

Supervision: Information for Speech and Language Therapists

What is supervision?

Supervision is the formal arrangement that enables you to discuss your 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 you to discuss clinical, service-related and wider professional issues. It is carried out by a supervisor with authority and accountability for the supervisee – usually your line manager. This person may or may not have a speech and language therapy background.
- ii. **Professional supervision:** provides an opportunity for you 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. You may also hear this 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 \(HCPC\)](#) standards stipulate that registrants must:

- “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 a speech and language therapist?

It is your responsibility as a registered professional to keep your knowledge and skills up-to-date and relevant to your scope of practice through continuing professional development ([HCPC, 2016, p. 7](#)).

The RCSLT considers that supervision is at the core of continuing professional development as it provides a pivotal opportunity for you to address and structure aspects of your 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 must have the skills, qualifications, experience and knowledge of the area of practice required to undertake their role effectively. They must 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.

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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.

More detailed information and resources about supervision are available on the RCSLT website:

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