

## Chapter 12

# Professional Supervision

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### 12.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the extent to which supervision specific to the youth work profession has been established in member states.

Professional supervision is a formal and disciplined professional conversation between practice colleagues. It is widely used as a means of quality assurance, and is often self-evaluative. It is seen as a management, learning and support mechanism in social work, counselling and psychotherapy as well as in some teaching, medical and policing contexts. This chapter outlines the existence of supervision as a learning and regulatory framework in youth work across the sampled countries.

### 12.2 What is professional supervision in the context of professional learning and development?

Youth work is understood to require reflective practitioners; people who are able to think about, discuss and justify their practice in order to develop, hone and improve the services they deliver to young people. Supervision is a recognised tool in this process that looks to improve youth work responses, helping to make them more effective, efficient, responsible, relevant and safe.

The practice of professional supervision can be refined in different ways according to aims and contexts, but essentially the work of supervision is focused on the interrogation of practice, which can take place no matter how much or how little experience one might have; it is not limited to those in training or structured education.

Professional supervision is not appraisal in the sense that one person is straightforwardly evaluating the performance of another, although it might encompass elements of self-assessment and, when required, guidance. It is not a debate, although it is an exploration. Neither is it an argument. However, it is enquiring, questioning and even probing. At the same time supervision can't be counselling; it isn't a form of therapy. Neither (perhaps at the other extreme) is it casual chatting.

Supervision concentrates on the development and perfecting of practice, the professional activity of the practitioner. To this extent, it is pragmatic, which does not preclude aims to support, but this is not starting from a deficit assumption about the supervisee; what is being supported is a postulation of asset – that the supervisee has it in them to maintain, refine, progress and/or better their practice delivery with appropriate supervision.

In short, the major outcome of supervision is the development of professional judgement as a foundation of innovation, sharpening, enhancing and improving the functioning of the supervisee and so the offer, capacity and operation of their organisation.

This said, more generally, professional supervision promotes learning, considered action and, within realistic boundaries, facilitate reflective practice. This process is aimed at underpinning client safety, wellbeing and care, which allows for, forwards and confirms the effective and efficient achieving and/or realising of agency aims, professional objectives conduct and attitudes, desired outcomes, goals and purposes. Supervision grounds, consolidates and advances policy and practice, while emphasising ethical and moral service delivery.

## 12.3 Youth work supervision in the Commonwealth

The baseline indicated little formal supervision processes in the Commonwealth outside the European context. Existing expertise within or outside your region, as indicated in Table 12.1, can be drawn on for the further strengthening of supervision practices in youth work in youth work implementing agencies.

### 12.3.1 Africa

It seems that some key stakeholders take youth work supervision to be staff appraisal or monitoring via reports. In some contexts it was argued that every institution employed their own methods or frameworks of 'supervision' of staff members to achieve their different goals. However, for the most part it was reported that there was no practice standard or guidelines.

South Africa indicated supervision for students during their service learning or practicum, which is required by specific module requirements included in youth work degree programmes. Nonetheless, there seems to be no supervision for practising youth workers.

**Table 12.1 Supervision – Africa**

Nature of professional accreditation of youth work qualifications			
Country	Formal supervision exists	Supervision guidelines exist	Qualifications exist for youth work supervision
<b>Ghana</b>	No	No	No
<b>Kenya</b>	No	No	No
<b>Malawi</b>	No	No	No
<b>Nigeria</b>	No	No	No
<b>South Africa</b>	No	No	No
<b>Tanzania</b>	No	No	No
<b>Uganda</b>	No	No	No
<b>Zambia</b>	No	No	No

In Ghana, there is no formal supervision for youth workers, although the monitoring of the Youth Empowerment Agency (YAE) activities through the reports of the implementing agencies is perceived as a form of supervision.

In Kenya and Malawi, it was reported that there are no formal supervision or national guidelines for supervision of the youth officers/workers. It was argued that most key stakeholders in Malawi consider the work of ‘supervision’ to be conducted by the local youth officers to whom all organisations working with youth are obliged to report. However, there was no practice standard for such ‘supervision’.

Nigeria also reported the non-existence of structured supervision.

In Tanzania, the government youth workers are expected to adhere to their departmental legislation and human resources regulations. In the NGO sector supervision is the responsibility of the Registrar of Societies.

Considering the specific goals of youth work supervision, such as enhancing professional growth and development, it is important to ensure that youth work supervision is not generalised or grouped with the general ‘line manager staff supervision’. This seems to be the way supervision is understood in Africa, however.

In view of this, there is no significant evidence of the existence of formal or non-formal supervision of youth workers.

### 12.3.2 Asia

In Singapore, the Youth Work Association (Singapore) has delivered a youth work supervision course with the intention of establishing a Register of Youth Work

**Box 12.1 Youth work supervision framework, Singapore**

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**How it all started**

The youth work supervision framework was part of our ongoing development as a fledgling youth work association. In the absence of a formal pre-employment track for youth workers in general, it was challenging to establish any form of benchmarks or standards of practice. The Committee of the Youth Workers’ Association (Singapore) therefore decided that it would instead be easier and more feasible to kick-start a process of supervision practices so that it can help at least tackle what is already in the field. The assumption was that current youth workers, irrespective of their settings and organisations they belong to, may be helped by a pool of senior youth workers armed with supervision, coaching and mentoring skills

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### Principles of the Framework

So far, the supervision framework stresses the following principles. They are not exhaustive but express the salient points:

- a. **A Strengths-based Approach** – Rather than focusing on deficits and placing our efforts on reducing them, we should also work on one's inherent strengths and talents.
- b. **Relationship Building and Contracting** – The dimension of supervision is a relational one and thus thrives on positive relationship elements.
- c. **Skills and Interventions in Supervision** – The practice of supervision requires a plethora of skills and techniques that must be honed for greater effectiveness.
- d. **Ethics and Values in Supervision** – Supervision must be anchored on a positive basis of solid values and ethical principles.
- e. **Collaborative and Peer Group Feedback** – Supervision need not only be approached from a top-down hierarchical angle but should include the lateral dimension of peer collaboration.
- f. **Reflective Practice** – To hone professional development, it is essential to conduct regular reflection.

### Implementation

Our initial run yielded 24 trained supervisors. The impact of the use of supervision tools, however, is yet to be measured and the YWAS Committee is keen to follow up on this process. This process is aligned to the planned launch of a National Youth Work Competency Framework by the Singapore Government in 2017.

Supervision practice is very aligned to the framework in that it is embedded in the modules pegged for senior and principal youth workers.

### Challenges

This is an ongoing process. One obstacle we face is the lack of recognition for the Youth Workers' Association and their power to advise and inform change in practice through the supervision framework. This was also raised by youth-serving organisations that would fall under the supervision guidance framework. This was a legitimate observation. As YWAS is not a regulatory body, we have no teeth when it comes to 'enforcing' standardised practices.

To address this challenge, The YWAS committee then felt it would be more appropriate to approach it as a coaching tool made available for the various youth organisations to tap from, and it is used as such in some contexts.

Our initial supervision course garnered some 24 participants who come from five different agencies. It is estimated that they each have oversight over at least two or three other youth workers in practice.

**Table 12.2 Supervision – Asia**

Country	Formal supervision exists	Supervision guidelines exist	Qualifications exist for youth work supervision
<b>Bangladesh</b>	None	None	None
<b>India</b>	None	None	None
<b>Malaysia</b>	Drafting	Drafting	Drafting
<b>Maldives</b>	None	None	None
<b>Pakistan</b>	None	None	None
<b>Singapore</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	None	None	None

Supervisors, looking to raise the standards of youth work practice in Singapore. This experience is outlined in Box 10.1.

The general conclusion from the baseline research in Asia was that, with the exception of Singapore, there is no significant engagement in the field of youth work supervision in the region. Malaysia, however, is in the process of drafting supervision guidelines as a part of its emerging framework for professionalising youth work.

**Table 12.3 Supervision – the Caribbean**

Country	Formal supervision exists	Supervision guidelines exist	Qualifications exist for youth work supervision
<b>Barbados</b>	Rules for formal supervision are mandatory as set out in the Ministry’s Performance Review Development System. This is augmented by the guidelines set out in the <i>Division of Youth Handbook</i> . In addition, there are assigned supervisors who mentor and validate practice activities of workers.	Yes	Supervisors are qualified by academic qualifications and/or years of experience in the post. The Supervisors in the Division have more than 15 years’ practice experience.
<b>Belize</b>	No	No	No
<b>Dominica</b>	No	No	No
<b>Guyana</b>	No	No	No
<b>Jamaica</b>	No	No	No
<b>St Lucia</b>	No	No	No
<b>St Vincent and the Grenadines</b>	No	No	
<b>Trinidad and Tobago</b>	No	No	No

### 12.3.3 The Caribbean

No youth-work-specific supervision mechanisms were reported, except in Barbados.

### 12.3.4 Europe and Canada

In Europe, Malta is laying the foundations for the provision of supervision, and the training of supervisors is currently being established. There has been experimentation with Skype supervision (with practitioners in the UK), and one-to-one and group supervision.

Supervision in the occupational context of youth work is relatively well established in the **United Kingdom**. It is a subject requirement of most undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. However, while supervision is seen as fundamental to professional practice in the child care field and was highlighted in Eileen Munro's extensive Government review of child care (Department for Education, UK, 2011) (this document consistently highlights the importance and the necessity of skilled supervision), many full-time youth workers are not committed to the practice, while comparatively few part-time and voluntary practitioners have access to supervision.

Qualifications exist for youth work supervision, but perhaps the most esteemed (as it is validated by Community Learning and Development (CLD) Scotland and as such deemed a professional qualification) is offered by the YMCA George Williams College.

While supervision is widely recognised in fields such as social work, counselling and psychotherapy in Canada, there is no specific emphasis on specialist youth work supervision. This is probably understandable as youth work has no formal recognition in Canada. This said, supervision may well be offered to youth workers involved in organisations that are acclimatised to or deliver social work/counselling services, but this is speculative and there is no structured or devoted supervision for youth workers and as such no guidelines.

As in many other aspects of youth work, in Europe, cross regionally, the access and understanding of supervision varies. It is

- well developed and seen as fundamental to child care in the UK;
- evolving in Malta;
- not obligatory but accessible in Canada as a desirable practice;
- invisible/non-identifiable or not promoted in Cyprus.

**Table 12.4 Supervision – Europe**

Country	Formal supervision exists	Supervision guidelines exist	Qualifications exist for youth work supervision
<b>Canada</b>	Yes	No	No
<b>Cyprus</b>	No	No	No
<b>Malta</b>	Yes	Yes	No
<b>UK</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes

### 12.3.5 The Pacific

**Table 12.5 Supervision – Pacific**

Country	Formal supervision exists	Supervision guidelines exist	Qualifications exist for youth work supervision
<b>Australia</b>	Yes	Yes	No
<b>New Zealand</b>	Yes	Yes	No
<b>Tonga</b>	No	No	No
<b>Fiji</b>	No	No	No
<b>Samoa</b>	No	No	No
<b>Solomon Islands</b>	No	No	No
<b>Papua New Guinea</b>	No	No	No
<b>Vanuatu</b>	No	No	No

Australia has no formal legislated obligation for professional supervision as a requirement for practising as a youth worker, although specific workplace supervision does occur both through management structures and accountability measures in workplaces and through professional networks of supervision. While management supervision resonates more with appraisal and assessment of productivity than professional supervision, there are many formal and informal professional supervision networks that operate around Australia, primarily self-organised by youth workers. The YWA in Victoria, however, have developed supervision resources and provide a voluntary supervision structure including regularly offering professional development seminars, workshops and annual conferences for members of the youth work association and providing support to the informal supervision networks.

In New Zealand, supervision is not widely used as part of the training and development of youth workers in government employment. However, the youth development sector has generated guidelines, although these are inconsistently enacted (largely because of resourcing) in the community sector.

### 12.4 Developing professional supervision practice

In terms of the development and enhancement of youth work as a profession in the Commonwealth, it would seem central that knowledge about the nature of supervision practice needs to be promoted, and that a skills base needs to be built. This might be facilitated by structured practice/academic programmes such as those offered by the YMCA George Williams College in the United Kingdom (YMCA George Williams College, n.d.).

The programme to be delivered by Aġenzija Żgħażaġh, the National Youth Agency of Malta, is a similar case. This programme follows a six-month experiment of international co-operation using Skype supervision, building on a partnership programme (with the YMCA George Williams College) familiarising youth workers in Malta with a good practice model. This was carried forward as follows:

- Youth workers in the UK, with experience of supervision, collaborated with youth workers in Malta.
- Maltese/British pairs of practitioners, alternatively taking supervisor/supervisee roles, conducted regular supervision sessions (six one-hour sessions of supervision over a six-month period – sessions took place at approximately three-week intervals).
- All participants wrote brief but structured and evidence-based self-assessments of learning as supervisors and supervisees.
- Supervisors detailed and evidence the learning and development of supervisees as youth work practitioners from the process of supervision.
- Supervisees looked at their own learning and development as youth workers, calling on evidence gleaned/identified from the supervision process.

### **Figure 12.1 Development of Supervision Studies in Malta – Introductory Programme**

The project will proceed in two phases:

Phase 1–The development and delivery of a six-month pilot programme. This will involve;

- a) The nomination of between 8 and 12 candidates for training
- b) Three full-day workshops;
  - workshop 1 will take place in week 3 of the course
  - workshop 2 will take place in the week 12 of the course
  - workshop 3 will take place in week 20 of the course
  - workshops will focus on participant learning via the sharing of practice and the study materials
- c) All participants will be supplied with study materials electronically
- d) All participants will undertake 5 sessions of supervision as supervisees
- e) All participants will undertake 5 sessions of supervision as supervisors
- f) All participants, as supervisees, will provide a satisfactory self-assessment of their learning
- g) All participants, as supervisors will provide a satisfactory assessment of their supervisee's learning

Students will be encouraged to keep in regular contact with the tutor via email and Skype. Electronic and face-to-face tutorials will be made available.

Phase 2–Following review and assessment of the pilot programme during a two-day conference, a proposal for postgraduate certificate in supervision studies will be submitted to the University. This will include study materials.

This initial process allowed for the development of skill and insight about the use and conduct of supervision.

Following the completion and evaluation of the introductory programme in Malta, it is hoped that a structured and accredited course might be initiated, perhaps as a partnership between the University and Agenzija Żgħażaġh.

As a first stage of developing supervision practice, it would be advantageous to draw on the experience of those Commonwealth countries where professional supervision is being incorporated in education and training, and where it is practised.

## 12.5 Core factors in teaching supervision

While supervision gives the task to the supervisee to develop their own conclusions and solutions, the supervisor has an educational and advice function, especially in terms of the supervisee's safety and performance and the safety of the supervisee's clients.

Usually supervision encompasses three areas:

- particular incidents, issues or cases
- situations or contexts (physical workplace and networks, including frustrations with and emotional responses to the same)
- career considerations.

The third area can incorporate such areas as further training, conditions of work, career prospects and career aspirations, retirement, perceptions about how to manage and delegate work.

Sometimes two or all three of these provinces might be touched on in one supervision session. When supervision has an educational emphasis the direction of the encounter is (relatively) more clearly defined in relation to the above areas.

'Vision' is the means to gaze on or look at. Logically, linking 'vision' with the word 'super' implies a sort of 'extra-looking' or 'looking plus'. However, the word 'supervision' tends to be used to refer to one person overseeing another, as a means of checking their performance. But this would be a bit of a dead-end occupation if this scrutiny was not also a means of performance getting better (rather than just a way of maintaining a standard).

Both checking and improving performance are, more or less, encompassed in the supervision process. The extent to which either happens over a number of sessions depends on the context. But supervision is developmental (connected to continuous learning about the management and delivery of practice) and linked to performance (maintaining and improving standards).

## 12.6 Ways and contexts

There are different ways and contexts in which supervision takes place: peer supervision, education and training and in groups. It can also be more inclined towards support or management.

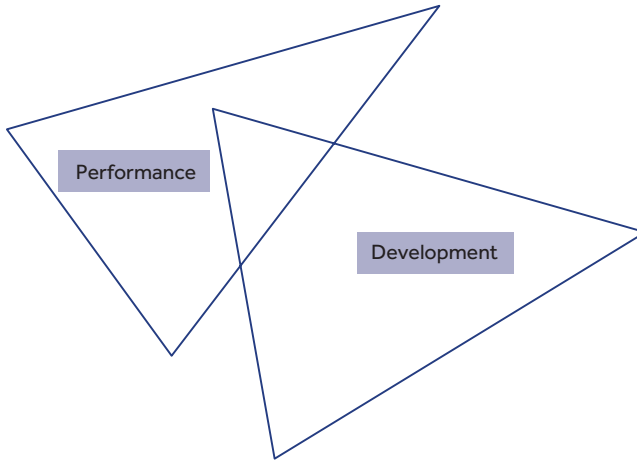
**Figure 12.2 Areas of supervision focus**

Figure 12.2 shows a diagram that can help practitioners to think about where their own supervisory encounters might be placed. For instance, if they are overtly managerial, more of an appraisal perhaps, one might place one's experience at the extreme right-hand point of the upper triangle. But if what the practitioner experiences feels more like a counselling session, they may feel inclined towards the bottom right hand point.

Although there are commonalities across supervision contexts, youth work has specific concerns and issues arising out of the nature of practice. The welfare/wellbeing, education/learning mix is unique, but it also changes from situation to situation. Sometimes youth workers are involved in igniting, making room for or generating relatively tangential learning experiences. In other spheres and/or points in time, youth workers can be implicated in clearly formalised and directive education, overt guidance, training and instruction – even, given the need – comparatively didactical forms of teaching.

However, in initial training and education, one of the primary concerns of supervision is the student's learning and development as a practitioner. This is second only to personal and client safety, but it might be a much closer second than, say, in an employment situation, where there is necessarily a major focus on performance and effective delivery. While the latter is also a consideration in training, it might not be as crucial (in relation to course requirements) as it could be in a field agency/organisation, given the need, with funding in mind, to ensure that intended outcomes are achieved.

The role of the supervisor in the educational context might be thought of as being much clearer, although it is no less complex. In this context of supervision, the supervisor has a role in supporting the learner on their 'learning journey'. Each supervisee's path on this journey, although having commonalities with study peers, will be unique to that person. As such the supervisor needs to get to know the strengths, areas for improvement/development and aspirations of their supervisee in order to provide effective and timely supervision. At the same time, the supervisee must be able to

communicate the same information profile to the supervisor; this cannot be a one-way process.

It is possible to see how aims, contexts and job specifics could require the supervision encounter to be set in particular areas of the above image. But one could also add other triangles, maybe for 'support' or 'guidance', among others.

## 12.7 Practice without supervision can become malpractice

The above heading is a strong, perhaps shocking statement, but youth work practice without mechanisms to promote reflection, consideration and introspection – the wherewithal to examine, explore, critique and develop responses and services – could be considered 'unsafe', creating prime ground for accidents to happen and mistakes to occur without the means to prevent mistakes, or to learn from them.

Perhaps of all the aspects of youth work in the Commonwealth supervision is the most underdeveloped. Indeed, it appears that knowledge and skills to implement supervision are limited, and in some cases, non-existent. This being the case, it is clear that the Commonwealth, working with expert and experienced partners, might constructively look at developing supervision practice examples internationally as part of a further strengthening the fundamental foundations for effective, efficient, safe, **examined** practice.

## 12.8 Conclusion

Supervision was less well developed in countries sampled compared to other regulatory frameworks discussed in Chapter 10. While general supervisory practices were evident in some countries, not all of them were informed by the tenets of reflective practice advanced by youth work supervision.

This situation is of concern as youth work supervision is one of the principal means to promote reflective practice, being deployed in order that practitioners might address practice needs, ensuring better outcomes for the youth service users.

The goals and approach of youth work require the consistent enhancement of practice in order that it remains relevant and appropriate. This is part of professional growth and development and supervision is a crucial means of ensuring the same.

The evidence available in the baseline will become useful to countries in identifying knowledge sharing around training and implementing supervision practice in their own countries.