

Hints and tips on remote supervision of trainees

1. **Be clear about who is supervising and, where possible, offer additional support**

Trainees will know who their supervising solicitor is but make clear if there is a specific point of contact when the supervisor is off (on leave, ill, in meetings etc). If the size of your organisation allows it consider linking trainees with an NQ "buddy". This will help the development of the NQ solicitor and will likely give a lot of benefit to the trainee.

2. **Work out a schedule of communication with your trainee, stick to it but be prepared to change it**

When we spoke to trainees some felt that their supervisors on occasion overlooked them and didn't check in as often as they might. Others noted their supervisors were speaking to them many times during the day. Aim for a balance that works for both. As one trainee summed it up: *"we need supervising solicitors to keep in touch with us without letting us feel adrift or badgered"*.

There is no one size fits all approach. A mix of the following may be helpful:

- A quick daily call at the start of the day (5-10 minutes) to check in that the trainee has the right level of work, knows what they are doing, when it needs to be delivered, who will be reviewing it, and is an opportunity to ask questions.
- At least one slightly longer call per week to brief/debrief on work or to explain more complex matters.
- Weekly wrap-up feedback sessions: what went well, what went badly etc. Make sure the feedback is fair – trainees don't want sugar-coated advice.
- For larger organisations, team catch-ups at least weekly.
- Consider how to recreate the social aspect of office life to help all feel connected to the team and colleagues (e.g. virtual coffees, catch-ups etc).

Do your best to prioritise these and, if they do need to be moved, do rearrange them. Be prepared to be flexible – what works in month 1 of the traineeship may be too much in month 12 etc.

3. **A balance of proactive and reactive communications**

As well as the scheduled updates supervisors will need to think about a blend of proactive and reactive communications to their trainees. This might include

- email round-ups covering progress, organisation news, new clients, new cases etc
- regular exchanges between supervisor and trainee
- a groupchat with the wider team as well as a one-to-one chat between supervisor and trainee.

4. **Be approachable... the supervisor's door should almost always be open**

It is easy to focus on *"day job"* and easy to forget our wider management duties. It is important that supervisors are approachable to trainees contacting them with questions and concerns over and above the scheduled times. This might be done by a messaging service or email. Trainees mentioned to us their questions sometimes went unanswered. Where

possible answer as quickly as you can. When catching up with them ask for feedback on communication is going.

5. Use the right technology for the task

Consider what is the most appropriate form of technology for each situation. For example, if a supervisor is offering feedback on a drafting task, technology that allows for screen-sharing may be helpful (more akin to feedback received in the "real world"). Sometimes though a phone-call or email will be quicker and easier than a video call.

6. Brief, reassure and debrief

Trainees may be reluctant to check a point so supervisors should consider detailed briefings when assigning work and then checking the trainee understands (by asking them to explain rather than affirm they understand). Similarly, discussions about '*how do you think that went?*' are important. As part of the training process it is likely that mistakes will happen. Make it clear everyone makes mistakes. Instil confidence. Ask trainees to outline in emails/discussions any areas where they struggled or anything they found difficult on a task you have set them. Take the time to debrief thoroughly when possible.

7. Osmosis by design

A lot of observational/learning by osmosis moments may be missed when WFH and can be difficult to replicate (e.g. the overheard telephone call, the observation of body language in meetings etc). When working remotely thought needs to be given to how you can recreate that all important aspect of the traditional traineeship. If you have a client call, client meeting or a virtual court appearance ensure that the trainee is included as often as possible. This gives them an opportunity to learn, take notes, and you can debrief after.

8. Be aware of their situation

Don't assume that everything is ok just because your trainee isn't raising issues. Take the time to check if they have the equipment they need to do the job properly (including WiFi) that they understand any software or systems that you use (or if they need additional training/guidance). Trainees may be reluctant to raise such issues but performance may well suffer if they don't and you don't ask. Trainees may well be parents and/or carers. Consider how you can make flexible arrangements for them.

9. Be willing to offer support

In the office if a phone call a trainee is on becomes difficult it is easy for a supervisor to step in. Remotely you might only hear about that after the fact and you will be relying on the trainee's ability to explain what happened. Where possible offer assistance to be on the call or in the meeting even if the trainee leads it. This can help build a trainees' confidence, improve quality of feedback and demonstrate your support as a supervisor.

10. Additional focus at certain points

There may be points in traineeships where trainees need additional support and guidance for instance when undertaking new tasks or if their roles are changing in some way (e.g. when supervision changes or for those organisations which offer seat-based traineeships). It can be difficult to integrate into new teams or undertake new tasks when being supervised remotely so supervisors should give thought and plan how they can support trainees in advance where possible.

11. Wellbeing

Remember the importance of wellbeing (yours and that of the trainee). It is easy when working from home to sit all day and not take breaks. You may need to be more alive to

issues like isolation and stress, and it can be easy for mental or physical health symptoms to be masked when working remotely. A more proactive approach to checking in with wellbeing is recommended. A good starting point for wellbeing is our own resources: <https://www.lawscot.org.uk/members/wellbeing/>

These hints and tips were last reviewed on 4th August 2020.

These hints and tips are next due to be reviewed on 1st January 2021.