

Organisation: Croydon Council

ASYE co-ordinator: ASYE co-leads are Tim Gray and Natesha Yanguba

Adults ASYE programme: Yes

Child and family ASYE programme: No

Adults and child and family ASYE programme: No

Number of NQSWs in your current cohort: 11

The practice identified	Phased Caseload Reduction: The Effectiveness of a phased caseload reduction for NQSWs in Croydon ASC.
Element(s) of the NEC/NEC+ to which the example relates	<p>A1- Feedback is proactively sought through mechanisms such as 360 evaluation tool. NQSWs are active participants, rather than passive recipients.</p> <p>A2- NQSWs, along with other stakeholders (i.e, supervisors/assessors and people who draw on care and support and their carers) are able to make a meaningful contribution to the ASYE quality assurance and continuous improvement.</p> <p>A3- NQSW's wellbeing is prioritized from the beginning of the ASYE and NQSWs are made aware of support structures available to them within the organization from the outset and how to access support, such as buddying and peer support networks.</p> <p>A4- Equality, diversity and inclusion are central to the ASYE Programme, ensuring that all NQSWs are offered an ASYE experience which is tailored to their individual needs, including culture and learning needs and identities.</p> <p>A6-The ASYE Programme has an equality and diversity framework in place that ensure NQSWs and those supporting them are not treated unfairly or discriminated against because of their background or characteristics.</p>

	<p>A8- NQSWs are encouraged to engage with the national ASYE framework via the quarterly NQSW forums.</p> <p>A9- A structure is in place for providing specific and impactful support for promoting the NQSWs health and wellbeing across all stages of the programme, the shape of this support has been influenced by NQSWs.</p> <p>B1- The transition from student to NQSW clearly identifies the individual support and development needs of NQSWs</p> <p>B4- Every NQSW receives regular reflective supervision with a focus on critical reflection</p> <p>B5- NQSWs receive workload relief appropriate for their stage in the programme</p> <p>B15- There are policies and procedures in place to make it clear what an individual NQSW can expect in terms of support and assessment and there is evidence of the review of these policies.</p> <p>C3-All those involved in the ASYE receives the support they need to understand their role in relation to the development of social work practice underpinned by the PQS and PCF.</p> <p>D2- A clear and transparent quality assurance and continuous improvement process is in place within the organization. Identified actions for developing a programme are reviewed.</p> <p>D5- Senior management are aware of their key role as leaders in championing the success of the programme. This includes ensuring that NQSWs are not overburdened with their caseloads and that protected CPD and development time is adhered to.</p>
Please record:	

- the element of the national evaluation criteria (NEC) or NEC+ to which this submission relates e.g. NEC A2
- the relevant points you would like the NQAP to consider in their endorsement process
 - the reasons and evidence for your programme's practice meeting or contributing in a meaningful way to meeting an element of the NEC/NEC+

When discussing the application with the ASYE co-ordinator, consider:

- Method of delivery/ what it involves is practical, clear and easily understood, including the materials for sharing on the website
- Whether it has improved the experience of NQSWs in one or more of the core dimensions of support, assessment and outcome
- Evidence from NQSWs/ Assessor/ other stakeholders that their experience (in support, assessment and outcome) has been improved by the practice
- Whether the practice is innovative and creative
- Is the application sufficiently robust to withstand challenge
- the degree of resources required to deliver the practice (resource intensity)
- the degree of bureaucracy/ burden involved in applying the practice
- Is the practice identified ASYE specific and relate to the support/development/ assessment/ outcome experience of NQSWs

Background and context

Croydon Adult Social Care employs 150 registered social workers. It has a large cohort of NQSWs. There were 15 in the 2020/2021 intake with 14 passes and one NQSW leaving the organisation, and 12 NQSWs in 2021/2022 intake with 11 passes and one deferral. The 2023/2024 intake has 11 NQSWs. Many of our NQSWs are recruited from the local HEI and we have our own social work apprentice programme; we also support NQSWs not directly employed by the local authority (e.g. SLAM) by letting them join workshops and access to reflective supervision.

Since the national implementation of the ASYE Programme, we have recognised the challenges of managing NQSW workload effectively within the ASYE requirement. Here in Croydon ASC, we have developed a systematic approach that enables us to effectively manage the workload of our NQSWs.

Our ASYE Programme is now well established and embedded in that is supportive environment lead by our senior managers. by senior managers, team managers and line managers and team managers and line supervisors who are fundamental in supporting the NQSWs with their workload management. All relevant stakeholders are aware of the requirements of the programme around caseload and other support arrangements for our NQSWs and have over the years seen the benefits of NQSWs developing their practice through our caseload reduction strategy.

Our approach to effectively managing our NQSW workload also uses of system of continuous review and monitoring, for the number of cases, from when agreed at the RSPA meeting through to when the NQSWs portfolio is quality assured at the internal moderation panel.

Our Caseload Reduction Practice.

We strongly believe that caseload reduction allows for foundation skills, knowledge, including law and social work theories, critical thinking and analysis and defensible decision making to be developed from early in the practice of the NQSW. We also believe that caseload reduction practice also contributes to the overall wellbeing our NQSWs as they are not overburdened with cases during their transitional year from students to social workers. Additionally, we note that given that the NQSWs have one study day, and one workshop day per month, this equates to roughly 10% of their working month being taken up with ASYE related activities, meaning a reduction of only 10% is not a reduction, in real terms, from their available time.

We do recognise that at the end of their final placements, students are normally carrying a caseload of around 6-8 cases. When we consider this in line with the number of cases an experience member of staff carries, we realised that 6-8 cases are normally representative of a 66% reduction in cases. As such, we use this percentage reduction as a benchmark for the NQSWs during the first three months of the ASYE Programme. After the first three months, we do expect that the NQSWs would have started to develop their practice and capabilities in managing a higher caseload and after reviewing their progress at the three months review a new percentage reduction is set at around 33%. This process is repeated at the 6-month review and a 10% put in place for up to the 9-month progress meeting. The expectation from this point, is that the NQSW is equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to be considered for the carrying a full caseload. At this stage, full caseload is not automatic, this will still very much be dependent on individual circumstances and in line with our equality, diversity and inclusion framework and the Equality Act 2010.

Our NQSWs work in various teams across adult social care, some are in locality teams, where on average, the upper-case limit is around 24/25 cases. Some are in hospital settings, where due to the nature of that setting, the upper-case limit for experiences workers will be around 9 cases, because of the variation in upper limits, percentages are in accordance with each team. For example, a NQSW in the locality team might carry around 8 cases in the first three months, whilst a NQSW in the hospital setting carries around 2 or 3 cases initially.

We do appreciate that our NQSWs come with their diverse needs and individual characteristics and as such, we also use a system of tailoring caseload numbers to the needs of the NQSW.

We do not use a system an automatic case load increase system, instead when case load is being reviewed at the 3-6-9 months, we do this line with individual circumstances, equality and diversity issues and considering the learning and development needs of the NQSW against the relevant PQS and PCF. As an example, at the 3- or 6-month reviews, a NQSW might be allocated fewer than the expected increased cases, so that they can take on more complex work to support them in their development of necessary knowledge and skills.

All the above regarding case load reduction is included in our ASYE Programme Policy

NEC B5, D5

Quality Assurance

The Record of Support and Progressive Assessment (RSPA) Meeting is central part of the caseload management strategy. It is during this meeting with the NQSW, Line supervisor and or Team Manager and ASYE Leads, that the NQSWs circumstances, along with team case numbers will be discussed and an initial caseload agreed for the first three months. Once agreed, if this number is to change prior to the three-month review, this should only be done in consultation and with the agreement of the ASYE Leads.

Croydon run a model of 2 supervisors (see policy) – one providing caseload supervision, the other reflective supervision – these (when combined) run weekly for the first 6 weeks, then fortnightly thereafter to the end of the ASYE – so in excess of current guidance for months 6-12. Caseload numbers are continuous reviewed and recorded during reflective supervisions.

Caseload numbers are reviewed and amended accordingly at the 3 and 6 months reviews and at the 9 month progress meeting.

All changes in caseload numbers are recorded in the NQSW RSPA.

All portfolios that go to our internal moderation panel (chaired by the PSW) are checked for the NQSWs caseload reduction throughout the ASYE Programme.

How are Disagreements Dealt With

Overall, the case load numbers are normally adhered to and if NQSWs have more cases than was previously agreed, this is normally promptly acted on to bring the number back in line with what was agreed.

If for any reason, an NQSW is consistently holding more than the agreed number and this cannot be resolved between the NQSW, line supervisor and team, then this is escalated to the ASYE Leads. If we are unable to resolve the issue at this stage, then this moves to the Principal Social Worker and then Director if necessary. To

date, we have not had to use the full escalation process as matters are normally resolved promptly at the first level.

Evidence Supporting the Effectiveness of Our Caseload Reduction Strategy

From our NQSWs:

XX an NQSW who finished her ASYE in 2023:

One main thing is that the gradual caseload increase gives you time at the beginning to understand how your LA works i.e., the policies / processes, and procedures within adult social care, as well as seeing legislation come to life (a lot of us just came from Uni whereby academic practice of writing essays is very different to day-to-day social work).

Another point is the gradual case load over the ASYE allows you to prioritise risk and complexity on your own caseloads which is a crucial skill in social work practice. Social Work is not always “first come first serve” – once you get into your cases, you see what needs to be done and how urgently. The ASYE enables you to develop your own evidence based professional judgement to then have the confidence to put services commissioned by the LA in place.

For example, at the beginning of the ASYE with new cases I was very cautious of “I have to get x, y, z approved”. Now if I know something needs to be put in, I have the confidence that I’ve assessed and I know what’s best to eliminate this risk, and I feed this back to SMT to say I put this in as a Duty of Care. It’s all part of developing your Social Work self.

From XX who is an NQSW now;

XX said she has found it very effective. Said she feels bad as some people have high caseloads, but she is aware she needs the time to familiarize herself with what she is doing, and she feels she has utilized the time.

XX noted - It gives me time to do research and draw on more information and attend forums like GEMs.

XX who is an NQSW in our current cohort:

I’ve been really appreciative of it. I can sometimes feel like I’m chasing my tail – now putting in time to focus on reflection after visits. Using to do lists, matching paper to electronic diary.

From XX who is an NQSW in our current cohort:

It has been helpful not having the full case load. At the start it was a struggle, but I have adjusted and developed and managing better.

XX who is an NQSW in our current cohort:

The caseload reduction is working well. Before I started the ASYE, I was struggling with case numbers. Now having the reduction has been really improved her practice.

From XX one of our Advanced Social Workers (and NQSW supervisor);

From my experience, the NQSW having a reduced caseload opens up the opportunity for the NQSW to effectively transition from student to a practicing social worker. This enables the NQSW to avail themselves of shadowing opportunities within the setting prior to having a full caseload when these opportunities are not as accessible due to competing demands. The caseload reduction allows the NQSW to actively reflect on their skills and intervention in cases and have a thorough understanding of their role. This reduction enables the NQSW to fully participate in the ASYE workshops and sessions and avail themselves of the mandatory training that they need to complete. If they were to have a full caseload from the outset this would make this much more difficult and potentially lead to a reduced attendance in the ASYE and the work that needs to be completed for this. I feel that my NQSW has been able to familiarise themselves with their role, the training available and shadowing opportunities as a result of the reduced caseload, gradually building themselves up to the caseload level of the team.

From XX one of our Advanced Social Workers (and NQSW supervisor);

I am of the view that it will be in the best interest of the NSQW to have a reduced case load to enable them to build on a solid foundation and develop in their confidence during their one-year protected case load. I think it is a critical part of their carer development and they need to be introduced gradually into the social work profession. A positive experience will determine their future retention in the social work profession.

From XX one of our Team Managers;

We have had two ASYE's in the last 2 years.

I feel it is appropriate to continue with the reduced caseloads, slowly building up to a full caseload, depending on complexity of cases.

This enables the ASYE practitioner to establish learning and knowledge gained through practical work experience, that may not have been fully encountered in the Social Work placements, provided during their degree courses.

The gradual increase in cases, assists the ASYE to build on their time & risk management skills and to get to grips with the processes of a statutory authority.

The additional time & space is required to enable the ASYE to complete the tasks of the ASYE programme and reflect on the actions / interventions undertaken in their new role.

I believe this gradual increase in allocated cases builds resilience in our future social work practitioners.

From XX one of our Team Managers;

I think reduced caseloads are very effective as well as commonsense if we want to invest in NQSWs' future and that of ourselves. They are no workhorses and should not be put off the profession by doing conveyer belt work that contributes little to their professional development.

From XX one of our Service Manager's;

I noticed that the last 2 sets of ASYEs are outstanding, it is just getting better and better like vintage wine. Their resilience in the face of challenges by clients, thoroughness, the quality of their panel paperwork, interventions which I have directly been part of or updated about, has been/is, stellar.

From Xx one of our Head's of Service;

ASYE's have proven the most reliable long term permanent recruitment strategy. Several of our long term permanent qualified social workers have come from this route and it is more reliable than turning locum colleagues into permanent posts. The staff are also well versed in law and local policy and practice and as such fit into Croydon teams well. They are known to management and colleagues and can navigate the networks and systems well. ASYEs tend to be strong on IT skills.

ASYE staff have played a role in helping teams to manage waiting lists, duty, GP Huddles and review work. While they have a protected caseload most stay towards the top end of this at each stage and easily move on to the full caseload shortly after passing their ASYE

From XX our PSW;

The ASYE scheme is an invaluable strategy which assists Croydon Council to 'grow our own' workforce and retain high quality professionals, achieving good outcomes for our residents and service users.

We are committed to reducing the caseload of our ASYE's to ensure that they are appropriately prepared to undertake quality work with our residents and service users. This is to ensure both safe and robust work is undertaken with relevant support in place. Such support offered to the ASYE's shows our commitment to developing their skills and experience and highlights how valuable they are to our workforce.

From XX our Director;

I am very happy to provide some comments in regard of the work around ASYE.

The Croydon ASYE programme is greatly valued, as it provides for a dynamic and contemporary rejuvenation to the service at least once a year. The impact, energy and challenge is palpable.

We are committed to managing an effective and supportive working environment, this predicated through a managed reduction of caseloads (67% reduction to 3 months, 33 % to 6 months, 10% to 9 months). The service takes great pride in ensuring we 'look after them' so each and every ASYE enjoys, benefits and achieve maximum professional development during their time spent with us.

From our ASYE Policy;

Workload over the course of the twelve months should be around 33% up to the 3 month review, 67% by the 6 month review and 90% by the 9 month progress meeting, then building to a full caseload by 12 months - of what is expected of a confident social worker in the same role in their second or third year of employment, weighted over the course of the year by such things as case complexity, risk and growing proficiency.

As an example – if a full caseload was 24 – up to 3 months would be maximum 8, then up to 6 months maximum 16, up to 9 months maximum 21 – rising to no more than 24 by the end of the ASYE.

The principal here is to allow the NQSW to build foundational skills – getting the basics right – before they build to learning to manage larger caseloads.

Where a caseload numbers in place, NQSWs should not have a case load exceeding the agreed number. The actual numbers involved should form part of the ROSPA for the ASYE.

See also attached policy document & EDI statement

Evidence to support the submission to the NQAP

e.g. documentation, materials, tools, guidance, feedback from NQSWs/assessors or other stakeholders (it will address the quality assurance dimension; also, whether any of the stakeholders

ASYE Policy

ASYE EDI Framework

<p>were involved in the development/ design of the practice or other evidence of impact Consider whether there has been any service user involvement in the design of programme generally</p>	
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