we will do if there are difficulties working together:

Appendix 3: IASW Supervision Record Template

Name of Supervisee:	Date of Session:
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Proposed agenda items to be discussed: -

Agenda Items	Summary of Actions / Notes	By Whom & When
		
		
		
		
		
		
		
		
		
		
		
Agreed by Supervisor	Agreed by Supervisee	Date Next Supervision

**Record of Service-User Discussion and
Decision Making in Supervision**

Where a supervisee holds a caseload, it is their responsibility to record any case-related decisions made or actions agreed within supervision on the service-user's file. This form can be used to record such discussion and decision making.

Service User: _____

Issues Discussed
Decisions Made and Actions Agreed

Signed Supervisor: _____

Signed Supervisee: _____

Date: _____