

“Didn’t they teach you that at university?” A scoping review of continuing professional development for enhancing work readiness of newly qualified social workers

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ABSTRACT

This scoping review delves into the transition of newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) from university studies to professional practice. Using a systematic framework to map literature within the post-graduation timeframe, it draws on 39 articles published between January 2011 and February 2023. Employing reflexive thematic analysis, the paper explores perspectives on support and development initiatives essential for enhancing NQSWs’ work readiness. Acknowledging the barriers NQSWs face upon workplace entry, the scoping review reveals that work readiness extends beyond quality education, emphasizing the continuous nature of knowledge and skill acquisition. Initiatives for NQSWs’ support and development should ideally include induction, supervision, case-load protection, and holistic education. Advocating a flexible approach to continuing professional development (CPD), the paper proposes factors around the format, accessibility, and cost implications of CPD. The review recommends a multi-level approach to addressing the shared responsibility for NQSWs’ continuing development. The review emphasizes the ongoing enhancement of support initiatives, promoting a comprehensive approach to personal and professional development.

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Introduction

In most countries, social work training either includes a generic Bachelor of Social Work degree (BSW) or an undergraduate social work or related degree, followed by a master’s in Social Work (MSW) before entering the workplace. Despite programs offering exposure to fieldwork and supervision during this practice training, new graduates experience considerable pressure to ‘hit the ground running’ and to perform as fully fledged social workers. Despite debate regarding their level of preparedness for work, it is generally accepted that it would be unrealistic to expect new graduates entering the field of social work to be fully developed professionals (Jack & Donnellan, 2010).

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The initial phase of entering the workplace, aptly coined ‘baptism of fire,’ has seen the call for a status for newly qualified social workers (NQSW) which has been widely accepted in the social work profession (Bates et al., 2010). NQSWs, in their transition from graduate to competent workers, require additional support structures and specific skills training (Hunt et al., 2017; Jack & Donnellan, 2010; Tham & Lynch, 2019).

Formal and informal support initiatives and induction programs have been developed in response to the need for support and continuing professional development (CPD) of NQSWs. Support programs in the United States of America (USA), Canada, and Australia generally take place during the initial months of induction into the workplace and are mostly organization-specific. In Scotland, NQSWs fulfill a Post Registration Training and Learning Requirement program, whereas in England, Northern Ireland, and Wales, a broader, systemic approach of support, informed by professional standards, has been found to have a positive impact on NQSWs (Carpenter et al., 2015; Moorhead et al., 2020). An examination of support and development mechanisms for NQSWs in the United Kingdom (UK) has, however, criticized less formalized NQSW support programs as being ad hoc, under-researched, and organization-specific (Moorhead et al., 2020).

CPD is regarded in broad terms as an educational process of formal and informal development that starts from initial education and continues throughout a professional’s career (Halton & Powell, 2014). While regulation of the profession is not standardized, CPD regulation and accountability for professional development remain a contentious issue (Thomas & Qui, 2013). Whether it is due to a lack of clarity or direction, all stakeholders with a legitimate interest in enhancing the work readiness of social workers remain jointly responsible for the development of NQSWs. The list is vast and includes government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), professional bodies, councils, students, and service users (Beddoe et al., 2018).

In many social work systems, there are inadequate regulatory induction and support systems for NQSWs and a general lack of induction and orientation programs for social workers entering the field (Beddoe et al., 2020; Grant et al., 2017; Lynn Glassburn, 2018; Stewart & Fielding, 2022).

Complementary to support initiatives, professional and personal development is pivotal for not only enhancing the work readiness of NQSWs but also for preparing social workers to respond to the multitude of challenges inherently found in the social work profession. Whereas professional development is seen as the recognition and equipping of the self to apply knowledge and skills in a changing society, personal development is an essential foundation for professional development as the ‘use of self’ forms a central part of social work service delivery (Lishman, 2009).

Literature in the past decade has shown an increase in the inclusion of the views of NQSWs regarding their transition into the workplace and includes research regarding initiatives for enhancing support of and retaining NQSWs in the field. A document analysis examining the support and development mechanisms for NQSWs across the UK as a basis for identifying policy implications for Australian social work (Moorhead et al., 2020) stirred an interest in the authors to scope literature from a wider angle and to regard international support needs and initiatives with an emphasis on addressing the professional development needs of NQSWs in practice (Frost et al., 2013).

The objectives of the scoping review center around (1) Inquiring about what support and development needs of NQSWs are consistently found in literature

and (2) Identifying what elements for support and development are highlighted and considered essential for the successful transitioning of NQSWs into the workplace.

Ultimately, the scoping review therefore aims to identify and map support initiatives for addressing the professional development of NQSWs during their transitional phase for enhancing work readiness.

Methods

A scoping review is considered suitable for this enquiry as it provides a framework for mapping available literature, within a specified timeframe related to the transition directly after a student has graduated and enters the field of work as a social worker. The authors were able to identify key features and reflect consistencies and changes within the field of enquiry by studying the themes generated (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Verdejo et al., 2021).

Following the Arksey and O'Malley framework (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005), the authors completed the following stages (1) identifying the research question; (2) identifying relevant studies; (3) identifying study selection and criteria for inclusion and exclusion; (4) charting of data; and (5) collating, summarizing, and reporting the results. The optional stage of consultation, as suggested by Levac, was excluded (Levac et al., 2010) and would rather be undertaken in future empirical research following the scoping review.

Phase 1: identifying the research question

The scoping review seeks to answer the question: What support initiatives enhance work readiness through addressing the professional development needs of NQSWs for facilitating successful transitioning into the workplace?

Within the context of the scoping review, support initiatives refer to formal and informal structures that seek to support and develop NQSWs. Program and policy identification for the support and development of NQSWs is limited to those evaluated in journals and does not include additional searches of policies or programs.

Phase 2: identifying relevant studies

Online databases and hand-searching of key journals were selected as research sources. The authors, in conjunction with library support, selected relevant databases and formulated related terms, based on the key concepts of the study (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Joanna Briggs Institute, 2015). A three-step search strategy was followed where the Wiley and Scopus databases were initially searched, where after the text words in the title and abstract of the papers were analyzed and reviewed as part of a pilot (Verdejo et al., 2021). Keywords and index terms were included in the following searches of all databases. Reference lists of the selected reports were controlled as possible sources for inclusion in the research (Joanna Briggs Institute, 2015).

The following databases were searched as they were deemed the most appropriate depositories of literature informing the present scoping review: Career & Technical

database; CINAHL; ERIC; SAGE Journals; Scopus; Social Science; Social Work Abstracts; Taylor & Francis (Journals); Wiley Online Library and Google Scholar, including the use of the EBSCOhost and ProQuest platforms.

Search strings included the following: (1) 'Newly qualified social worker*' OR 'NQSW*' OR 'recently qualified social worker*' OR 'early career social worker*' OR 'social worker*' AND (2) 'Work readiness' OR 'professional readiness' OR 'work preparedness' OR 'professional preparedness' OR 'support structure*' OR 'supported' OR 'assessed' AND (3) 'Continuing professional development' OR 'CPD' OR 'in-service training' OR 'bridging program*' OR 'orientation program*' OR 'retention' AND (4) 'Newly qualified social worker*' OR 'NQSW*' OR 'recently qualified social worker*' OR 'early career social worker*'

Phase 3: study selection

The specified criteria provided a guide for the reviewer during the process of selecting sources for the review (Joanna Briggs Institute, 2015).

Inclusion criteria

English, peer-reviewed journals accessible on the databases provided by the institutional library or available through interlibrary services were included. Journals included qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods studies as well as subject-related discussions. Studies pertaining to NQSWs within the transitional period, post-graduation, were included from January 2011 to February 2023. The authors focused on more recent literature, however, recognized essential studies from January 2011 that were necessary to be included.

Exclusion criteria

Grey literature, studies not peer-reviewed, and book reviews were excluded. No book sections, document analyses, policies or program manuals, scoping and systematic reviews, or other languages, not translated into English in journals, were included. As the study focused on the transitional period once graduates enter the workplace, the following study topics were not included the following: social work education and curriculum; social work undergraduate experiences; studies related to generalized continuing professional development, not specific to NQSWs; and generalized discussions regarding social work functioning, not specific or related to NQSWs.

As depicted in the PRISMA-ScR (see [Figure 1](#)), and following the set search strategy, with consideration of the criteria, an initial total of ($N=142$) articles were selected. The duplicates ($n=69$) were removed, leaving a remaining total of ($n=73$). The first author completed an initial screening of the title and abstract of each article, and after consultation with the second author, 29 articles were identified that did not match the criteria, resulting in 44 articles for further review. A final selection process, including the screening of the title, abstract, and findings, excluded five articles. The final selection of articles ($n=39$) was extensively reviewed and information was summarized (see [Figure 1](#): Flow

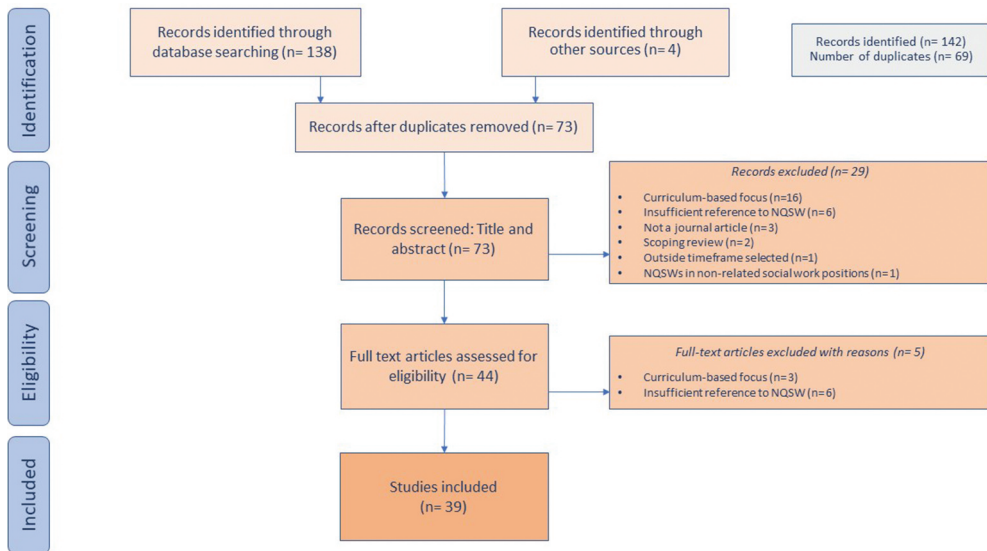


Figure 1. Flow diagram of selection as guided by the PRISMA-ScR.

diagram of selection as guided by the PRISMA-ScR). Both authors agreed on the 39 included articles.

Phase 4: charting the data

A synthesized data chart (Levac et al., 2010) was extracted from the larger data set and used for charting relevant information (see supporting data file). The charting approach included recording key information related to the core aspects found in the literature. Following a descriptive-analytical method, the data was extrapolated and entered into an MS Excel 2019 spreadsheet based on guidelines provided by Arksey and O'Malley (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005).

Phase 5: collating, summarizing, and reporting the results

Chartered data was analyzed using the reflexive thematic analysis method and process (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The review followed an inductive and semantic approach to the thematic analysis. Identifying the themes was data-driven and the authors focused on the surface meaning of the data as provided in the journal articles (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Clarke et al., 2015). Based on the data chart, all data was coded, and placed into areas of similar meaning, while consistently referring to the research question. After initial codes had been identified, the second author confirmed and discussed the codes, until a final consensus was reached and the codes were organized into themes and sub-themes. Themes were further refined; removed, created, and included as sub-themes (Nowell et al., 2017). Themes reflected the information that was consistently being generated in the journal articles and provided an outline of the support and development needs and

initiatives for enhancing the work readiness of NQSWs in their transition to social work practitioners.

Trustworthiness was enhanced by consistent peer debriefing and by providing a detailed account of the research methods as followed and reflected in the PRISMA-ScR (Nowell et al., 2017; Verdejo et al., 2021). The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the university (Ref no.: HUM003/0722).

Findings

The 39 journal articles included the following: longitudinal designs ($n = 4$); cross-national qualitative design ($n = 1$); mixed method (multi-modal and/or multi-method) designs ($n = 7$); reflections ($n = 2$); literature review ($n = 1$); quantitative- ($n = 1$); and qualitative studies ($n = 23$).

Research was conducted in the following countries, of which some are multi-national studies: the UK, including England and Scotland (19), Australia (7), New Zealand (4), Israel (4), the United States of America (3), Sweden (2), Mainland China (2), Hong Kong (2), Ireland (1), the United Arab Emirates (1), South Africa (1), Canada (1), Italy (1), Portugal (1), and Spain (1).

Study populations ranged, and the number of articles reflecting studies is indicated, including combinations of study populations in articles: NQSWs and graduates entering the field of social work (31); postgraduate master’s students (2); managers and supervisors (4); assessors and authors (1); social workers with experience (3); and social work educators (1).

Five main themes are identified in the review. Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the themes and reflects the reciprocal process of identifying NQSW’s barriers and support and development needs (Theme 1) and the subsequent response in the developing of appropriate initiatives (Theme 2) including the identifying of essential elements

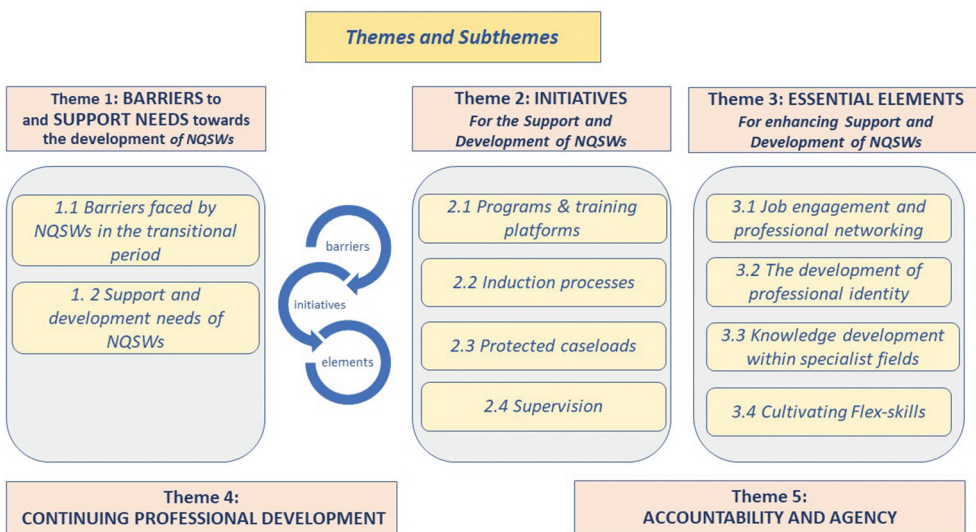


Figure 2. Themes and subthemes.

(Theme 3) for enhancing their support and development. Theme 4 and Theme 5 offer a general approach and philosophy toward the CPD of NQSWs, including who is to be considered responsible for their support and development initiatives.

Theme 1: barriers to and support needs toward the development of NQSWs

Identifying the barriers to, and support needs toward, the development of NQSWs offers important information for enhancing work readiness as solutions are based on sound perspectives of the obstacles. The specific barriers and support needs reflected in the scoping review provide a foundation understanding of responsive initiatives and elements for enhancing the support and development of NQSWs.

Subtheme 1.1 barriers faced by NQSWs in the transitional period

NQSWs face a multitude of barriers in the transitional period. The impact of different management and operational approaches (Huni & Chikadzi, 2014; Thoburn et al., 2021) and challenges in terms of leadership expectations and roles place strain on the NQSWs entering the workplace. A general expectation is that social workers in positions of leadership are required to facilitate the support and development of NQSWs through the provision of orientation or induction programs, supervision, and the protection of caseloads. In reality, social workers in management or senior positions find themselves facing limited work resources, managing high caseloads for low staff numbers, and dealing with the subsequent high staff turnover as a result of the lack of support (Beddoe et al., 2020; Huni & Chikadzi, 2014; Manthorpe et al., 2014; Thoburn et al., 2021).

Unregulated practices, where social work registration systems are not mandatory (Kwan & Cui, 2022; Yan et al., 2013) and uncertainty of employment and permanency in employment (Harrison & Healy, 2015; Stewart & Fielding, 2022), create insecure work environments for graduates entering the field. In addition, practicalities, including excessive work hours, high and complex caseloads (Cleveland et al., 2019; Radey & Schelbe, 2017; Segev et al., 2022), and limitations, such as the lack of resources for carrying out work tasks (Beddoe et al., 2020; Huni & Chikadzi, 2014), have a negative effect on the transitional phase. Due to NQSWs not being sufficiently prepared for the realities of the work environment, they are deemed at risk for stress-related complications, such as emotional exhaustion which poses a challenge to their development and can lead to burnout and compassion fatigue (Cleveland et al., 2019; Huni & Chikadzi, 2014; Kinman & Grant, 2017; Lynn Glassburn, 2018; McCusker, 2022; Radey & Schelbe, 2017; Segev et al., 2022; Tham & Lynch, 2021). Burnout and compassion fatigue affect mental health, are closely linked to the work of caring for others, and are characterized by emotional exhaustion and cynicism, with Maslach et al. (1986) adding a decrease in self-efficacy as a component in burnout (Kinman & Grant, 2017; Wu et al., 2022).

Subtheme 1.2 support and development needs of NQSWs

NQSWs experience unique personal and professional demands on entering the workplace and subsequently specific support and development needs.

An essential need identified is professional- and professional identity development. While *professional development* refers to the broad context of development through

equipping oneself to apply knowledge and skills within a specific profession (Lishman, 2009), Campanini et al. (2012) recognize *professional identity development* as individuals' identification, not only with their profession but with certain traits linked to their specific professional culture. The call for further research into the role of professional identity development of NQSWs (Moorhead et al., 2016) reflects an understanding of identity formation as being central to NQSWs' experiences in the transitional phase into the workplace (Harrison & Healy, 2015; Hunt et al., 2017; Moorhead et al., 2016). Considering the different academic requirements for social work studies, inadequate training in specialist fields of social work is also identified as a development need as not all requirements include compulsory postgraduate studies within specialist fields but view a generic undergraduate degree as sufficient (Cane & Tedam, 2022; Galvani & Forrester, 2011).

The need for supervision, induction and orientation programs, and protected caseloads receive repeated attention as pivotal for NQSWs' successful entrance into the workplace. Despite the repeated call for these services, these non-mandatory processes are often found to be lacking in quality, standardization, and structure, with caseloads being too high and complex (Cleveland et al., 2019; Grant et al., 2017; Huni & Chikadzi, 2014; Lynn Glassburn, 2018; McCusker, 2022; Radey & Schelbe, 2017; Segev et al., 2022; Stewart & Fielding, 2022).

Theme 2: initiatives for the support and development of NQSWs

Responsive initiatives facilitate the successful transitioning of NQSWs into the workplace and alongside CPD, networking, and ethical, relationship-based practices also contribute to work retention (Hunt et al., 2017; Radey & Schelbe, 2017; Tham & Lynch, 2019; Thoburn et al., 2021). Theme 2 reflects four areas repeatedly recognized as support and development needs of NQSWs, with corresponding initiatives to address them. These initiatives, applied and implemented in various forms and levels of intensity, are discussed within the subthemes that follow.

Subtheme 2.1 programs and training platforms

Programs and training platforms ensure support through development. Formal programs and elements within programs, for the development of NQSWs, are constantly evolving as they are researched for effectivity and application purposes (Baginsky & Manthorpe, 2015; Beddoe et al., 2020; Carpenter et al., 2015).

National programs, including 'The Newly Qualified Social Worker Programme' in the UK influenced the development of the 'Assessed and Supported Year in Employment' (ASYE); a developmental process model that views growth as a process rather than a final product and is widely recognized for its effectivity in the development of NQSWs (Baines, 2020; Beddoe et al., 2020; Carpenter et al., 2015). The ASYE includes elements considered relevant for NQSWs support and development, among which are skills developed through action learning, the enhancement of personal and professional development, encouragement of workload reduction, and the facilitating of assessment (Carpenter et al., 2015; Wells et al., 2017). Furthermore, the review confirms that learning elements included within the ASYE program enhance resilience and general well-being, both considered essential for addressing the support and development needs of NQSWs

(Baines, 2020; Brook & Abbott, 2022; Cleveland et al., 2019; Kinman & Grant, 2017; Wells et al., 2017).

Workforce/employment-based programs, such as the ‘Step-Up programme,’ and employer-sponsored schemes, including the ‘Grow Your Own’ scheme, are important for the support and development of the transitional phase of NQSWs entering the workplace as they hold the benefits of peer support, a practice integrated focus and the recruiting and retaining of new social workers (Baginsky & Manthorpe, 2015; Manthorpe et al., 2012).

Workforce development organizations are also considered valuable in their contribution to the support and development of NQSWs. ‘Skills for Care,’ a workforce development organization in the UK, trains facilitators to implement action learning as an essential part of the support and development component of the ASYE program (Wells et al., 2017). Action learning, including self-managed action learning (SMAL), fulfills a crucial support and development function for NQSWs. Action learning promotes and consolidates learning and development and develops reflective- and leadership skills, independent and critical thinking, and the vital skill of practice-based problem-solving (Baines, 2020; Beddoe et al., 2020; Brook & Abbott, 2022; Wells et al., 2017).

Agency-specific and in-house practice training platforms are also considered important for enhancing the transitional phase for NQSWs. With consideration of the unique context and needs of NQSWs, these platforms should be accessible, practice-based, and linked to the performing of social work tasks (Lam et al., 2016; Radey & Schelbe, 2017).

Subtheme 2.2 induction processes

Induction processes enhance the transitional process of NQSWs entering the workplace (Carpenter et al., 2015; Tham & Lynch, 2019; Yan et al., 2013). Quality agency-specific and personalized induction and orientation programs are considered part of the recommended support structures for NQSWs (Hunt et al., 2017; Lynn Glassburn, 2018). Induction programs require a creative approach to design, incorporating a combination of support structures aligned to corporate, departmental, and team-based programs (Manthorpe et al., 2014). A general expectation is that induction programs should provide employees entering the workplace with access to explicit and implicit knowledge of the organizations and should furthermore facilitate the development of self-efficacy (Kearns & McArdle, 2012; Lam et al., 2016). Using the concept of self-efficacy, the outcomes of the ‘Supportive Induction Programme,’ a national program developed for NQSWs by the Children’s Workforce Development Council in England, were measured. The longitudinal study reflected an increase in the confidence and competence of NQSWs attending the program and supported the principles of a development process model (Carpenter et al., 2015).

Despite induction programs being linked to a healthy workforce and an increase in job satisfaction and retention (Hussein et al., 2014; Kearns & McArdle, 2012), there continues to be a lack of formalized induction for NQSWs (Lam et al., 2016; Stewart & Fielding, 2022).

Subtheme 2.3 protected caseloads

Caseload protection is essential for the support and development of NQSWs. Large caseloads, in combination with limited experience, can contribute to NQSWs’ developing compassion fatigue and emotional burnout (Cleveland et al., 2019; Lynn Glassburn,

2018) and lead to high employee turnover rates (Radey & Schelbe, 2017). An evaluation of the child welfare workforce in the USA in 2003 found that high employee turnover (within the first 3 years of employment) often associated with large caseloads, placed pressure on the remaining staff and subsequently resulted in a decline in the quality of service rendering (Radey & Schelbe, 2017).

The workplace environment, however, continues to reflect a discrepancy in the repeated call for caseload protection for NQSWs (Manthorpe et al., 2014; Radey & Schelbe, 2017).

Subtheme 2.4 supervision

Supervision enhances the transitional period for NQSWs. Effective supervision is important in the NQSWs transitional period as it increases resilience and job engagement and subsequently has a positive influence on work retention (Cleveland et al., 2019; Hussein et al., 2014; Kearns & McArdle, 2012; Manthorpe et al., 2015; Thoburn et al., 2021). Opportunities to increase supervision efficiency include following a varied approach in content and frequency (Manthorpe et al., 2015); offering peer- and guided group supervision, and focusing on skills and specialist knowledge development (Cleveland et al., 2019; Hochman et al., 2022; Moorhead, 2019b). Although supervision should be widely and frequently available, it is often not provided effectively and subsequently does not meet the required needs of the NQSWs (Beddoe et al., 2020; Hunt et al., 2017; Moorhead et al., 2016; Radey & Schelbe, 2017; Stewart & Fielding, 2022).

Theme 3: essential elements for enhancing support and development of NQSWs

While theme 2 highlights initiatives for addressing the needs of NQSWs, theme 3 recognizes specific elements, some of which are embedded within these initiatives, that are considered essential for their support and development, as illustrated in Figure 3.

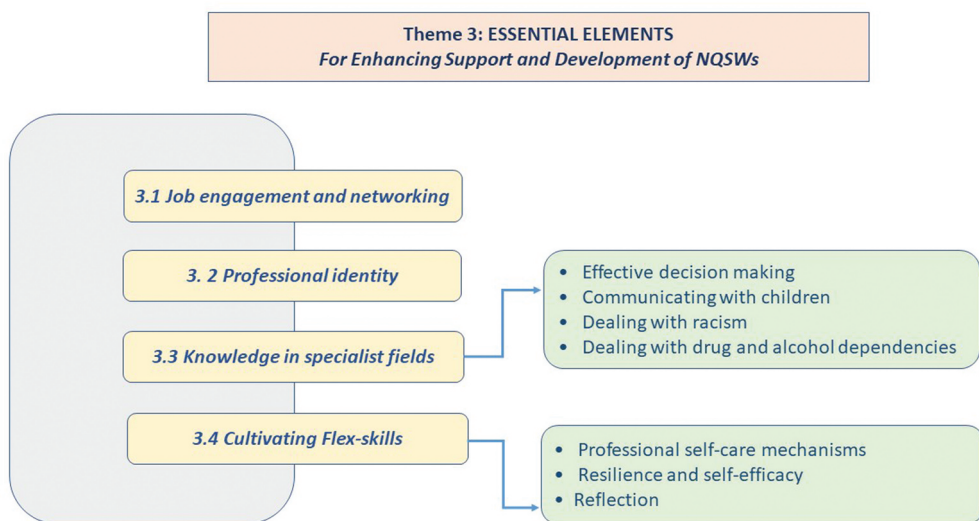


Figure 3. Essential elements for enhancing support and development of NQSWs.

Subtheme 3.1 job engagement and professional networking

Job engagement, within a supportive team and facilitated by effective supervision, is a predictor of job satisfaction and workplace retention, and therefore essential for the successful transitioning and retaining of NQSWs in the workplace (Hussein et al., 2014; Manthorpe et al., 2015). Extending the element of supportive teams into a wider context, professional and peer networks provide an essential support function to NQSWs entering the workplace. Networking includes working collaboratively and developing effective peer learning and support groups for facilitating discussions and support (Beddoe et al., 2020; Hochman et al., 2022; Hunt et al., 2017; Hussein et al., 2014; Kearns & McArdle, 2012; Thoburn et al., 2021).

Subtheme 3.2 the development of professional identity

The forming of a professional identity is central to NQSW's experiences of entering into practice and leads to the enhanced integration of personal and professional identities (Hochman et al., 2022; Hunt et al., 2017; Moorhead, 2019b; Moorhead et al., 2016). As professional identity development improves commitment and subsequent retention in the profession, studies are highlighting integration into NQSWs support and development initiatives, curricula, and policy (Harrison & Healy, 2015; Moorhead, 2019a, 2019b; Thoburn et al., 2021). Due to the complexity of identity development, it is often embedded within other processes, with skills such as reflection and building resilience recognized as essential for facilitating identity development (Harrison & Healy, 2015; Kearns & McArdle, 2012; Moorhead et al., 2016; Segev et al., 2022; Thoburn et al., 2021). Addressing negative characterizations related to age and gender in a predominantly female-based profession (Newberry-Koroluk, 2018), and keeping professional values and client-centeredness central to the process of identity development, is important for a holistic development of the professional identity of NQSWs (Harrison & Healy, 2015).

Subtheme 3.3 knowledge development within specialist fields

Considering the generic nature of social work graduate training in many parts of the world, scholars acknowledge the need for access to specialized knowledge development for NQSWs. With consideration that social work requires the ability to make complex risk-related decisions, skills such as equipping NQSWs for effective decision-making during home visits are important (Lishman, 2009; Newman & Littlechild, 2022). Additional practice-related skills to develop in NQSWs is the advancement of communication skills specifically in working with children (Newman & Littlechild, 2022). Furthermore, a call for knowledge development by NQSWs in specialist areas is recognized in the management and dealing with racism (Cane & Tadam, 2022); dealing with drug and alcohol dependencies (Galvani & Forrester, 2011) and skills related to criminal justice system (Grant, 2017).

Subtheme 3.4 cultivating flex-skills

Flex-skills, also referred to as soft skills, people skills, and transferable- and workplace readiness skills, include non-technical skills related to intra- and interpersonal development. Regarded as integral to work success and pivotal to thriving within the workplace, flex-skills include enhanced self-awareness, problem-solving solving, and the ability to

work in a team (Price & Magy, 2021; Tulgan, 2015). Essential flex-skills for NQSWs include:

Professional self-care mechanisms. NQSWs entering the workplace are at risk for developing compassion fatigue, also referred to as burnout, which includes symptoms of increased irritability, a lack of empathy, difficulties in limit-setting, and a general feeling of being overwhelmed (Hochman et al., 2022; Lynn Glassburn, 2018; Segev et al., 2022). Practicing mindfulness has been recognized as effective in managing stress and preventing compassion fatigue of NQSWs through addressing uncertainties and overcoming work challenges (Hochman et al., 2022; Moorhead, 2019a; Segev, 2023).

Resilience and self-efficacy. Resilience facilitates successful transitioning and is linked to supportive environments, making the development of resilience essential for providing support during the growth and development of NQSWs entering the workplace (Cleveland et al., 2019; Kearns & McArdle, 2012; Kinman & Grant, 2017; Segev et al., 2022). Studies include the value of developing self-efficacy, as a dimension of resilience, which increases competence and confidence in transitioning NQSWs and enhances a healthy and sustainable workforce (Carpenter et al., 2015; Hussein et al., 2014; Kearns & McArdle, 2012).

Reflection. Reflective practice is directly linked to ensuring that social workers are retained in practice (Thoburn et al., 2021). Developing the ability to critically reflect, embedded in various support and development initiatives including action learning and self-managed action learning, is also recognized for the important role it plays in the development of professional identity in NQSWs (Baines, 2020; Brook & Abbott, 2022; Moorhead et al., 2016; Stewart & Fielding, 2022; Wells et al., 2017).

Theme 4: continuing professional development as a vessel toward holistic development of NQSWs during the transitional period

A supportive work environment is considered crucial for facilitating the transition into the workplace and a vital characteristic includes the provision of structures allowing for CPD (Moorhead, 2019a; Stewart & Fielding, 2022; Tham & Lynch, 2014; Thoburn et al., 2021). Areas of support therefore need to offer more than a space for workload management and must consider and be responsive to the learning needs of NQSWs (Grant, 2017). Carpenter et al. (2015) refer to the combination of attaining both personal and professional practice-related skills and the development of confidence in their abilities, as reflected in theme 3 which recognizes the essential elements identified for enhancing support and development of NQSWs.

Social workers in countries with licensing systems have varying approaches to professional development and the subsequent maintenance of quality service delivery (Lam et al., 2016). In the USA, social workers are required to obtain a license to practice in their state or province, which includes continuing education as part of the requirements (ASWB, 2024).

Whether the continuing development of social workers is formalized or not, a suggested approach to development is that of the developmental process model of

expertise (Carpenter et al., 2015). The developmental process model is based on the Dreyfuss skills model which deliberates that skills and expertise are acquired through a process of development; rather than viewing development as being a final product (Carpenter et al., 2015; Rouse & Dreyfus, 2021).

Developmental opportunities for NQSWs include their own set of challenges, with access often being reliant on personal capabilities (Beddoe et al., 2020) and programs becoming unsustainable due to cost- and time constraints (Manthorpe et al., 2012).

Consideration of research findings for addressing developmental opportunities for NQSWs includes presenting relatively short training courses while still reaching training goals (Galvani & Forrester, 2011; Kinman & Grant, 2017). The evaluation of a brief multi-modal intervention (training over 2 months) to develop the resilience and well-being of NQSWs measured clear benefits and goal attainment (Kinman & Grant, 2017). Even shorter periods considered adequate for enhancing practice preparedness are found in the training of NQSWs dealing with substance dependencies, where training equates to three or more days of training and studies reflected an increase in preparedness to manage their work (Galvani & Forrester, 2011).

Furthermore, experiential learning as part of a participatory approach to in-service training (Lam et al., 2016) and the application of action learning sets for holistic development incorporated into the ASYE programme are valued for integrating theory and building the practice skills of NQSWs (Wells et al., 2017). CPD is notably foundational in the holistic developmental process of NQSWs.

Theme 5: accountability and agency as a foundation for the support and development initiatives for NQSWs

Aligning with the developmental process model, the social work qualification represents the beginning of a learning process that requires not only a successful transition into the workplace but also continuous support and development (Grant et al., 2017; Tham & Lynch, 2021). There is a call for a collaborative approach to supporting and developing NQSWs which requires the involvement of all sectors, including government agencies or local authorities, nonprofit organizations (NPOs), and the private sector (Grant et al., 2017; Hussein et al., 2014). Effective collaborations between sectors include, for example, the involvement of workforce development organizations, such as 'Skills for Care' for the development of staff and facilitators (Wells et al., 2017) and the employer-sponsored scheme 'Grow Your Own' for social work training (Manthorpe et al., 2012).

Discussion

The scoping review aimed to identify the support and development initiatives that enhance the work readiness of NQSWs as they transition into the workplace. Inadvertently, identifying the barriers to the development of NQSWs is a starting point for addressing development needs, which is also attributed to enhancing work retention (Burns, 2011; Harrison & Healy, 2015; Moorhead, 2019a; Thoburn et al., 2021). Although these barriers continue to reflect the harsh realities of entering the workplace, studies show an interesting shift in support and development initiatives. Initiatives for the Support and Development of NQSWs include specialized programs and training,

induction processes, protected caseloads, and efficient supervision as being indispensable in shaping responsive initiatives for the support and development of NQSWs. While studies continue to focus on the need for initiatives, essential elements for further enhancing the support and development of NQSWs include induction processes and supervision, job engagement and networking, developing a professional identity, enhancing specialist knowledge, and cultivating flex-skills. The scoping review identifies the development of professional self-care mechanisms, resilience and self-efficacy, and reflection as flex-skills essential for NQSWs, while additional training in professionalism and critical thinking is viewed as essential in all sectors of the workplace (Price & Magy, 2021; Tulgan, 2015). Holistic personal and professional development of NQSWs is interconnected and accountability for their growth rests not only on the social work agencies and educational systems but also on the graduates themselves. Importantly, the initiatives identified in the review show that NQSWs need to be inherently satisfied in their workspaces, and that refined personal- and professional specialized knowledge- and skills development form an undeniable cog in the unlocking and developing of their growth potential.

Graduate's expectations of the workplace are often not aligned with the realities thereof (Agllias, 2010; Radey & Schelbe, 2017) and the review confirms that it remains fair to accept that NQSWs will not be work-ready on entering practice (Jack & Donnellan, 2010). While the review does not evaluate social work graduate training programs, it highlights the uniqueness of the transitional phase, deeming it unlikely that graduates will feel fully prepared for work, despite a well-developed education curriculum (Lam et al., 2016; Radey & Schelbe, 2017; Tham & Lynch, 2021). In addition, adopting a developmental process model emphasizes that learning and skills acquisition is a continuing process and serves as a reminder that the journey from novice to expert is transitional and interrelated (Carpenter et al., 2015; Rouse & Dreyfus, 2021). This approach to lifelong learning therefore matches the view that support and CPD are necessary for facing the complexities found in social work (Lishman, 2009) and notes that despite a sound social work education, NQSWs do not enter the work 'all-knowing' (Stewart & Fielding, 2022). The question regarding accountability and accessibility for the support and development of NQSWs, however, remains contentious with challenges to CPD including limited access, funding of training, and a general lack of regulatory processes related to initiatives (Beddoe et al., 2020; Grant et al., 2017; Moorhead, 2019b). In addition, not all support and development initiatives are created equally and often lack a central link to professional standards (Moorhead et al., 2020). The responsibility for the support and development of NQSWs therefore includes quality social work education and collaboration in the development of support initiatives from all role-players in the social work system, with the inclusion of NQSWs themselves (Beddoe et al., 2018; Segev et al., 2022).

Limitations

The scoping review focused on the support and development initiatives for NQSWs. Hence, articles referring to social work education or general CPD are excluded from the review (Peters et al., 2022; Tricco et al., 2016). Journal articles cover the timeframe from January 2011 to February 2023 in one language. While the review reflects a clear

representation of the views of NQSWs (32 of the 39 articles share the views of NQSWs) an important limitation is that the role of contextual understanding and teaching practices, which can vastly differ from university to the practice setting in undermined (Battaglia & Flynn, 2020).

Conclusion and recommendations

The scoping review provides a holistic, wide-angled view of perspectives related to the support and development initiatives seen as relevant for enhancing the work readiness of NQSWs. This ‘zooming in and -out’ approach associated with a scoping review, allowed for important connections to be recognized and underlined in the study. Firstly, the undeniability that NQSWs face complications when entering the workplace is confirmed. Thereafter, despite social work education systems not forming part of the review, it is suggested that work readiness cannot be considered the sole responsibility of a quality education. While expectations regarding what should be taught in university are essential, no single phase in the development of a social worker is all-inclusive as the acquisition of knowledge- and skills is regarded as a continuing process. The development process model is relevant to the social work profession as it supports the view that development is ongoing, and therefore highlights the need for support and development initiatives for NQSWs. Initiatives that are recommended include the provision of induction, supervision, and the protection of caseloads and extend to the holistic training and development of NQSWs, with a focus on developing essential elements as identified in the review. It is further recommended that a flexible approach to CPD is applied and that initiatives for NQSWs carefully consider aspects such as the format, platform for training, duration, accessibility, and cost implications while ensuring the facilitation of application in practice.

Despite research providing sufficient proof that the transition into the workplace is a particularly vulnerable phase, there are varying levels of commitment by social work policymakers to address the facilitation of NQSWs into the workplace. In recognizing a shared responsibility toward the continuing development of NQSWs, it is recommended that a multi-level approach is followed which should include relevant sectors of social work, including government and non-governmental organizations. Advocacy for the support and development of NQSWs is therefore no longer a tentative debate as the scoping review provides evidence of the positive influence of support initiatives for enhancing work readiness. The predominant focus on external support for NQSWs in terms of access to formal programs, induction processes, caseload protection, and supervision has shifted to also include the development of internal processes, viewing both personal- and professional knowledge and skills development as central to successful transitioning. It is therefore recommended that current support initiatives continue to be evaluated and enhanced. Furthermore, the facilitation of the development of elements identified in the review as being essential for enhancing the work readiness of NQSWs reflects an important, holistic approach to personal- and professional development. Collaborative, creative approaches for the support and development of NQSWs will not only ease their transition into the workplace but will aid in retaining young professionals and cultivating the growth of the profession.

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