

# Providing Supervision for UTAS Social Work Students on Placement



Welcome to the supervisory relationship on placement. The UTAS Field Education Manual provides some additional information about student supervision, including outlining the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) requirement of 1.5 hours of social work supervision per 5 days of placement.

The purpose of supervision is to promote competent independent practice to a high standard. Supervision is believed to be most effective

when the process is valued by both the supervisor and the supervisee; when it is prioritised and valued by all parties involved; and, where the needs of the supervisee as an adult learner are acknowledged (AASW, 2010: 3).

“Supervision is regular, uninterrupted time for facilitated, in-depth reflection on practice that enables the supervisee to achieve, sustain, and creatively develop a high quality of practice through the means of focused support and development.”

Driscoll & O’Sullivan (2007:14)

Within the field education context, supervision is an important means for maintaining and enhancing professional ethics and standards of practice. It is the role of the field educator to ensure that students are informed about the purpose and functions of supervision, and the importance of reflective practice and critical thinking for ongoing practice development.

The AASW provides the following documents to guide the practice of social work supervision:

- AASW Practice Standards for Social Workers – Supervision (2000): <http://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/18>
- AASW Practice Standards (2013): <http://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/4551>
- AASW Education and Accreditation Standards 2012: <http://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/3550>

## Functions of Supervision

There are many recognised models and approaches to supervision. Most models of supervision typically propose functions or tasks of supervision. The administrative, educative and supportive functions described by Kadushin, 1976, are those accepted by the AASW (2010).

### **Administrative**

The Administrative function relates to the student and supervisor's administrative or managerial practice related to policies, procedures, mandates, ethics and practice standards established by the organisation, legislative requirements and regulatory or accrediting bodies. Students can be assisted to manage the quality and quantity of their placement activities.

### **Educative**

The Educative function of supervision attends to the process of the student developing their professional knowledge and skills, through being appropriately supported and resourced by their supervisor. Students can be assisted to learn from their practice, the principles underpinning it, and to make links between theories and the practice of social work within the agency.

### **Supportive**

The Supportive function of supervision relates to the student being able to deal with work induced stressors, and with 'developing attitudes and feelings conducive to maximum job performance' (AASW, 2010: 3). The nature of the support functions of supervision are largely determined by the personal relationship between the supervisor and supervisee and the work context.

## **The Supervisory Relationship**

A healthy supervisory relationship will incorporate all three of the functions described above, including managing the possible conflicts between them. Where a positive supervisory relationship is built on mutual respect and trust, tensions between the functions of supervision can be appropriately addressed and managed.

The supervisory relationship can be enhanced when the supervisor and student clarify their expectations and boundaries early in the placement period. Supervision contracts can help, as can paying attention to length, frequency, formal/informal focus, and planned/ad hoc nature of supervision.

The use of power, personal differences, styles of supervision, responses to difficulties, how feedback is given and received, and the balance between the functions of supervision have all been shown to influence the development of the supervisory relationship (Cleak & Wilson, 2007:59). The field educator and student are encouraged to discuss these early in the placement. The way power is used or avoided will impact on the style of relationship between supervisor and student. Cleak & Wilson describe supervisory styles broadly as *authoritative or facilitative*:

### **Authoritative styles are:**

- *Prescriptive*: supervisors provide advice and direction explicitly for the student
- *Informative*: supervisors provide information and share knowledge with the student
- *Confrontational*: supervisors provide clear, direct feedback about behaviour and challenge beliefs and attitudes.

**Facilitative styles** are:

- *Cathartic: supervisor assists the student to release tensions and emotions*
- *Reflective: supervisor encourages the student to be reflective and self- directed*
- *Supportive: supervisor validates the students’ values and self-worth.*

The style of the supervisory relationship may change over time and is dependent on the different stages of placement and subsequent stage of development of the relationship, opportunities available, the tasks and issues at hand, and the balance between the functions of supervision.

Another model of supervision is the PASE Model (©2013) developed by Tracey Harris, Amovita Consulting, which incorporates an integrated model of supervision coupled with the appropriate supervisory style.

Table 1. Summary of the PASE Model of Supervision (©2013)

“PASE”	FOCUS	SUPERVISOR STYLE
<b>(P) Practice</b>	Discussion is focused on the professional in their role & practice context. Topics may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional practice frameworks</li> <li>• Models, Approaches, Theories</li> <li>• Critical reflection/ Observational Analysis</li> <li>• Ethics &amp; ethical dilemmas</li> <li>• Language Framework</li> <li>• Client Cases</li> <li>• Reporting</li> <li>• Evaluation</li> <li>• Professional Identity</li> </ul>	<b>Reflective</b> – it is the supervisor’s role to assist the supervisee to think about their practice; why they do what they do; to consider how their beliefs and values impact on their work; and to link theories with their practice.
<b>(A) Administration</b>	Discussion is focused on the requirements of the <b>agency</b> within the context of the supervisee’s role. Topics may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workload/work flow issues</li> <li>• Reporting &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>• Performance Appraisal</li> <li>• Strategic Planning &amp; Resourcing Funding/Service agreements</li> <li>• Compliance &amp; Policy</li> <li>• Client Satisfaction</li> <li>• KPI’s &amp; Professional Development</li> <li>• Business &amp; Staff Planning</li> </ul>	<b>Directive</b> – it is the supervisor’s role to be focused on achieving outcomes, to provide guidance and direction, and to be actively involved in decisions made.

**(S)  
Support**

Discussion is focused on **supporting** the person as the professional, to minimise or resolve stressors, to debrief, and ensure the person is validated & appreciated for the work they perform.

Topics may include:

- Self care
- Personal vs professional
- Team functioning & morale
- Debriefing
- Work/life balance
- Health & wellbeing
- Stress, job & Role Satisfaction
- Workplace relationships
- Resilience
- Vulnerabilities
- Encouragement
- Validation
- Refuelling

**Facilitative** – it is the supervisor’s role to guide the discussion from a supportive position that allows the supervisee to draw their own conclusions and make their own decisions.

**(E)  
Educational**

Discussion is focused on the **learning and professional development** needs of the supervisee.

Topics may include:

- Professional excellence
- Professional development
- Training needs & gaps
- Qualifications
- Competencies
- Transfer of knowledge & information
- Research & evidence Base for practice
- Career planning

**Developmental** – the supervisor provides a scaffolded approach through which the supervisee can grow & learn in the role, & plan for the future.

## Types of Supervision

Field educators must be qualified social workers eligible for full membership of the AASW, with a minimum of two years full time post-qualifying practice experience, or its part-time equivalent in order to supervise a student. It is desirable for field educators to demonstrate a commitment to continuing professional education and an interest in developing social work knowledge and skills (ASWEAS Guideline 1.2, 2012:5).

While the **one-to-one style** of supervision sessions remains the most popular method of engaging in supervision, it can be less efficient from an organisational perspective, and may limit students' exposure to different practice styles and theories (Cleak & Wilson, 2007:68).

The use of supervision to assist students in the integration of theory and practice is essential. Supervision is the vehicle by which the student learns the theory underpinning the agency's mandate and principles, and integrates the theories learnt during the social work course into practice within the agency context. Both formal and informal supervision contribute to the overall development of the supervisory relationship and have an impact on the student's learning throughout the placement.

**Informal supervision** is one way that supervisors and students can attend to the immediate need for checking on processes, eliciting support or obtaining necessary information (Cleak & Wilson, 2007:55). It is a responsive form of supervision that is usually unplanned and occurs more often at the commencement of placement.

**Formal supervision** is a planned, purposive and goal-directed process. A formal supervision contract that establishes the terms of the supervision, including the frequency and duration of sessions is ideal. Setting an agenda and planning material to be discussed will ensure the student receives the best possible use of the time available. Keeping a summarised record of sessions will ensure the student's learning can be mapped over time; enhances transparency between student and supervisor; and can be used as a concrete record for assessment documentation requirements (Cleak & Wilson, 2007:65).

**Co-Supervision** is increasingly recognised as an efficient method of providing student placements that also enables the student to draw on the respective expertise of the field educators and/or task supervisors involved. Students may be placed with two field educators, who are both qualified social workers, also known as co-field educators. Co-field educators may or may not work within the same area of the organisation, or indeed, the same organisation. Students may also be placed with a field educator and a task supervisor, who is a practitioner with known expertise in an area but who does not have social work qualifications (Bowles, Collingridge, McKinnon, Agllias, Dawood, Irwin, Maywald, Noble, O'Sullivan, Zubrzycki, 2010: 36). The field educator and task supervisor may or may not work within the same organisation.

**External supervision** requires a formal arrangement between the placement agency and the university for a social work qualified practitioner to provide the supervision requirements for a student throughout the placement. An external supervisor's services are usually contracted to provide the student with supervision who is undertaking a placement within an agency where a qualified social worker is not available to provide the AASW standard of

supervision. The external supervisor undertakes the same tasks as a field educator apart from day to day management, task allocation and accountability to the agency. It is the role of the external supervisor to assist the student to link practice to social work theory, values, principles and ethics, and examining practice skills and methods.

**Task Supervision** is a form of supervision provided in placements where students undertake a professional experience placement in a setting where an on-site social work field educator may not be present, and where social work services may/may not be routinely provided, but where there may be potential for a social work role to emerge. The task supervisor is responsible for providing the learning opportunities for the student(s) on a day to day basis, and may be from a different occupational background. A qualified social work field educator, must provide the AASW standard of supervision, and may come from a different area within the agency, from a different agency, or is arranged by the University.

**Group Supervision** may be used during field placements to compliment individual one-to-one supervision sessions. For students on placement it is recommended that at least half of the supervision provided is formal one-to-one supervision. Where group supervision is used it is recommended that there is a documented agreement between the facilitator and participants as to the purpose, goals, frequency, duration, confidentiality, reporting requirements, and the roles and responsibilities of the participants, e.g. rotating chairperson, minute taker, and the like.

Please refer to the Models of Social Work Student Placements included elsewhere on the website for further information about placement models.

### Process of Supervision

Regularly scheduled, uninterrupted supervision sessions that are structured, recorded purposeful, and goal-oriented are likely to produce the best outcomes for students during their placement. The setting of an agenda or prioritising topics for discussion will assist both student and field educator to focus on the most pressing issues or concerns for the student, and attend to their learning requirements. The student's future learning goals should also be a focus of the discussion. Similarly, the student should be provided with feedback about their supervised practice to date (AASW, 2014:5). Cleak & Wilson suggest the following format for preparing for supervision:

- 'students propose an agenda and give it to their supervisors two days before the session.
- Students give their journal, process records and other relevant material to the supervisor two days beforehand, so that key issues and concerns can be highlighted.
- Students and supervisors use the last five minutes of each supervision session to set an agenda for the next session' (2007:65).

Recording supervision sessions may seem a time-consuming task by some, however the benefits of doing so can be great learning for the student, and can provide valuable concrete evidence for both student and field educator should problematic issues arise during the placement. Documentation of supervision sessions may assist in ensuring feedback is provided transparently; the field educator models appropriate record keeping

strategies for the student; and, the records can be used as examples of discussions or work completed for evaluation documentation purposes.

The following templates are provided to assist your supervisory processes:

- *Sample Individual Supervision Contract*
- *Sample Student Supervision Agenda & Minutes Template*
- *Supervision Attendance Log*

## References:

AASW, (2012), *Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards*, AASW, Canberra. Available to download at: [Australian Social Work Education & Accreditation Standards \(ASWEAS\) \(2012\)](#)

AASW, (2000), *Practice Standards for Social Workers: Supervision*, AASW, Canberra. AASW, (2014), *DRAFT Supervision Standards*, AASW Canberra.

Amovita Consulting, (2013), *Professional Supervision – Providing an Integrated Learning Experience - unpublished workshop manual*, Amovita Consulting, Queensland.

Bowles, W., Collingridge, M., McKinnon, J., Agllias, K., Dawood, A., Irwin, J., Maywald, S., Noble, C., O’Sullivan, J., & Zubrzycki, J., (2010), *A Guide to Supervision in Social Work Field Education*, Revised Edn, Office for Learning & Teaching, Canberra, viewed 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 2013: <http://www.olt.gov.au/resource-social-work-supervision-guide-csu-2011>.

Cleak, H., & Wilson, J., (2007), *Making the Most of Field Placement*, 2nd edn., Thomson, Australia.

Driscoll, J., & O’Sullivan, J., (2007), The place of clinical supervision in modern healthcare, in Driscoll, J., ed., *Practising Clinical Supervision*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Elsevier, Edinburgh, pp.3-26.

## Useful Resources

Bowles, W., Collingridge, M., McKinnon, J., Agllias, K., Dawood, A., Irwin, J., Maywald, S., Noble, C., O’Sullivan, J., & Zubrzycki, J., (2010), *A Guide to Supervision in Social Work Field Education*, Revised Edn, Office for Learning & Teaching, Canberra, viewed 23rd December, 2013. Available for free download online at: <http://www.olt.gov.au/resource-social-work-supervision-guide-csu-2011>

Health Education & Training Institute, (2011), *The Superguide: A Handbook for Supervising Allied Health Professionals*, NSW Government, NSW. Available for free download at: <http://www.heti.nsw.gov.au/Global/HETI-Resources/allied-health/Superguide-May-2012.pdf>