

# SOUTH WEST REGIONAL YOUTH WORK UNIT

## Implementing Consistent Supervision in Youth Work Settings : Good Practice Guidelines

### **Introduction**

This paper is produced as a result of discussions at the SW Regional Trainers Group, regarding the practical difficulties encountered in ensuring that supervision practice is consistent across youth work organisations. It draws on the experience and policy documents of Youth Services across the region. It is intended to provide guidance for Youth Services and voluntary organisations.

There are many models of supervision available to youth workers. This document assumes a model of managerial supervision, delivered through one-to-one sessions between the worker and their line manager/designated supervisor. However, it should be noted that management supervision can also be achieved through group meetings. Non-managerial supervision and peer supervision can supplement this process, but cannot replace the management functions of supervision.

### ***What are the barriers to achieving consistent supervision across an organisation?***

The following factors have been identified by members of the SW Regional Trainers Group:

- Lack of understanding of the purpose and practice of supervision
- Lack of skills and confidence amongst supervisors
- Resistance from supervisees and/or supervisors
- Lack of time/priority given to supervision
- Supervisors expected to supervise too many staff
- Unrealistic expectations regarding frequency of supervision
- Lack of forward planning for supervision meetings
- Inadequate monitoring processes
- Lack of management action to resolve non-compliance.

This guidance aims to provide potential solutions to the issues identified above.

### **Understanding the purpose and practice of supervision**

It cannot be assumed that all staff will understand the concept of supervision as it is used in youth work. A clear definition should be provided as part of staff induction processes. Somerset County Youth Service 'Supervision Practice Guidelines' (2005) provides a clear and accessible set of objectives and functions:

- *To monitor work performance*
- *To evaluate work and performance*
- *To clarify priorities*
- *To share information about work*
- *To discuss how you and they feel about work*
- *To recognise and deal with potential and existing problems*
- *To discuss how outside factors are affecting work*
- *To provide a framework for discussing and agreeing change.*

Most Youth Service supervision policies include models for the content/agenda for supervision, and for recording supervision sessions. They also give guidance about the environment for supervision and the extent to which the content of supervision can be seen as confidential. It is recommended that youth work organisations adopt agreed models for these, and ensure that all staff are aware of them and know how to use them. Some examples of current models are included in the reference section at the back of this document.

### **Ensuring supervisors are skilled and confident**

All staff who have supervision responsibilities should be required to undertake a programme of supervision training in their first year of employment, unless they can demonstrate that they have completed similar training in the last two years. Cornwall Youth Service 'Supervision and Performance Appraisal' (2005) requires all supervisors to undertake 'refresher training' every three years, and this is recommended as good practice.

### **Tackling resistance from supervisors and supervisees**

Not all staff will have had positive experiences of supervision in the past. Youth Support Workers in particular are likely to have worked in other settings where supervision is seen as a process utilised only where performance is deemed to be poor, so may find the idea of regular supervision quite threatening. Some staff will need to be reassured that the process is valuable to them and their learning, and the induction process for new staff should ensure that staff are provided with the opportunity to raise concerns and ask questions about how supervision will be used in the organisation.

Somerset County Youth Service uses a 'Supervision Agreement' (Appendix 1), between supervisor and supervisee as a basis for establishing supervision practice. This is seen as good practice, as it provides an individually tailored approach, agreed by both parties and recorded. It can also be seen as an 'entitlement' to which supervisees can refer if supervision arrangements break down.

Where a potential supervisor expresses reservations or resistance to engaging in supervision this should be explored by their line manager/supervisor, training and support should be made available, and the situation monitored. If supervision is to be effective, supervisees need to feel confident that their supervisor views it as a valuable process. Managerial action will be needed if a supervisor is identified as not providing effective supervision.

## **Ensuring that supervision is given sufficient priority and time**

### ***Realistic expectations***

Organisations need to ensure that their expectations of the frequency and length of supervision are realistic. Amongst the Youth Services that provided documentation, there is considerable variation on what is expected, with differences between expectations for staff at different levels in the organisation and between full and part-time staff. Some organisations have set minimum criteria of 4-6 meetings a year, while recommending sessions every 4-8 weeks.

The large numbers of part-time staff in youth work and the wide range of youth work units bring unique problems to the implementation of consistent supervision. Supervisors are often not based in the same location as those they supervise, and part-time staff often have very little paid non-contact time, which makes it difficult to prioritise supervision, or make it part of a routine. Youth work organisations need to take this into account in establishing their normal pattern of supervision, so that expectations are kept to an achievable level.

### ***Recommendation***

*A minimum of 4 and maximum of 8 sessions a year, to include an annual Performance Appraisal meeting is recommended for all staff working more than 6 hours a week. Those working 6 hours a week or less should receive a minimum of an annual Performance Appraisal meeting and a half-yearly review. Supervision should take place in paid time for all staff.*

### ***Realistic workloads***

The organisation should ensure that each supervisor has a reasonable workload to enable them to supervise their staff effectively. Many management texts regard 8 as the maximum number for whom any manager can provide effective line management and supervision support. To achieve this across a complex organisation, supervision will need to be delegated throughout the organisation. In youth work, this is likely to mean that Senior Youth Support Workers/Workers-in-charge and newly qualified professional range staff will be supervisors of small teams, as well as Senior Youth Workers and Youth Work Managers. The JNC grade descriptors allow for these responsibilities, and all staff who could potentially be supervisors should have access to relevant training.

### ***Effective planning for supervision***

Several Youth Services require supervision meetings to be planned annually in advance (BANES, Cornwall). This is recommended as good practice. Agreed dates should be recorded on the organisation's calendar (thus enabling the organisation to monitor supervision arrangements, and to try to avoid arranging internal events and meetings that clash with supervision dates). It is acknowledged, however, that a two-way meeting is often easier to rearrange than a larger, externally generated meeting or event, so some flexibility will be required. Organisations should ensure that any supervision meeting that is postponed should be reconvened within 3 weeks of the original date. This could be built into individual 'supervision agreements'.

## Monitoring supervision arrangements

Many youth work organisations acknowledge that while they have a coherent policy for supervision, their procedures for monitoring its implementation are weak. OFSTED inspection reports frequently highlight this gap between rhetoric and reality.

It is recommended that organisations put in place systems to ensure that:

- Supervision meetings are planned in advance
- Supervision meetings are recorded using a consistent framework
- Recordings are retained and are accessible for internal and external QA processes
- Internal QA processes, including unit and area reviews, assess the consistency of supervision practice
- Managers are alerted to cases where supervision arrangements are failing, and take action to explore and resolve issues
- Supervisees have access to a complaints procedure to resolve problems arising from failure to meet their supervision entitlement

## Rewarding good practice and managing non-compliance

Supervision is one of the base-line 'maintenance' functions in a youth work organisation, and workers are rarely praised for consistent application of the organisation's policy. This may contribute to staff viewing it as a low priority, and allowing it to slip off the agenda. Organisations should consider ways of recognising the efforts of individual managers in ensuring that their staff are well supervised. These could range from praise from line managers to awarding mini 'Investors in people' type awards to units where supervision arrangements are good.

The converse of this is that managers rarely take action when a case of non-compliance with the supervision policy is identified. It is an important element in quality improvement, however, and as such should be treated at least as seriously as health and safety policy implementation. It is recommended that youth work organisations ensure that they deal with lapses in the implementation of supervision policy using similar mechanisms to those used for dealing with issues such as failure to comply with policies for off-site activities. This would ensure that staff understand that supervision is seen as an important task by the organisation, and encourage them to give it a high priority.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn from the discussion above. Organisations should:

- Provide a clear definition of supervision as part of staff induction
- Explain to all staff the purpose of supervision and adopt recommended models for confidentiality, environment, content and recording of supervision meetings
- Ensure that all supervisors are trained in supervision skills and have access to refresher training on a regular basis
- Establish an individual 'Supervision Agreement' for all staff
- Set realistic expectations of the frequency of supervision for all staff
- Ensure that supervisors have direct responsibility for no more than 8 staff
- Ensure supervision meetings are planned in advance

- Establish effective monitoring of the implementation of supervision across the organisation
- Reward good practice in supervision
- Treat non-compliance seriously and take appropriate management action.

**Gill Millar**

Regional Youth Work Adviser

May 2006

**References**

*This document was informed by the following documents from South West Youth Services:*

Bath & North East Somerset Youth Service: Managerial Supervision

Cornwall Youth Service: Supervision and Performance Appraisal

Devon Youth Service: Managerial Supervision

Gloucestershire Youth & Community Service: Supervision Guidance

Somerset County Youth Service (2005): Supervision Practice Guidelines

# SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL

## County Youth Service

### Sample SUPERVISION AGREEMENT



<b>Name:</b>  <b>Signature:</b>	<b>Team / Establishment Address:</b>
<b>Name of Supervisor:</b>  <b>Signature:</b>	<b>Date of Agreement:</b>
<b>Name of Line Manager:</b>  <b>Signature:</b>	
(A) Method	
(B) Frequency	
(C) Duration	
(D) Location	
(E) Confidentiality	
(F) Recording	
(G) Storage	
(H) Contents of record	
(I) Quality Assurance Sampling discussed and clarified	

