

Supervision: Information for Employers of Speech and Language Therapists

What is supervision?

Supervision is the formal arrangement that enables a speech and language therapist (SLT) to discuss their work regularly with someone who is experienced and qualified. Supervision is an essential component of a good quality speech and language therapy service that is able to identify and manage risk. This is the case for all SLTs, including those practising independently or employed in other contexts.

There are a wide variety of terms applied to the activity of supervision in health and social care and the terms used may overlap or vary depending on your context. RCSLT uses the terms 'managerial supervision' and 'professional supervision' to make a distinction between two different types of supervision and differentiate these from professional support:

- i. **Managerial supervision:** provides an opportunity for the SLT to discuss clinical, service-related and wider professional issues. It is carried out by a supervisor with authority and accountability for the supervisee – usually their line manager. This person may or may not have a speech and language therapy background.
- ii. **Professional supervision:** provides an opportunity for the SLT to discuss clinical and other professional issues in a non-judgmental environment, and is usually provided by another speech and language therapist without line management responsibility. This may also be referred to as 'clinical', 'personal' or 'practice' supervision.
- iii. **Professional support:** is the over-arching, umbrella term used to refer to a wide range of learning opportunities – it is typically more ad hoc and informal than supervision.

RCSLT recommends both types of supervision and professional support for all speech and language therapists.

The [Health and Care Professions Council \(HCPC\)](#) is the UK-wide regulatory body responsible for setting and maintaining standards for SLTs. Registration is a legal requirement for all practising SLTs, who must adhere to the HCPC standards, including a requirement to:

- “understand the importance of participation in training, supervision and mentoring” in order to be able to practice as an autonomous professional ([HCPC, 2013, p.8](#)).
- “keep your knowledge and skills up to date and relevant to your scope of practice through continuing professional development” ([HCPC, 2016, p.7](#))

What are the benefits of supervision?

Supervision is critical to the delivery of a high-quality client service through accountable decision-making and clinical practice, the facilitation of learning and professional development and the promotion of staff wellbeing. Supervision has been associated with higher levels of job satisfaction, improved retention, staff effectiveness and reduced turnover. It is also one way for a provider to fulfil their duty of care to staff.

What are the risks of not accessing supervision?

The importance of effective supervision has been raised in a number of recent health service reviews, following a series of major incidents in healthcare trusts, for example:

- [The final report of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry](#)
- [The Department of Health's final report on Winterbourne View Hospital](#)

What is my responsibility as an employer?

It is the responsibility of an employing organisation to provide support for staff to enable them to deliver care

safely and to an appropriate standard. The RCSLT strongly recommend that employers commit sufficient time and financial resources to enable SLTs to access supervision in line with the recommendations below. The RCSLT considers that supervision is at the core of continuing professional development as it provides a pivotal opportunity to structure learning. Failure to access appropriate supervision may affect the indemnity insurance that SLTs have as part of their RCSLT membership.

Managerial supervision

Managerial supervision comprises:

- One-to-one supervision between the line manager and supervisee. This can take place face-to-face, by telephone, videoconference or online. Face-to-face is the preferred option and a balance between this and any other form would need to be negotiated and reviewed regularly.

Who can provide managerial supervision?

- Managerial supervision is carried out by a supervisor with authority and accountability for the supervisee. If the managerial supervisor does not have a speech and language therapy background, then s/he will need to pay attention to their scope of practice and delegate accordingly (e.g. the NQP competency framework, ensuring adherence to HCPC standards that require a speech and language therapy background). The same applies for an SLT with a management role in relation to a non-SLT health professional.

How much and how often is managerial supervision needed?

- RCSLT recommends that certified speech and language therapists receive: *at least one hour of managerial supervision every four to six weeks.*
- NQPs must access managerial supervision more frequently: *one hour every week during the first three months; and one hour every month thereafter.*

Professional supervision

Professional supervision can be a combination of:

- One-to-one supervision, which can be face-to-face, by telephone or videoconference.
- Group supervision in which two or more practitioners discuss their work with a supervisor.
- Peer or co-supervision, where practitioners discuss work with each other and share the role of supervisor.

Who can provide professional supervision?

- A professional supervisor should have the skills, qualifications, experience and knowledge of the area of practice required to undertake their role effectively. They should also be supported through having their own professional supervision.
- Speech and language therapy assistants (SLTAs) and NQPs must receive professional supervision from an experienced, HCPC-registered SLT, but more experienced SLTs may choose to access professional supervision from a non-SLT professional working in the same area of specialism (e.g. a psychiatrist or ear, nose and throat (ENT) consultant).
- RCSLT recommends that managerial and professional supervision are offered by different people, however, recognise that there will be situations where this is difficult in practice. In such circumstances, the supervisor needs to negotiate which role they are taking at any given time for the sake of clarity and transparency.
- Organisations that employ small numbers of speech and language therapists may be able to buy-in supervision from their local NHS service or independent therapists in their area. The [Association of](#)

[Speech and Language Therapists in Independent Practice](#) (ASLTIP) has a list of practitioners offering professional supervision.

How much and how often is professional supervision needed?

- RCSLT recommends that certified speech and language therapists receive: *at least one hour of professional supervision every four to six weeks.*
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Professional support

In addition to supervision, it is important that SLTs also access professional support – for example, through colleagues, employers, RCSLT Advisers, Clinical Excellence Networks (CENs) and other peer groups and networks.

Recommendations for Employers of Newly Qualified Practitioners (NQPs)

NQPs are SLTs who:

- have recently completed a recognised speech and language therapy qualification
- are registered with the HCPC
- have not completed the RCSLT's NQP competency framework.

The competency framework supports learning, development and safe practice during the SLT's first year post-qualification, bridging the gap from education into working practice. The registered SLT can access more detailed information and resources about the competency framework on the RCSLT website:

<https://www.rcslt.org/members/your-career/newly-qualified-practitioners>

During the NQP period, the RCSLT recommends that both managerial and professional supervision must be provided more frequently - *one hour every week during the first three months; and one hour every month thereafter.*

It is the responsibility of the NQP and employer to ensure the supervisor who is signing off the competencies is a registered member of both HCPC and RCSLT. We recommend that this is confirmed before the NQP commences employment.

The RCSLT considers that any breach of the requirements around supervision of NQPs may pose a significant risk to service users, to the NQP and their employer. If these requirements are not adhered to the indemnity insurance that NQPs have as part of their RCSLT membership may be invalidated.

The registered SLT can access more detailed information and resources about supervision on the RCSLT website:

<https://www.rcslt.org/members/delivering-quality-services/supervision>

If you have any questions about your responsibilities as an employer of SLTs, please contact RCSLT by phone on 020 7378 3012 or email: info@rcslt.org