



SUPERVISION POLICY SETTINGS: OPTIONS ANALYSIS

NAME	Supplementary Paper for ANZASW Supervision Strategy
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SUMMARY

This paper supplements our Supervision Strategy document. The supervision strategy seeks to strengthen social work supervision, which advances social work practice and fosters the continuous strengthening and transformation of our profession. It also seeks to address the current variability in experiences of social work supervision.

A key approach within the strategy is to recommend and advocate for policy changes to the Social Workers Registration Board's (SWRB) supervision expectations.

The SWRB is the regulator of social work in Aotearoa New Zealand and currently has expectations for social workers to engage in supervision. Reviewing these expectations and adopting them as a general condition relating to supervision, which would elevate them to the status of secondary legislation, is likely to better contribute towards the vision of the Supervision Strategy, as well as the purpose and function of the Social Workers' Registration Act 2003. This document provides an analysis of options proposed under the recommended policy changes section of the strategy.

What is the policy problem?

Social work supervision is central to providing and maintaining a high standard of social work practice (Bogo & McKnight, 2006; Davys & Beddoe, 2010). Is it one of the key pou for social workers in developing practice skills, enhancing knowledge, exploring values and ethics in decision-making, building cultural responsiveness and alleviating tension and work stresses (Beddoe & Davys, 2009; Munroe Review, 2011). Importantly, the unique aspect of supervision is the reflective space where this sharing and extension of self and practice serves to achieve better outcomes for clients and whānau. It is for this reason that supervision is essential in ensuring accountability for the social work profession to the wider communities we serve. Supervision can only achieve these outcomes when it is consistently high quality.

Policy settings for social work supervision in Aotearoa New Zealand are not new, in fact the current settings within both the SWRB's supervision expectations and ANZASW's supervision policy (2016) have remained largely unchanged for over 2 decades. However, compliance with these settings appears to be variable, despite many of them being well known by social workers. We have as part of this strategy development process, explored the reasons behind this variable compliance and have found that many drivers are not related to the policy settings and are in fact systemic issues, for example availability of supervisors, adequate funding of organisations to provide social work supervision, and increasing workload demands.

It is for this reason that we have taken a multi-pronged approach to addressing these drivers, informed by behaviour change theory (B-COM Model; Social Change UK, 2019) and public health practice (Tombor &

Michie, 2017) as behaviour change around supervision is the key goal for this mahi and relates to all stakeholders' behaviour in this space, be it social workers, supervisors, organisations and employers, funders (government agencies or elsewhere), professional bodies (including ANZASW), and SWRB as the regulator. Behaviour, according to the B-COM Model, consists of three components: capability, opportunity, and motivation:

- **Capability**, refers to whether individuals' have both the psychological capability, meaning the knowledge and mental resilience as well as they physical ability to engage in a behaviour.
- **Opportunity** refers to whether the external environment is conducive for the behaviour both physically and socially.
- **Motivation** references the internal cognitive and emotive processes which determine decision making around whether individuals will engage in behaviour.

Therefore, behaviour change interventions must target these components to effectively achieve and maintain behaviour change (Social Change UK, 2019). This explanation of individual behaviour can be positioned within a wider context of 'policy categories' to nudge behaviour change at a collective level (such as for public health interventions), as per the Behaviour Change Wheel, an extension of the B-COM model (Social Change UK, 2019).

Policy settings can be used as an effective external motivator for behaviour change when coupled with other interventions which improve capability to achieve the behaviour, alongside opportunities and internally motivating factors (Michie, van Stralen, & West, 2011; Ewert, 2020). The variability in the quality and experiences of social work supervision may be explained by the B-COM system theory, as external factors appear to significantly impact the implementation of supervision expectations. Systemic issues create barriers to accessing supervision, and thus motivation to adhere to supervision requirements dissipates. Currently, supervision expectations are not monitored by the regulator for compliance (however, professional development expectations are through a random audit). Monitoring may increase compliance with expectations as social workers are more frequently reminded of the expectations on them and are aware non-compliance could potentially result in disciplinary action by the regulatory body, resulting in possible consequences for their career.

We hope that clarifying and enforcing the SWRB expectations for supervision will create a greater understanding of and motivating incentive for social workers and organisations to engage in social work supervision which leads to whole of sector change. The specifics of these expectations, or policy settings, aims to achieve minimum requirements for supervision practice which reflects the purposes set out in the Supervision Strategy. These minimum requirements will be supported by activities related to awareness raising, capacity building, and relationship and advocacy approaches as identified within the strategy. These additional approaches aspire to create an environment where best practice in social work supervision can be achieved and maintained.

What is the objective sought?

The overarching objective in having policy settings around supervision, is to improve the quality and consistency of social work supervision via measurable and enforceable expectations to ensure compliance across the profession. As a regulatory mechanism, supervision policy settings contribute to the purposes of the Social Workers Registration Act 2003, which include:

- Protection of the safety of the public through ensuring social workers are competent to practice and accountable for the way in which they practice.¹
- Enhancing the professionalism of social workers.²

¹ s3(a), Social Workers Registration Act 2003

² s3(d), Social Workers Registration Act 2003

The supervision policy settings ensure social workers engage in regular supervision, which achieves the purposes of social work supervision. The purposes of social work supervision are to:

- Ensure social work practice and supervision is grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi and cultural humility is demonstrated towards those of a different cultural background, especially Māori and Pasifika.
- Focus on the wellbeing and safety of all whom social workers interact, including whānau, hapū, iwi, communities, and others (as relevant to the social workers' practice setting).
- Support and uphold ethical social work best practice, including the integration of human rights and social justice, through critically reflective conversations.
- Safely navigate the intersections between personal (including cultural) and professional identities.
- Inspire and support professional growth and leadership.
- Attend to the holistic wellbeing of the social worker.

Social work supervision which achieves these purposes will ultimately support the achievement of the purposes of the Social Workers Registration Act 2003. Taken together, the purposes of social work supervision act to provide an accountability mechanism which strongly contributes towards ensuring competent, professional social work practitioners. It also supports the safety of clients and whānau with whom social workers interact with.

What criteria has been used to assess options compared to the status quo?

Four criteria have been used to assess the various policy options against the status quo:

- **Feasibility** – this refers to how easily an option can be implemented, and to what extent does it achieve the purposes of the Social Workers Registration Act 2003.
- **Impact** – this refers to whether the option is likely to contribute towards the vision of the Supervision Strategy.
- **Unintended consequences** – captures not only the potential risks of implementing this option, but unintended consequences which may occur due to a ripple effect.
- **Dependencies** – this identifies whether an option is reliant on other actions or settings for it to be implemented and achieve the intended outcome.

What is the scope of these options?

These options must be settings which are under the regulatory remit of the Social Workers Registration Board. Currently, the SWRB has Supervision Expectations³ which are referenced in the SWRB Code of Conduct. Since 2015, when these Supervision Expectations were last reviewed, the Social Workers Registration Act 2003 has been amended with the introduction of mandatory social work registration. These changes to the Act also allow a new mechanism for the SWRB to adopt conditions relating to supervision for all social workers as part of a scope of practice.⁴ We have identified options for policy changes which we believe are the necessary minimum requirements for social work supervision that the Board should adopt as a condition on the general scope of social work practice. We are of the view that options must be measurable, auditable, and enforceable.

We have explored options under 8 key changes:

- Separation of line management from social work supervision
- Frequency of supervision sessions
- Written agreements
- Accountability
- Experience of supervisor
- Continuing Professional Development for supervisors
- Supervision of supervisors

³³ Social Workers Registration Board. (2015). *Supervision Expectations for Registered Social Workers*. Retrieved from <https://swrb.govt.nz/download/supervision-expectations/?tmstv=1671586386>

⁴ s8H, Social Workers Registration Act 2003

- Training of supervisors

1. SEPERATION OF LINE MANAGEMENT FROM SOCIAL WORK SUPERVISION

Definition of problem

Supervision, when delivered via line management, poses significant barriers for social workers in achieving the purposes of social work supervision as described in this strategy. Power and workplace dynamics, a tendency to focus on performance management, prioritising case work discussions and tensions between holding dual accountabilities to social workers and the organisation (Beddoe et al., 2020; Rankine, 2019; Patterson, 2019; Rankine & Thompson, 2022) means that line management undermines social work supervision and limits critical reflection when these roles are not separated (Akhter, 2021; Wilkins 2019; Rankine 2019).

Line management may be the most cost-effective form of supervision, as it is utilising existing staff to perform a supervisory function over those for whom they already have management responsibility. However, because line management tends to prioritise managerial needs and performance targets over social workers wellbeing and development needs (Rankine & Thompson, 2022) it is unlikely to protect against burnout and turnover, ultimately costing social workers and organisations more over time. Furthermore, evidence suggests that line management supervision is unlikely to meet the cultural needs of social workers (Holz, 2019).

Choice in the supervision partnership, which a line management approach does not offer, is important. It leads to higher levels of commitment, and bi-directional trust (Rankine, 2019; Davys, 2017). Social workers report more trust and openness in supervision when the relationship isn't tainted by issues of power and workplace dynamics, which is inherent in line management (Beddoe et al., 2020). Trust and openness are vital to achieving the quality of relationship needed for supportive social work supervision.

In our 2022 social work supervision survey of 770 practicing social workers, 75% of respondents indicated they received supervision from someone other than their line manager and outside of their team.⁵ Approximately, 12% of social workers only had a supervisory relationship with their line manager, 11% with another social worker in their team, and 2% did not have a social work supervisor. Therefore, there is the need to set an expectation as part of the Strategy around the difference in roles of line managers from social work supervisors.

Contribution to purposes of the Social Workers Registration Act 2003

Public safety, by prescribing or providing mechanisms to ensure social workers are competent to practice and accountable for their practice (s3 (a) of SWRA 2003)

Recent practice reviews and Ombudsman investigations have criticised supervision as being task and action focused; rather than critically reflective and used as a mechanism for robust decision making, which is its intention (Boshier, 2020; Office of the Chief Social Worker, 2022). As already noted, this is a known limitation of line management supervision, which tends to prioritise organisational needs and efficiency over reflective practice. Instead, critically reflective social work supervision supports public safety through encouraging professional growth and supporting competent, ethical professional practice, which includes reflection on decision-making.

⁵ Participants could select multiple supervisory relationships. The 75% figure consists of social workers have a relationship with a supervisor who is not their line manager and is outside of their direct team. Social workers who have both external and line management supervision are included in this figure.

Separating line management from social work supervision is therefore a practical option for mitigating against the risk of supervision purely attending to tasks and actions rather than enhancing competent practice. We also need to stress that social work supervision is not a replacement for quality case management oversight and day-to-day support by line managers, as not all cases can and should be discussed in social work supervision. Line management oversight and social work supervision serve distinct yet complementary functions and purposes. Separating them out would ensure greater support and accountability for social workers, particularly around their decision-making and practice competence.

Objective of proposed solution

That social work supervision is separate and in addition to line management support, where choice of supervisor is offered. This is to mitigate the risk of prioritising service efficiency and outputs at the expense of best practice and ethical decision-making.

Options considered

Option 1

Status quo – voluntary separation of line management and social work supervision by employing organisations. Arrangements are often directed by internal supervision policies and organisational practice norms which are self-regulated by management within the organisation.

Option 2

Requiring all social workers to have a relationship with a social work supervisor who is not their manager and outside of their immediate team. This could be achieved via external supervision arrangements, or via internal arrangements such as cross-team supervision or using social work supervisors who do not hold a management role within that workplace. A declaration by social workers that their social work supervisor is not their manager would be required as part of a supervision audit.

Option 3

Requiring that all social workers have a relationship with a social work supervisor who is external to their employing organisation. This would need to be evidenced via supervision agreements and a declaration made by social workers as part of a supervision audit.

Assessment of options

Assessment criteria	Option 1- Status quo – voluntary separation of line management and social work supervision by employing organisations.	Option 2 – Requiring all social workers to have a relationship with a social work supervisor who is not their manager and outside of their immediate team.	Option 3 – Requiring all social workers to have a relationship with a social work supervisor who is external to their employing organisation.
Feasibility	No changes would result in how most organisations currently deliver supervision	Social workers would have the greatest number of options as to how their supervision is accessed. Cost effective arrangements such as utilising an internal pool of supervisory staff would still be available, provided these supervisors could meet the needs of social workers. Approximately 25% of social workers would be affected by this change.	Choice would be limited for social workers as they could not be supervised by someone who works for the same organisation.
Impact (how does option achieve vision of strategy)	Inequities in supervision outcomes related to separation of line management from supervision would remain, as current inconsistency across sector would persist.	Consistent separation of line management from supervision would be achieved which would mitigate against the negative impacts of power imbalances in social work supervision. This would contribute towards the vision of lifting the quality of social work supervision.	Would result in consistent, wide-reaching changes, achieving full separation of line management from social work supervision and action from SWRB if social workers are unable to comply which places pressure to comply on organisations. External supervision mitigates against risk of power imbalances therefore external supervision is viewed as best practice.
Unintended consequences	Supervision arrangements would continue to be inconsistent with those who have their line manager as their social work supervisor less likely to incorporate critical reflection and more likely to focus on case work and performance targets.	Staff who do have a trusting relationship with their line manager may feel that this relationship is being forcefully severed (albeit it is only being re-positioned). Risk of what is termed ‘splitting’ occurring which is when management and support functions are separated and therefore, the organisation is unable to maintain effective oversight, which includes awareness of practice issues and the needs of social workers by both the organisation and supervisor (Patterson, 2019; Beddoe & Davys, 2016).	This would impose undue to costs onto organisations and social workers by requiring all supervision to be externally contracted. Higher regulatory burden as SWRB would need to audit whether supervisor and social worker share an employer as this would be considered a conflict of interest. If an organisation is unable or unwilling to fund external social work supervision, social workers may be forced to fund their own supervision or change roles to maintain their registration, as responsibility for meeting these expectations ultimately lie with social workers and not organisations. Risk of splitting which results in the loss of information exchanged between organisation and supervisory relationship.

Dependencies	No dependencies identified	<p>Organisations would need to support implementation of this strategy not only in principle but through monetary investment.</p> <p>The community and iwi social worker pay equity settlement extension includes funds for supervision and cultural supervision arrangements. Dependent on SWRB having resource to audit type of arrangement as part of normal CPD audit cycles.</p>	<p>The community and iwi social worker pay equity settlement extension includes funds for supervision and cultural supervision arrangements. Dependent on SWRB having resource to audit type of arrangement as part of normal CPD audit cycles.</p>
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Recommended option

Ensuring there is a clear separation of social work supervision from line management will support the objective of ensuring public safety through accountability and practice competence. Requiring all social workers to have a relationship with a social work supervisor who is not their direct manager (Option 2) ensures there is consistency across the profession and should be the minimum requirements for social workers. This will ensure social work supervision supports competent professional practice and meets the needs of social workers. Whilst requiring relationships with supervisors external to the organisation would be best practice, this is not a feasible regulatory option as it would impose undue cost onto organisations and social workers. Arrangements for high-quality social work supervision can be made within organisations, whilst still separating social work supervision from line management oversight. The risk of ‘splitting’ can be mitigated through use of three-way agreements and regular feedback channels (Holz, 2019). Although this option carries the highest need for investment on part of organisations and the SWRB, on balance of the benefits this setting change would bring to the social work profession, we believe this is justified.

2. FREQUENCY OF SUPERVISION SESSIONS

Definition of problem

The frequency of social work supervision is about establishing and maintaining the quality of the relationship (Hirst, 2019) more so than ensuring supervision occurs. It is difficult to establish trust, openness, and the sense of knowing how another's identity contributes to their practise without regular connection. It is also well established that newly qualified workers and students require additional structured support in the form of more frequent supervision (Beddoe et al., 2020; Rankine & Thompson, 2021). Additionally, there is a need to transition newly qualified workers towards practice autonomy (Patterson, 2019), hence why we are exploring a stepped approach to transitioning early career social workers from weekly to fortnightly supervision during their first year, before reducing this further to monthly supervision. Another consideration is in relation to experienced or specialist social workers who hold significant practice responsibilities and whether they would benefit from more regular social work supervision at this point of their career. However, it's also noted that such social workers are more likely to have built their peer support networks, interprofessional relationships, and specialist advisors for whom they can draw upon, therefore such needs could be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Currently, the SWRB (2015) and ANZASW (2016) expect social workers to engage in regular supervision, which is later defined as 'at least monthly'. No specific evidence has been found as to why monthly is the accepted minimum requirement, it is a historical setting, and appears to be the accepted international standard for social work supervision. We have found no reason to recommend a minimum frequency greater than this but acknowledge that some organisations do require fortnightly supervision instead of monthly (Oranga Tamariki, n.d.). We are also proposing that the current part-time pro-rata setting is removed, it is our view that maintaining a supervisory relationship requires minimum monthly connection, regardless of whether social workers are engaging in mahi part-time or full-time.

Provisionally registered social workers are those who are being registered for the first time (i.e., new to the profession) or have qualified overseas and are beginning to practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. We are proposing an increased frequency of supervision for them whilst they are provisionally registered social workers. The evidence suggests that newly qualified social workers have greater needs regarding frequency of supervision compared to more experienced social workers (Rankine & Thompson, 2021). In one study, 40% of newly qualified social workers felt they needed more opportunity to discuss their learning needs with their supervisor and that many received supervision less than the best practice of fortnightly for newly qualified workers (Beddoe et al, 2020). This reiterates findings that supervision which is supportive and provides professional development opportunities is essential for provisionally registered social workers to confidently transition from student to practitioner (Beddoe et al, 2020).

Our survey revealed 11% of respondents do not receive supervision at current minimum requirements, citing workload, funding, supervisor capacity, and avoidance due to a lack of trust in this relationship as reasons. Our results mirror findings in the literature. We therefore believe there remains a need to keep specific minimum requirements which also reflect differing needs of early career social workers and students, for whom this relationship is of upmost importance in shaping their transition into practice. Such a setting would support social workers in effectively advocating for themselves and hold organisations to account. Furthermore, by checking compliance of supervision frequency, this is likely to result in an increase in the number of social workers regularly engaging in supervision.

Contribution to purposes of the Social Workers Registration Act 2003

Public safety, by prescribing or providing mechanisms to ensure social workers are competent to practice and accountable for their practice (s3 (a)of SWRA 2003)

Providing for a minimum setting around frequency supports social workers to develop and maintain skills which ensure they are competent to practise and provides a regular place for reflection and accountability for practice. Without frequent supervision, it is not easy to establish how social workers are building on their skills or support them in areas of professional growth through effective adult learning approaches. Additionally, without a relationship based upon trust, transparency, and safety which comes with regular connection, social workers are less likely to disclose and reflect upon practice which may not have met practice standards, raising concerns for public safety. Therefore, maintaining regular supervision, works towards achieving the purpose of protecting the safety of members of the public, as set out in the Social Workers Registration Act 2003.

Objective of proposed solution

That expectations around frequency of supervision are clearly articulated to promote supervision as one regular mechanism to ensure practice competency and accountability in the interests of the public.

Options considered

Option 1

Status quo – at least monthly for all registered social workers. SWRB expectations do not specify increased frequency for provisionally registered social workers, only that they must undertake 2000 hours of supervised practice before becoming eligible for full registration.

Option 2

Frequency of social work supervision is set at:

- **Fully registered social workers:** At least once per month and a minimum of 10 sessions per year. The minimum of 10 sessions recognises leave periods such as Christmas/New Year and allows for sick leave which may interrupt supervision availability on occasion. We have estimated this could amount to 2 months of the year; however, they are unlikely to be in succession.
- **Provisionally registered social workers:** At least weekly for the first six months following provisional registration and thereafter fortnightly until fully registered. This recognises the greater needs of provisionally registered social workers and offers a smooth transition process between the level of support provided to students and achieving relative autonomy as a fully registered social worker.
- **Social work students:** Weekly supervision whilst on placement. This recognises how essential the supervisory relationship is to student's learning needs and readiness for practice.

Social work supervision sessions should be uninterrupted and last at least 45 minutes (it is expected sessions will typically be at least 60 minutes).

Option 3

Frequency of social work supervision is set at:

- **Fully registered social workers:** At least once per month.
- **Provisionally registered social workers:** At least weekly.
- **Social work students:** Weekly supervision whilst on placement.

Social work supervision sessions should be uninterrupted and last at least 45 minutes (it is expected sessions will typically be at least 60 minutes).

Assessment of options

Assessment criteria	Option 1 – status quo- at least monthly for all registered social workers, no increased frequency requirements for provisionally registered, weekly for student social workers	Option 2 - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully registered social workers: At least once per month and a minimum of 10 sessions per year. Provisionally registered social workers: At least weekly for the first six months following provisional registration and thereafter fortnightly until fully registered. Social work students: Weekly supervision whilst on placement. 	Option 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully registered social workers: At least once per month. Provisionally registered social workers: At least weekly. Social work students: Weekly supervision whilst on placement.
Feasibility	No change to expectations as currently written.	Would require less resource than current setting for fully registered social workers but may be more feasible to achieve. No change for student social workers. Although this setting in an increase in frequency for provisionally registered social workers, it does reflect existing practice in some organisations, as well as what is set out in previous ANZASW supervision policy so including this expectation would just formalise this requirement.	Would require no changes to current expectation for registered social workers or students (as per 3.14 of SWRB Programme Recognition Standards), however would require more resourcing for provisionally registered social workers.
Impact (how does option achieve vision of strategy)	Reflects current settings so would not expect to see any improvements in consistency around frequency of supervision.	Acknowledges impact of leave by lowering setting to 10 months per year which may be more achievable for social workers and supervisors. Allows for supported transition into fully registered practice. Slightly less resource required so may be adhered to more consistently and contribute toward the vision of this strategy.	Most simple settings so easy for sector to understand, however the high frequency may be more difficult to achieve and therefore compliance may not be improved.
Unintended consequences	Inconsistent with intent of this Strategy as unlikely to result in any improvement to compliance around frequency.	Social workers may not be able to access supervision when they require it if they have already had '10 sessions' that year- could create an additional barrier for some. Organisations may only provide monthly supervision when social workers require more frequent based on complexity of their work.	Currently inconsistently adhered to so would not expect this to change. Organisations may become reluctant to employ provisionally registered social workers because of high level of commitment to their supervision during first year of practice. This may make it more difficult for newly qualified social workers to enter the workforce.
Dependencies	No dependencies identified.	Continued growth of supervisory workforce to support increase in supervision frequency for all provisionally registered social workers.	Continued growth of supervisory workforce to support increase in supervision frequency for all provisionally registered social workers.



Recommended option

Option two would ensure greater clarity around frequency of supervision, whilst allowing for the realities of sick and annual leave, both of which vital to maintaining social worker wellbeing. It is important that students and newly qualified social workers have separate expectations, and this option provides an opportunity to support newly qualified social workers through a structured transition from weekly supervision through to monthly supervision in their 2nd year, mitigating shock that may result from the current dramatic change in supervision support.

3. WRITTEN AGREEMENTS

Definition of problem

Supervision contracts or agreements are a pivotal tool to facilitate a relationship where expectations are clear and agreed. Sturt and Rothwell (2019) describe it as a cornerstone of supervision, where what happens in the space is negotiated. Supervision agreements are often perceived as an administrative process; however, their purpose is in fact relational. They should be used at the beginning of the supervision relationship to set expectations around how conflict and difference will be addressed and how feedback will be given and received (Davys, 2019). We have heard from supervisors that it is relatively common for the supervisory relationship to become fractured when critical reflection is encouraged but not expected by social workers, therefore being specific in agreements, and negotiating how critical reflection as well as conflict will be initiated and discussed is an important aspect to develop trust and transparency from the beginning (Davys, 2019).

Agreements can also provide opportunity to discuss the values underlying a supervisory relationship and acknowledging power dynamics that exist, particularly in relation to privacy and confidentiality between the social worker, supervisor and organisation. External supervision relationships have been criticised for creating what Patterson (2019) terms ‘splitting’ between the organisation and the worker, where supervisors may be unaware of mandated organisational professional behaviour and social workers may not raise their performance issues as an area for development (Beddoe, 2010). To mitigate this risk, agreements should be positioned as ‘three-way negotiations’ between the social worker, supervisor, and employing organisation (where relevant), where regular feedback mechanisms are negotiated to ensure transparency around practice issues and knowledge back to the organisation (Beddoe and Davys, 2016) around social workers needs using an agreed, regular, and accountable review process.

87% of social workers who we surveyed indicated that they have a supervision agreement, either in written (72%) or oral form (15%). This aligns with O’Donoghue’s 2014/15 survey where 90% of respondents reported that they had an agreement in place (O’Donoghue, 2019). What we don’t know is whether these agreements are just between the supervisor and social worker, and how many of these include the organisation as an active participant in the agreement process. We also do not know how frequently these supervision agreements were reviewed or what they covered in them. SWRB supervision expectations reference ‘negotiated contracts’ a term which is interchangeable with agreements within the supervision field. It states that the supervision relationship should be based upon a negotiated contract and that social workers should be able to provide this at the time of Annual Practising Certificate renewal (SWRB, 2015). In practice this is not requested as part of the renewal and adherence to this expectation monitored, however the intention to do so is set out. There remains a need to enforce this expectation and ensure that agreements are ‘three-way’ (where applicable) to ensure accountability across all aspects of the wellbeing, development, and practice of the social worker.

Contribution to purposes of the Social Workers Registration Act 2003

Public safety, by prescribing or providing mechanisms to ensure social workers are competent to practice and accountable for their practice (s3 (a) of SWRA 2003)

Written agreements are an accountability mechanism which further ensures public safety, as it enhances connection between the supervisory relationship and organisation, as well as providing a foundation for expectations which may contribute towards the longevity and effectiveness of the supervisory relationship.

Enhance the professionalism of social workers (s3(d) of SWRA 2003)

Additionally, positioning social work supervision as a formalised partnership via this agreement contributes towards enhancing the professionalism of social work through ensuring there is a standardised mechanism for accountability of practice, and documentation which confirms this, across the whole sector.

Objective of proposed solution

That all social workers have a written supervision agreement, which is reviewed regularly and is negotiated between both their supervisor and organisation (as applicable).

Options considered

Option 1

Status quo –verbal or written contract expected between supervisors and social workers, however this is not monitored by SWRB.

Option 2

Written agreement required between the supervisor and social worker which will be audited as part of a supervision audit by SWRB. Agreements should include a voluntary annual review process which includes feedback to and from the employing organisation (a three-way agreement).

Option 3

Written agreements required between the supervisor, social worker and when applicable the employing organisation. Agreements will include a clearly agreed annual review process between these three parties and agreements will be included as part of the supervision audit by SWRB.

Assessment of options

Assessment criteria	Option 1 – verbal or written contract expected between supervisors and social workers, however this is not enforced or monitored	Option 2 – Agreements required between supervisor and social worker, voluntary annual review process which includes employer	Option 3- Agreements required between supervisor, social worker and employer (where applicable) with clearly agreed annual review process. Audited by SWRB.
Feasibility	Would require no change to current setting	Would require updated templates to facilitate, but little resource required across sector to implement.	Templates, guidelines, and education would be required to support the change. Audit built into SWRB CPD auditing process.
Impact	Would not consistently achieve the objective, as those who do not currently adhere to this are unlikely to change behaviour.	Improve consistency across the sector, however, would not necessarily achieve objective around regular reviews if this is only completed on a voluntary capacity and not audited by SWRB.	Three-way agreements would become minimum requirement across sector, with clearer expectations around supervisory relationship.
Unintended consequences	Lack of accountability and ‘splitting’ will continue to be a risk for those who receive external supervision.	Annual review processes may vary significantly and there is potential for scope creep by organisation into supervision space.	Annual review process has potential to look like an ‘audit of supervision’ which would need education of organisations to mitigate against.
Dependencies	No dependencies identified.	Dependent on organisational education and consistent understanding of social work supervision	SWRB capacity to add to audit process

Recommended option

To achieve consistency across the sector, option three is recommended as this would ensure a minimum requirement is enforced around using three-way agreements. From both our survey and research, the use of supervisor/social worker agreements are already common, therefore this additional requirement to include employers is an incremental step for the sector which would require education as to the purpose and parameters, but not significant behaviour change.

4. ACCOUNTABILITY

Definition of problem

Engaging in regular supervision is a well-known requirement that social workers are expected to meet on renewal of their annual Practising Certificate (SWRB 2015); however, only 89% of social workers we surveyed were meeting this expectation. Arrangements around supervision, and their quality are known to be highly variable (Rankine, 2019) and feedback from our workshop attendees reflected research findings that this is due to poor understanding as to the purpose and benefits, a lack of commitment (on part of all parties). and competing demands (Patterson, 2019).

Currently, there is no enforcement mechanism to identify non-adherence to this requirement as the SWRB does not require social workers to demonstrate that they are receiving supervision during the Practising Certificate renewal process or audit these settings. Therefore, at present there is no accountability mechanism to ensure that all social workers have suitable social work supervision arrangements in place. This means social work supervision is likely to remain inconsistent across the sector in terms of access and engagement. Without compliance monitoring and possible consequences for non-compliance, organisations have little motivation to support their workers to access social work supervision and it may be perceived as a 'nice to have' rather than the vital component of ensuring safe practice and social worker wellbeing.

Contribution to purposes of the Social Workers Registration Act 2003

Public safety, by prescribing or providing mechanisms to ensure social workers are competent to practice and accountable for their practice (s3 (a) of SWRA 2003)

This setting contributes towards the purpose of public safety in the Act in two ways: firstly, through engaging in social work supervision social workers are demonstrating accountability for the way in which they practice.

Secondly, by requiring evidence of this engagement, the Social Workers Registration Board is ensuring there is an active accountability mechanism, rather than the current self-regulation by social workers in relation to supervision expectations. Non-compliance which would result in a practice certificate not being issued is only identified when a complaint is made. It is an 'exception reporting' approach which does not capture true adherence to supervision expectations, and importantly does not provide motivation to adhere, as social workers are aware this will not be checked unless they are referred to the board around additional serious practice concerns.

Should the Board place general conditions on social workers, there are mechanisms under the SWRA available to the Board should a social worker not comply with these conditions. For example, s30(1)(b)(iv) requires the Registrar to refer the issuance of an annual practising certificate to the Board if there are reasonable grounds to suspect the social worker has not complied with the conditions on their scope of practice. If a social worker fails to demonstrate they have the necessary supervision arrangements through a supervision audit process, this is likely to be sufficient grounds for the Registrar to be required to refer the issuance of a practising certificate to the Board. After following the procedure outlined in the Act (s32), the Board could potentially refuse to issue a practising certificate or place additional conditions on this. These measures may improve compliance with supervision requirements.

Objective of proposed solution

An accountability mechanism around social work supervision arrangements is enforced to improve consistency across the profession.

Options considered

Option 1

Status quo- expectations set out in policy statement however no compliance monitoring or enforcement mechanism.

Option 2

Introduce voluntary supervision logs to create an accountability mechanism between social worker, supervisor and employing organisation. These would not be audited by SWRB and not required as part of annual practicing certificate renewal.

Option 3

Require social workers to complete supervision logs which detail dates of supervision sessions, provide a copy of their supervision agreement and a declaration from themselves and supervisor that they are meeting all requirements. SWRB to audit these.

Assessment of options

Assessment criteria	Option 1- status quo, no monitoring	Option 2 – voluntary supervision logs	Option 3 – Supervision logs submitted for audit alongside CPD log, supervision agreement provided during audit
Feasibility	No changes required	May require a template or additional online log to facilitate.	May require a template or additional online log to facilitate. SWRB would need to add to existing audit process.
Impact	This would not improve accountability around supervision nor consistency around engagement as current settings would remain, therefore it would not achieve the objective of accountability.	Unlikely to have any impact on group of social workers/organisations who are currently not meeting this expectation, as voluntary measures are unlikely to motivate behaviour change and there would still be no consequences for those who choose not to complete a log.	Most likely to achieve accountability by facilitating behaviour change as social workers/organisations will know enforcement action will be taken if not compliant and social workers are randomly selected for audit.
Unintended consequences	Unlikely to improve situation for social workers who are currently not accessing/unable to access supervision as there are no consequences for their employers/themselves by not adhering to expectations.	Impact on social workers as they would be compelled to complete another log, however creation of online logs which are not as involved as CPD log may make this process less administratively burdensome.	Impact on social workers as they would be required to complete another log, however creation of online logs which are not as involved as CPD log may make this process less administratively burdensome. Would add to auditing process SWRB are undertaking.
Dependencies	No dependencies identified.	Development of an online supervision log.	Development of an online supervision log which could be shared with SWRB. SWRB having capacity to add this to audit process.

Recommended option

We recommend that option three is pursued as this offers the only consistent approach to ensuring accountability around supervision for our profession. Option 2 would still result in inconsistent application, and we are more likely to see uptake in a voluntary supervision log by those who are already complying with expectations compared to the small group who are not. A voluntary measure provides little incentive for behaviour change. We acknowledge that there is an increase in administrative burden placed upon social workers in implementing this option, however, we feel that this is justified to achieve the objective. Our view is that social workers should only be required to provide evidence of dates social work supervision occurred, a current supervision agreement, and a declaration they are meeting other requirements (i.e., their supervisor is not their line manager).

5. EXPERIENCE OF SUPERVISORS

Definition of problem

Supervisors are required to demonstrate a range of well-refined skills when engaging social workers in supervision. It is a complex task which involves:

- recognising their ethical obligations towards both social workers and the profession (Davys, 2019);
- navigating the space between organisational agendas and the personal and professional needs of social workers (Morrison, 2011 cited in Rankine & Thompson, 2021);
- recognising stress and burnout and supporting social workers through this, including advocating for organisational and environmental change when needed (Hirst, 2019);
- resolving interpersonal conflict (Hirst, 2019);
- facilitating and structuring sessions whilst interweaving critically reflective questioning and ensuring it remains social worker led (Rankine, 2019); and
- identifying and supporting social workers to draw upon their own strengths which builds self-efficacy within demanding practice settings (Englebrecht, 2010).

There is much research that suggests that less experienced social workers struggle with the transition into supervisor, and sometimes social workers 'inherit' the role without sufficient qualification or experience (Rankine, 2019). This can lead to various problems, namely, supervisors tend to model supervision practices on what they have themselves experienced regardless of the quality of these interactions (Carpenter et al., 2013; Hair, 2012; Kadushin & Harkness, 2014; Davys and Beddoe, 2010 cited in Rankine, 2019). There is also evidence that less experienced social workers can experience a sense of loss of identity when transitioning from their role as social worker, where they felt high levels of competence, into a supervisory role. This can lead to a supervision style Wonnacott terms 'active-intrusive' or micromanaging (Wonnacott, 2012 cited in Patterson, 2019) in efforts to prove themselves rather than facilitating a reflective space for social workers (Quarto, 2003 cited in Davys, 2019).

Currently, there is no minimum experience requirement for social work supervisors (SWRB, 2015). ANZASW supervision policy sets out an expectation that supervisors have at least two years supervised practice as a social worker (ANZASW, 2016), however this is not listed as essential under the policy and is not included in SWRB expectations so does not apply as a regulatory setting. By comparison, there are various settings internationally for experience requirements of social work supervisors. In Australia and the US, a minimum of three years in a relevant field of practice is required before social workers can become supervisors (AASW, 2014; NASW, 2013), whereas the UK have no experience requirement, instead stating that training is required for supervisors to undertake this highly skilled task (BASW, 2011). Here in Aotearoa New Zealand, many similar regulated professions have an experience requirement: for counsellors, psychologists, and nutritionists this is set at minimum 5 years, for dieticians it is 3 years (NZCCA, n.d.; Nutrition Society, 2020; Dieticians Board, 2018). It is our view, that social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand need a minimum experience requirement for supervisors to ensure the professionalism of social work is enhanced and remains in step with the international social work community, and comparable professions.

From our ANZASW supervision survey, of the 350 social workers who indicated they provide social work supervision, only 2.87% of supervisors have less than 5 years of social work practice experience. Therefore, setting a minimum requirement would have little impact on the current supervisory workforce, yet establish an experience level going forward which better reflects the complexity of this role.

Contribution to purposes of the Social Workers Registration Act 2003

Public safety, by prescribing or providing mechanisms to ensure social workers are competent to practice and accountable for their practice (s3 (a) of SWRA 2003)

Requiring minimum years' experience as a social worker to become a supervisor works towards protecting public safety by ensuring that supervisors have the necessary experience and skills which enables them to understand the challenges, tensions, complexities, and realities of social workers whom they are supervising.

Objective of Proposed Solution

We believe there is a need to explore a minimum experience requirement for supervisors which better reflects the skill development required to attain practice competencies needed for social work supervision.

Options considered

Option 1

Status quo- no minimum experience level required to supervise.

Option 2

Require a minimum of 3 years practice experience in a related field before becoming a social work supervisor. This would mean Aotearoa New Zealand requirements are consistent with Australian and US settings.

Option 3

Require a minimum of 4 years practice experience before becoming a social work supervisor, this could be in any field of social work. This setting reflects a balance between international settings and comparable regulated professions in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Assessment of options

Assessment criteria	Option 1 – status quo, no minimum experience level required to supervise	Option 2 – Minimum 3 years practice experience in related field required.	Option 3 – Minimum 4 years practice experience required in any field of social work.
Feasibility	Most feasible option, as would require no change to current setting.	Least feasible option as may result in a longer pathway given the 'relevant field' requirement. Omits provisional registration year and retains current 2-year ANZASW recommendation, but new requirement of practice within related field makes this more difficult to achieve.	Feasible but would need to consider graduated approach to implementation to ensure there is a pathway for existing supervisors who may not meet this requirement at date of enforcement. 4 years reflects omitting provisional registration year (so essentially the setting is 3 years practice experience as a fully registered social worker).
Impact	Retaining this setting would not ensure that supervisors have the relevant skills and practice competencies needed for the complex task of social work supervision.	Would ensure that supervisors are highly specialised in specific fields of practice before they are able to supervise, but this may not contribute much towards the objective of attaining practice competencies in supervision.	Achieves objective around ensuring there is sufficient time for skill development and attaining supervision practice competencies without requiring years' experience related to a specific field of practice.
Unintended consequences	Inexperienced supervisors may still struggle to manage transition which results in poorer quality social work supervision.	Does not recognise transferrable skills between practice settings and may inadvertently orientate supervisor as an 'expert' which contradicts the strategy's purposes of supervision. It would mean a delay for some social workers becoming supervisors, however according to survey data there is a very small group of social workers entering supervisory practice before 5 years so this risk to the workforce is negligible.	Would disadvantage a very small group of current supervisors (2.87%) who currently have less than 5 years practice experience, however this could be mitigated through a graduated introduction for this setting so that it would not negatively impact current supervision workforce. It would mean a delay for some social workers becoming supervisors, however according to survey data there is a very small group of social workers entering supervisory practice before 5 years so this risk to the workforce is negligible.
Dependencies	No dependencies identified.	Depends on increasing supervisory workforce within next 3 years to meet demand within parameters of this setting.	Depends on increasing supervisory workforce within next 3 years to meet demand within parameters of this setting.

Recommended option

Option three would best achieve the objective of the proposed solution, but we have heard concern during workshops at the prospect of increasing this setting, founded around availability of supervisors going forward. We acknowledge that this rational reflects the reality of the pressure our supervision workforce is under, however, our survey results do not reflect these concerns as less than 3% of supervisors indicated they had under 5 years practice experience. We do not feel compromising on this setting reflects the intent of this strategy to uplift the quality of social work supervision. We are therefore proposing that this setting is implemented over 3 years, which allows for other strategy aims around increasing workforce capacity to be achieved and concerns around meeting demand addressed. It also means any current supervisors with less than 4 years' experience are not adversely impacted by the change.

6. CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR SUPERVISORS

Definition of Problem

Supervisory practice, like any social work practice, needs to be viewed as a journey of continuous learning, growth, and reflection which supervisors must undertake intentionally. There is a need for supervisors to be able to identify their knowledge and practice gaps (Fook and Gardener, 2007 cited in Rankine, 2019) and act upon these. Patterson (2019) notes that supervisors do not gain competency merely through experience and so further professional development and training is a key factor in developing their skills.

Registered social workers are required to undertake 20 hours of continuing professional development per year. Supervision is part of the social work scope of practice. It may be unduly burdensome to require continuing professional development hours related to supervisory practice to be completed in addition to current requirements. We are therefore proposing an option which would require social work supervisors to undertake professional development relating directly to developing their social work supervisory practice as part of their 20 hours of continuing professional development.

Importantly, there is an additional need for supervisors to continually reflect upon their own social and cultural context and how this impacts supervisory partnerships (Rankine, 2019). There is a clear development need for supervisors around cultural humility, responsiveness, and identity (O'Donoghue, 2019; Beddoe et al., 2020). Akhter (2021) suggests that supervisors need to process and deconstruct their own cultural biases and assumptions, as this is the only way they can truly know and honour social workers' identities and needs. Eketone describes this as 'culturally effective supervision', where emphasis is placed on the "spiritual and cultural protection of the supervisee, the supervisee's agency and the client" (cited in Wallace, 2019, p. 22). To achieve this, we think it is important to place a requirement on supervisors to undertake continuing professional development activities which demonstrate and further cultural humility and responsiveness in their supervision practice, as evidence suggests cultural responsiveness can be lacking in supervision (O'Donoghue, 2019; Beddoe et al., 2020). This was also described to us anecdotally during our workshops.

We have heard that CPD opportunities for supervisors are difficult to find, not always supported by employers (for supervisors who hold dual supervisor/ practitioner roles), and are scarce, therefore, there are complementary actions around accessibility and availability of CPD for supervisors within the Strategy to support this requirement.

Contribution to purposes of the Social Workers Registration Act 2003

Public safety, by prescribing or providing mechanisms to ensure social workers are competent to practice and accountable for their practice (s3 (a) of SWRA 2003)

Minimum requirements for continuing professional development of supervisors, contributes towards ensuring their competency to practice. Supervision is an area of practice, and like all social work practice requires continuous development and refreshing of practice skills to maintain competency which guides competent social work practice and ensures client safety. It is a field of practice which continues to evolve with new theories, models, approaches, and frameworks, the relevancy of which is strongly correlated to the political, social, and economic context in which social work is practised. One off training may provide a baseline competency, however without continuous development around supervision skills and approaches, it may be difficult to maintain this competency over time.

Objective for proposed solution

Social workers who are supervisors have a minimum requirement around completed CPD activities related to supervisory practice.

Options considered

Option 1

Status quo- no additional requirements for supervisors outside of usual CPD requirements as a social worker.

Option 2

Require supervisors to complete 5 hours of annual CPD related to supervisory practice on top of current CPD requirements. This means that total hours of required CPD for supervisors would be 25 per year.

Option 3

Require supervisors to complete 5 hours of annual CPD related to supervisory practice as part of their existing annual CPD hours. They must demonstrate that some of this has included furthering cultural humility and responsiveness in supervisory practice.

Assessment of options

Assessment criteria	Option 1- status quo, no requirement outside of usual CPD requirements	Option 2- Annual CPD requirement of 5 hours on top of current CPD requirements.	Option 3 – Annual CPD requirement of 5 hours within current CPD requirements, one of which must focus on further developing cultural humility and responsiveness in supervisory practice
Feasibility	No changes required.	Small change required to current policy setting, however additional CPD requirements in terms of hours may pose challenge to funding arrangements and contracts as an increasing in funding for CPD of supervisors would be needed.	Policy change required and ensuring that CPD for supervisors is available. However, this does not place any further burden on supervisors in terms of time or funding.
Impact	Situation would remain unchanged and there would continue to be no onus on supervisors to develop their skills over time.	Would achieve objective by ensuring supervisors continually grow in their practice over time. More CPD may become available as it will become in demand.	Should result in building capacity and quality of supervision practice over time. More CPD may become available as it will become in demand.
Unintended consequences	Quality of supervision for those who have not been recently trained may not improve.	Would create inequity for supervisors as they would have 5 hours more CPD requirement for registration, many supervisors are private practitioners who fund their own CPD therefore this creates a financial burden for them. This could create additional burden for SWRB in terms of CPD audit.	May create additional burden for SWRB in terms of CPD audit and ensuring that cultural humility and responsiveness requirement is met.
Dependencies	No dependencies identified.	Dependent on availability of CPD for supervisors.	Dependent on availability of CPD for supervisors.

Recommended option

Option three would best achieve the objective around continuous intentional learning for supervisors and ensure that current gaps around cultural humility and responsiveness in supervision practice are addressed. By including this as part of existing CPD hours rather than in addition to, supervisors would not experience inequitable burden on their time or finances in relation to CPD requirements which if implemented in addition to existing 20-hour requirements could act as a disincentive for practitioners becoming supervisors.

7. SUPERVISION OF SUPERVISORS

Definition of problem

We heard during workshops, that some supervisors feel that they simply do not have time to prioritise their own supervision needs due to workload demands, an ironic replication of one of the barriers social workers experience. However, research is clear that supervisors require protected space and their own supportive supervisory relationship to reflect upon their practice and development needs (Rankine & Thompson, 2021; Patterson, 2019). Patterson (2019) notes there is limited evidence base for the specific support and supervision needs of supervisors, however, is clear that unmet needs may compromise supervisor's abilities to provide support, which leads to overwhelm and reduced empathy (Patterson, 2019; Cousins, 2004 cited in Patterson, 2019). It is also accepted that the support needs of supervisors are different from those of social workers and so should be attended to explicitly (Patterson, 2019). This is particularly relevant for supervisors who may also undertake direct client practice and may receive supervision around their direct practice, but not have a space to reflect upon their supervisory practice. For this group, there is a sense of being 'overlooked' in relation to their unique supervision needs which has been found to lead to feelings of isolation in their role (Rankine & Thompson, 2022).

Social workers for whom provision of supervision is their only practice area, should be having supervision and therefore it can be presumed that supervision of their supervisory practice is occurring. However, we feel that by being clear about the expectation that supervisors receive supervision about their supervisory practice, all supervisors will be able to better advocate and prioritise their own supervision. We support Patterson's (2019) view that supervision of supervisors is key in the development of supervisory practice and reflection.

Contribution to purposes of the Social Workers Registration Act 2003

Public safety, by prescribing or providing mechanisms to ensure social workers are competent to practice and accountable for their practice (s3 (a) of SWRA 2003)

Ensuring there is a clear expectation around the supervision of supervisors contributes towards ensuring that supervisors are accountable for the way in which they practice and promotes competent and professional social work practice. Similarly, to supervision of social workers, supervision of supervisory practice ensures that practice is being regularly reflected upon, professional development needs are being identified and addressed, and that supervisors are receiving support in their role which contributes towards their own wellbeing. Without such support, supervisors are more likely to experience overwhelm and reduced empathy towards social workers and clients. This state poses a risk to the public through supervisors not adequately guiding critical reflection where social workers can reveal practice issues and ethical dilemmas and could result in unsafe practice.

Objective of proposed solution

Supervisors are supported in reflecting upon and developing their own supervision practice.

Options considered

Option 1

Status quo- no specific requirement for supervisors to receive supervision which attends to their supervisory practice.

Option 2

Requirement that supervisors engage in supervision in which they reflect upon their own supervisory practice at a minimum frequency of every second month. This could be achieved via peer or group supervision sessions, or as part of usual social work supervision arrangements.

Option 3

Requirement that supervisors engage in supervision in which they reflect upon their own supervisory practice at a minimum frequency of every second month. This must be achieved via an individual supervision arrangement which reflects the purposes of social work supervision but can be incorporated as part of usual social work supervision.

Assessment of options

Assessment criteria	Option 1- status quo – no specific requirement	Option 2 –Requirement that supervisors engage in supervision in which they reflect upon their own supervisory practice at a minimum frequency of every second month. This could be achieved via peer or group supervision sessions, or as part of usual social work supervision arrangements.).	Option 3 –Supervisors engage in supervision in which they reflect upon their own supervisory practice at a minimum frequency of every second month via an individual supervision arrangement but can be incorporated as part of usual social work supervision.
Feasibility	No changes	Allowing for flexibility in these arrangements makes it more achievable for supervisors.	Still allows for flexibility by incorporating this into usual social work supervision, however, would need agreement around how supervisory practice would be included in sessions.
Impact	Low as supervision of supervisory practice will remain inconsistent and is unlikely to achieve the objective of supporting supervisors in their practice.	Would meet the development needs of supervisors with the aim of improving supervisory practice consistently across the sector. It may also help establish local communities of best practice which could become a valuable resource to the sector going forward.	Would meet the development needs of supervisors with the aim of improving supervisory practice consistently across the sector. Would ensure same level of confidentiality and reflection around individual supervisory practice is available compared to usual social work supervision.
Unintended consequences/ Risks	Supervisors may not prioritise or be able to access supervisory support which limits their development and quality of supervisory practice.	Peer or group arrangements may limit disclosure due to confidentiality issues, particularly if within organisations, as even removing identifiable attributes of examples may mean individuals are still identifiable in agency setting. It would be difficult to mitigate against this within agencies. This would need to be carefully managed and mitigated against.	Demand for supervisors may increase further with this requirement and add more pressure to the supervisory workforce.
Dependencies	No dependencies	Robust organisational policies around how peer and group supervision for supervisors are conducted, addressing parameters of privacy and confidentiality for social workers.	Building capacity within supervision workforce Training and development around supervision of supervisory practice

Recommended option

Option three best meets the objective around ensuring supervisors are supported in their supervisory practice whilst minimising the risks for social workers which could occur in peer and group environments. There is a place for peer and group supervision in supporting supervisors, however, this should be a supplementary mechanism and not an expectation. Allowing for reflection and development of supervisory practice to occur within a supervisor’s usual social work supervision arrangement mitigates risks associated with significantly increasing demand for supervision, also in acknowledgement that actions around growing the supervision workforce is included within the Strategy as a development area.

8. TRAINING OF SUPERVISORS

Definition of problem

There is consensus that supervision training is essential to facilitate quality supervisory practice, as competency cannot be attained through experience alone (Patterson, 2019). However, some social workers become supervisors with little training or preparation (Cousins, 2004; Patterson, 2015 cited in Patterson, 2019). Our survey results identified only 3% of supervisors who had not had any form of supervision training with appropriately 50% of respondents reporting they have completed at least 50 hours. We do however acknowledge that our sample is likely to be biased towards those who take an active interest in supervision and may not fully represent the social work supervisory workforce.

There is a need for those providing supervision to understand the purpose of what they are doing and be competent in supervision models, roles, and responsibilities, addressing ethics and diversity, and advanced interpersonal skills, including conflict management (Rankine, 2019; Ford, 2017; Davys, 2019). Social workers report that they notice the difference between supervisors who have been trained and those who have not and tend to prefer trained supervisors (Beddoe et al., 2020), however, we have been unable to source clear evidence which sets out exactly what training requirements should be for supervisors. The literature supports training as a mechanism for lifting the quality of social work supervision, however, there is not consensus as to how much or in what form supervision training should take to achieve the necessary skills and knowledge (Rankine, 2019). There are difficulties in measuring the effectiveness of supervision due to the sheer number of dynamic forces which influence supervision outcomes (Ford, 2017).

Internationally, requirements vary around level of training. The UK offers a post-qualifying standard for social work practice supervisors programme, which is 12-months (Skills for Care, 2021), however the British Association of Social Workers does not stipulate a training requirement for supervisors in their policy, just that training is required (BASW, 2011). Likewise, the Australian supervision policy uses the phrasing ‘Supervisors are appropriately trained...’ (AASW, 2014. Pg.9) yet only refers to supervisors engaging in CPD with no specific requirements related to training or qualifications. The Canadian policy does reference minimum hours of ‘continuing education’ in supervision coursework but defers to the jurisdiction under which the social worker practices who sets these minimum hours (NASW, 2013), information about individual jurisdiction settings does not appear to be readily publicly available. Here in Aotearoa New Zealand, requirements for psychologists and counsellors are 30 hours (NZCCA, n.d.) this is largely consistent with literature which commonly identified weeklong training programmes, presumed to be between 30-40 hours total (Ford, 2017).

We have been unable to find any requirements or evaluations relating to formal supervision qualifications (i.e., a diploma or programme offered through a tertiary training institute) There is currently an evidence gap around the benefits of formal supervision qualifications over other forms of supervision training. There are also equity and access considerations should a requirement to have formal supervision qualifications be introduced. Post-graduate study is not achievable for many social workers due to a variety of reasons such as time, financial commitment, out of work responsibilities, and structure of such courses. We would need to be confident that the benefits of formal supervision qualifications outweigh the limitations this would place on some social workers in progressing their career via a supervision pathway. Supportive mechanisms such as grants, scholarships and improved access to courses would need to be available to make such a requirement feasible.

Contribution to purposes of the Social Workers Registration Act 2003

Public safety, by prescribing or providing mechanisms to ensure social workers are competent to practice and accountable for their practice (s3 (a) of SWRA 2003)

Requiring minimum training for supervisors contributes towards ensuring supervisors are competent to practice by ensuring that they have the required skills, knowledge, and aptitude to undertake this type of practice. There are currently no requirements or provisions which ensure that supervisors are competent, or even have some base level understanding around supervision before they engage in this practice. This places social workers, and ultimately the public, at risk due to potential for poor practice, both on part of the supervisor and the social workers whom they supervise.

Enhance the professionalism of social workers (Sec 3(d) of SWRA 2003)

A minimum training requirement would also contribute towards enhancing the professionalism of social work by elevating the supervision role to that of a specialist, which reinforces the validity of supervision as a standalone career pathway within the profession.

Objective of proposed solution

That all supervisors have the necessary skills, knowledge, and confidence to undertake supervisory practice before they start providing supervision.

Options considered

Option 1

Status quo- no training requirement.

Option 2

Requirement for supervisors to have completed at least 40 hours of training and development relating to supervisory practice (which includes skills practice) before supervising social workers and student social workers. This would need to be introduced via a delayed enforcement date to allow for supervisors who have not completed training to upskill.

Option 3

Requirement that supervisors hold a formal supervision qualification before supervising social workers and student social workers.

Assessment of options

	Option 1 – status quo, no training requirement	Option 2 – Requirement for supervisors to have completed at least 40 hours of training and development relating to supervisory practice (which includes skills practice) before supervising social workers and student social workers	Option 3 – Requirement that supervisors hold a formal supervision qualification before supervising social workers and student social workers
Feasibility	No changes required	<p>Delayed enforcement date allows for buffer for those who have not completed training but are still able to practice while completing training (until the enforcement date).</p> <p>Would require investment from supervisors and organisations to attend training.</p>	<p>Likely to require some sort of registration process for supervisors to ensure only those with a recognised qualification are practising. This would be expensive. This would create significant equity issues as only those with the means to complete formal study would be able to progress in their career. We do not have a sufficiently large supervisory workforce to provide supervision to all social workers should this become the requirement.</p>
Impact	Supervisory practice likely to remain inconsistent as no minimum requirements for training required.	Supervision practice would in time become more consistent as workforce transitions to completely trained.	The impact is unknown as there are no identified evaluations of formal supervision qualifications. This may not have any greater impact than a minimum training requirement.
Unintended consequences	Quality of supervision does not improve.	<p>Some supervisors may be 'locked out' of practice if there are financial barriers to accessing training.</p> <p>May stretch demand on programmes/courses.</p>	Significant barriers for many social workers in achieving qualification: financial, time, leave from practice, work/life balance etc. Likely to be a disincentive to many wanting to become a supervisor.
Dependencies	No dependencies identified	Availability of supervision training and trainers and funding for social workers to attend training.	<p>Availability of sufficient post-graduate level courses.</p> <p>Availability of funding for supervisors to attend.</p>

Recommended option

Option 2 ensures that supervisors have a minimum level of training that appears to be consistent with positive outcomes in the literature. A minimum of 40 hours of training appears achievable but will require some time before being implemented. We have considered a formal qualification training requirement, however, in the absence of evidence as to the effectiveness of formal qualifications, this is not a pathway we support. It would, therefore, be useful for training and qualification level courses across Aotearoa New Zealand to be evaluated and compared to see if any baseline for effective training could be established prior to review of the strategy.

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