

Training trainee solicitors

Guidelines on supervising trainees

Education and Training Unit
Version 1

Why supervise trainees?

The purpose of the training contract is to develop in a work-based setting the knowledge and skills that trainees have learnt during the Legal Practice Course.

The lessons that trainees learn from their supervisors will stay with them throughout their careers, so the value of good supervision should not be underestimated.

Trainees will be more motivated, and will develop more quickly, with good supervision. Close supervision in allocating and checking the work of trainees will also help organisations to ensure trainees are working to an appropriate standard.

Good supervision requires time and resources. To enable supervisors to fulfil their role effectively, they need to be given time, resources, and, if necessary, supervision training.

Who can supervise?

Supervisors can be

- partners
- assistant solicitors
- associate solicitors
- barristers
- experienced legal executives

What knowledge and experience do supervisors need to have?

Supervisors need to

- have expertise in the practice area they are supervising
- understand the training requirements and the skills standards
- understand the system of training within the practice
- give guidance, advice and feedback to trainees on their performance
- have the skills to supervise effectively
- be enthusiastic and make time for the trainees they are supervising

What needs to be supervised?

Trainees should be given work and tasks that will help them to develop their skills and the supervisor's role is to help them achieve this by

- delegating work at an appropriate level, with an increased level of difficulty over time
- giving clear instructions on what needs to be done, with sufficient background information and sources of research
- monitoring the trainee's workload to ensure that it is not too much or too little
- giving work that requires the trainee to use different skills with a balance of substantive and procedural tasks
- giving regular feedback on the trainee's performance, recognising achievements and ensuring areas that need improvement are discussed
- ensuring that the trainee keeps a record of the work they have done and reviewing this regularly with the trainee

What skills do supervisors need to have?

Supervisors need to create an environment that will encourage trainees to ask for help, find solutions to problems and take responsibility for their own self development.

Supervisors should

- be clear on expectations, and ensure that the trainee understands them
- have a truly open-door policy
- keep an open mind
- involve/include the trainee whenever possible
- listen carefully
- stretch the trainee but not 'push the trainee in at the deep end'

Reviewing performance

Giving feedback on a trainee's performance and helping them to improve their performance is an important part of the trainee's learning experience. Trainees will want feedback on their performance of individual tasks and on their performance generally.

Delegation

Supervisors need to delegate work to trainees. Supervisors need to plan the parameters within which the task to be undertaken is to take place, including time limits; they also need to consider the level of responsibility to be given to the trainee over time.

Supervisors should

- plan delegation
- be precise in their briefing, and ensure the trainee understands what is required
- set review dates to check on progress
- initially delegate straightforward tasks, increasing the complexity of work over time
- give feedback on performance
- be aware that trainees must apply through the SRA for a [Criminal Records Bureau](#) check before they can be admitted as a solicitor