UNISON
Scotland

Helping
People change
their **lives**

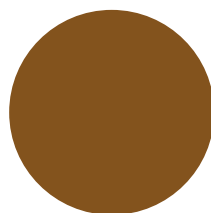## Supervision and Workload Management for Social Work
A negotiating resource

Helping People Change Their Lives - the Social Work Manifesto for frontline staff in Scotland issued in 2009 by UNISON and BASW - was universally welcomed. It has already resulted in some fruitful discussions at local level within Branches and with employers.

The Manifesto threw the spotlight on the important issues of workload management and supervision. This updated paper by social work practitioners in UNISON Scotland's Social Work Issues Group is designed as a tool for activists, negotiators and members to promote discussion on these matters.

It brings together some new guidance on Workload Management and updates to UNISON Scotland's previous paper on Supervision in Social Work.

Supervision and Workload Management for Social Work
A negotiating resource

This pamphlet is a 2014 update to the first in a series of individual and joint publications building on *Helping People Change Their Lives* - the Social Work Manifesto for frontline staff in Scotland - issued jointly in 2009 by UNISON and BASW.
www.unison-scotland.org.uk/socialwork/swmanifesto25june2009.pdf
It has been produced by practitioners who are activists in UNISONScotland's Social Work Issues Group (see page 11) and is also available on line at
www.unison-scotland.org.uk/socialwork/workload_supervision.pdf

It is intended as a resource for branches, activists, negotiators and members to promote discussion on the issues and to develop and enhance workload management and supervision policies with employers and other decision-makers.

"Working with people where meeting need, assessing risk and ensuring human rights are respected is a skilled task. Whilst workers are responsible for their own level of decision making and recommendations they need access to good quality supports and supervision to do the job."
Helping People Change Their Lives
A Social Work Manifesto
UNISON Scotland and BASW June 2009.

Introduction

UNISON Scotland's submission on Professional Supervision in Social Work to the 21st Century Review described four functions of supervision - quality assurance, learning and development, support and shared decision-making.

It concluded that these "must take into account individual capacity and workload. It is therefore essential that agencies develop transparent and workable workload management systems that realistically match capacity to expected agency standards. Those expected standards need to be clearly articulated and professionally valid".

This pamphlet builds on this work by:-

♦ Laying out a template for a simple time based Workload Management Scheme that can be applied universally in all settings. It is drawn from the experience of members in Social Work in Scotland

♦ Taking forward UNISON Scotland's position on Professional Supervision.

Workload Management Guidelines

There is no universal blueprint for formal workload management schemes and experience suggests devising and implementing systems is often left to frontline managers. Unsurprisingly the result is that social workers rarely experience them and if they do, their application is inconsistent. Those interested in models, experience difficulty accessing them.

This paper outlines a simple time based scheme that we think can be applied universally in all settings. It is drawn from the experience of members in social work in Scotland. It is not meant to be prescriptive and local variation on its general theme can be applied without difficulty. We do however favour time based schemes to other models. We believe that the general principles of time based workload management schemes can be applied in other settings to prevent overload and its consequences.

"We believe that steps should be taken by all employers to introduce effective workload management systems. Few employers have effective systems in place to ensure that what staff are asked to undertake is manageable and allows for sufficient time for staff to apply their skills appropriately."
Helping People Change Their Lives Manifesto June 2009.

Setting the Scene for a Time Based Model

The work of social workers can be broken down into a series of activities that will differ from setting to setting, and locality to locality. The first task is to list these for the setting involved. These sample lists below are not intended to be exhaustive :
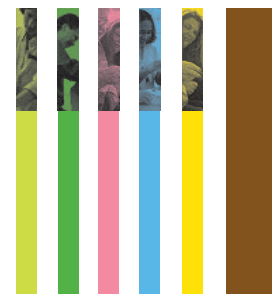
♦ Typical Children & Family Activities:
assessment/report writing, child protection investigations, recording (computer and manual), planned client contact, children's hearings, contact supervision, escorts, case conferences, LAC review meetings, travel, telephone calls, office duty, training, supervision, workload management tasks, personal development activities, other unspecified tasks (including support for colleagues).

♦ Typical Criminal Justice Activities:
assessment/report writing, prison visits, home visits, other planned client contact, recording (computer and manual) case conferences, office duty, travel, telephone calls, training, supervision, workload management tasks, personal development activities, other unspecified tasks (including support for colleagues).

♦ Typical Community Care Activities:
assessment/report writing, recording (computer and manual), adult protection investigations, planned client contact, case conferences, case discussions, review meetings, travel, office duty, training, supervision, workload management tasks, personal development activities, other unspecified tasks(including support for colleagues).

♦ **Typical Service Access/ Assessment/Reception/Initial Response Team Activities:**

assessment/report writing, recording, office duty, child protection investigations, adult protection investigations, planned client contact, travel, training, supervision, workload management tasks, personal development activities, other unspecified tasks(including support for colleagues) .

First Considerations

It can be seen from all the above that tasks are essentially similar across settings. What will vary enormously is the work involved under each heading.

We work with human beings whose situations are always unique. We owe it to them and to ourselves not to be prescriptive about the time we can give them.

It is clearly the case that a report might involve a simple process taking no more than a few hours; on the other hand a comprehensive assessment on a child or adult might take 15 hours of preparatory work and writing involving consultations with an array of agencies and individuals.

> *"We are in no doubt that too many social workers are carrying caseloads which can be too high and make it hard for them to do their job well. There is very strong evidence that the absence of effective management of workload makes practitioners feel de-skilled, lowers their morale and can lead to poor health"*
> **Social Work Task Force (England): Final Report November 2009.**

Individualised allocation of time is essential for effective workload management. This rule also applies to the individuality of the worker - e.g. a newly qualified worker is bound to take longer over most tasks than an experienced worker; some workers take more time to write things than their colleagues - this should not mean they should feel under more pressure - we should all be valued for our different contributions and tasks should not be forced into particular time frames.

Planning of time is clearly required if we are not become overloaded with tasks that we simply do not have the time to undertake.

We also have to recognise that unexpected emergencies are daily occurrences in social work so we have to express that somehow - workload management has to look backwards as well as forwards.

At this stage though, it is contended that the calculation of time allocation to an individual worker will be based on an agreed list of headings similar to those above.

Trust and the Supervisory Relationship

The importance of effective supervision is emphasised in the accompanying section of this pamphlet, and this too was re-stated clearly in the Joint Manifesto. Workload management and supervision are complementary processes but should not be confused.

Experience would suggest that they should be maintained as separate processes, but this may be subject to local variation.

> *The worker has to be able to trust that the supervisor will take responsibility from them for work that is beyond the reach of the time available - whether or not that involves an allocated case.*
> *The supervisor has to trust that the worker will be honest about her or his capacity.*

Both workload management and supervision have to involve trust between worker and supervisor: the worker has to be able to trust that the supervisor will take responsibility from them for work that is beyond the reach of the time available - whether or not that involves an allocated case.

The supervisor has to trust that the worker will be honest about her or his capacity, and will seek further advice if events seriously overtake planned activity.

These involve skills and mutual understanding that might take time to develop within a supervisory relationship, but are important premises to a successful workload management scheme.

Working Out Time Allocation:
A Children & Family Example

It should be possible to apply this example to any setting using the lists provided above, and individualising the time allocations according to the task and its priority for a team.

Jill is Jack's team leader and sits down with him once every four weeks for a workload management session. The key to success is keeping the system as simple and flexible as possible.

Jack will come to the meeting having completed a basic form (electronic versions are simple to update) with brief details of the service user and a list of tasks required over the next four week period. This will draw on the activities described above for children and family settings and should be in line with the agreed plan for each child concerned:

♦ 4 home visits of one hour each   - - - - - - - - - - -4 hours
♦ Reports on each child for a Panel   - - - - - - - - - -6 hours
♦ Panel Attendance   - - - - - - - - - - -1 hour
♦ Core Group Meeting   - - - - - - - - - - - 1 hour
♦ Meeting with nursery staff   - - - - - - - -1 hour
                  TOTAL - - - - - - - - -13 hours

The first task in the WLM session is to establish a date for the next one - four weeks hence.

Jill and Jack then discuss briefly the times he has estimated for each case and reach agreement. Considerations might include at this stage priorities for tasks and the general progress of the individual child's plan.

Total hours for each case will be then be added together which will give a total for caseload time. It might be useful here to separate out client contact time from other tasks so that this can be quickly determined - this might be useful for information purposes on what proportion of time is actually spent with service users.

> *"Our evidence suggests that it is the lack of a whole system approach to managing all of the pressures on workload - rather than the lack of a single caseload limit - that is having a detrimental effect on social work practice"*
> **Social Work Task Force (England): Final Report November 2009.**

Lets say that in Jack's case his total time for cases totals 80 hours. Jill will then list time he has to spend on other tasks (from the lists provided earlier):

♦ Duty : - 20 hours
♦ 2 Days Training - 14 hours
♦ General Local Travel - 8 hours
♦ Supervision - 1.5 hours
♦ Workload Management Preparation & Meeting - - - - - - - - 1.5 hours
♦ Holidays & TOIL : (2 days) - 14 hours
♦ Recording (1 hour per worked day) - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 18 hours
                         TOTAL   - - - - - - - - - - 87 hours

ADD CASE TIME -80 hours

TOTAL TIME REQUIRED - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -167 HOURS

Note that this includes two items involving generalised average calculation:

1. Local Travel: this will obviously vary between settings according to geography and an average for a team might be established through a diary exercise. In this case Jill's team add an average of 1 hour per worked day for local travel. If a worker requires additional travel outwith the local area (e.g. to visit a placement) this can be added to case time.

2. Recording: this is given a notional value at one hour per worked day and again could be added to under exceptional circumstances, or given additional averaged time according to agency expectations.

Jack's calculated time requirement of 167 hours must now be compared with his actual available hours - he works a 35 hour week:

Total Time Required:	167 hours
Time Available over next six weeks	140 (ie 4 x 35 hours)
Deficit	: 27 hours
Surplus	: 0 hours

As a general rule a surplus or deficit of 5% is not significant. A bigger surplus indicates space to take on more work; conversely (and more often the issue) a deficit of more than this means that Jack and Jill will have to agree what might be prioritised, what might be carried over until the next session, or whether Jack's workload is excessive and requires reduction.

In Jack's case a 17 hour deficit will require this consideration. WLM should not be used to increase workloads by setting excessive team norms or targets: the team manager who tells the worker that that their deficit is average for the team and to get on with it, has got it wrong! Statistics on deficit time can be used to argue for more staffing or diversion of aspects of work elsewhere. They might also be used to evidence stress claims.

The Best Laid Plans...

Of course Jack and Jill's plans for his work are likely to be thrown off course by unexpected emergencies. Whilst it might be possible to build in the expectation of crisis, it will not always be.

> *"They'd rather have a serious case that cannot be dealt with on my caseload than a managerial waiting list of unallocated cases. That way, I can take the flak if anything goes wrong. That's the way it works. They know you cannot work all your cases."*
> **Social Worker in *The Guardian*, 26 November 2008.**

In some places it will always seem as if the workload only ever increases, but there may be some where a reduction takes place e.g. a service user moving into a hospital or other institutional setting.

In Jack's children and family setting interruption to plans is very likely: if and when this happens he has to take some responsibility for working out what might be left undone or deferred. This may be determined by priority previously agreed with Jill or he may have to pass on tasks to a colleague, or defer them.

He may have to seek Jill's assistance in reducing his workload to take on new tasks. If she wants him to undertake new work e.g. to take on a new high priority piece of work such as a child protection, this will certainly be required.

Obviously reductions in planned work for unexpected reasons might create space for more allocation: the essence of an effective workload management scheme is that work is allocated on the basis of space being available and agreed.

It might be considered useful to simply record tasks not achieved and new ones undertaken over the set period at the next WLM session. This might, though, be considered superfluous.

..and finally

This scheme is offered by UNISON as a template. It can be amended according to local circumstance but in most settings could form the basis for the negotiated introduction of a workload management scheme.

> *UNISON would welcome the experiences of members on the introduction and practice of workload management schemes:*
> ***Contact:***
> *Diane Anderson, UNISON Scotland, UNISON House, 14 West Campbell Street, GLASGOW G2 6RX.*
> *diane.anderson@unison.co.uk*

Opposition to workload management schemes will often come from those people (including trade union activists) who claim they do not have time for them; others object on the grounds that WLM schemes constitute a type of Taylorist micro-management aimed at increasing productivity. This does not cut with the reality in managerially driven statutory settings: the days of the autonomous practitioner are long past! Experience suggests that once a scheme is understood and underway, time spent can be reduced to a minimum: about an hour for a worker to prepare and about an hour for the session between worker and supervisor. WLM can also be built into supervision sessions. **Workload Management has to be better than stress and burnout caused by excessive workload.**

Professional Supervision in Social Work

The danger at a time of financial restraints is that supervision can become focused on efficiency, accountability and worker performance at the expense of professional and practice development *(see Noble and Irvine: Journal of Social Work 2009)*.

In that context, with increasing 'managerialism' and an inspection culture that can seem divorced from the reality on the ground, it has never been more important to be clear about the roles of workload management and supervision. While this focusses on social workers, the issues raised are just as crucial to the whole social care workforce.

Here we summarise and add to UNISON Scotland's position statement on Social Work Supervision first published in response to the debate around the *21st Century Review* in 2006. That described four functions of supervision - quality assurance, learning and development, support and shared decision-making.

It concluded that these "*must take into account individual capacity and workload. It is therefore essential that agencies develop transparent and workable workload management systems that realistically match capacity to expected agency standards. Those expected standards need to be clearly articulated and professionally valid*". For the full paper and references see **www.unison-scotland.org.uk/socialwork/supervision.html**

Since then there has been a flurry of research and reports which underline the importance of supervision - especially at a time of increasing pressures - to morale, recruitment, retention and positive outcomes for service users.

> *"Results suggest that supervisor support and availability of resources directly affect workload management. Additionally, supervisor support is significantly associated with worker ability and availability of resources."*
> **Juby, C., & Scannapieco, M. (2007).**

What is professional supervision?

Professional supervision is a (if not the) key element in recruitment and retention. The nature and frequency of supervision is one of the main questions asked by candidates in interviews and the lack of supervision is often quoted by professionals as their reason for changing jobs. It is highly valued by social workers.

Much of the academic work describes the purpose and the process of supervision in Social Work rather than defining the term. However, where there is an attempt to define the principle, there is remarkable consistency over the years.

M.K. Smith (1996) pulls together a range of models stemming from Kadushin's model of supervision which itself calls on much earlier work by *John Dawson (1926)*. Dawson defined the purpose of supervision as Administrative, Educational and Supportive. At least these three elements recur in a range of writings on the subject.
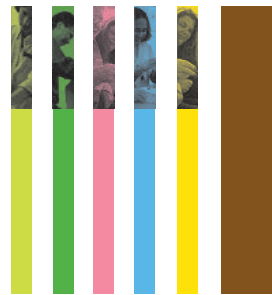
> *Employers should have "...a formal supervision policy which is communicated to, and understood, which requires that supervision be used to support effective professional practice that: reviews workload and associated stress levels, balances best practice requirements with organisational policies, procedures and priorities; and to support professional judgement and continuous development.*
> **Scottish Government Practice Governance Framework 2011**

The administrative element ensures that agency policy is implemented but also enables supervisees to work to the best of their ability.

The educational element encourages reflection on, and exploration of the work and of current research, evidence and policy. Supervisees are helped to understand the client better, be aware of their own responses, examine the dynamics of the relationship and evaluate their intervention. Smith outlines a helpful chart describing this process by *Hawkins and Shohet (1989)*.

The supportive element builds on morale and job satisfaction at its basic level. It involves understanding, identifying stress factors that may affect the worker and may impinge on the client. *Part of this is ensuring that staff are carrying manageable workloads, which allow them to meet the requirements of their role*. At its extreme end it involves an assessment of whether practice is safe for the professional, the client and the agency.

However, as the nature of the professional Social Work task has developed, this takes on a more crucial element. Kadushin and Smith crucially identify the issue of *shared decision-making* and this is the element most valued by social workers.

Shared decision-making

The concept of shared decision-making is often misunderstood. How can social workers want autonomy but also want to be part of a process that examines decision-making and seeks to arrive at an agreed plan of action?

This misunderstanding largely derives from a misunderstanding of autonomy. Autonomy is about working independently, yet often sharing that as part of a team. It is about taking responsibility for assessment and actions, yet accepting scrutiny from peers, service users, the agency and the profession. Social workers largely understand these tensions and do not see themselves as totally independent (or perhaps isolated) rules unto themselves.

Shared decision-making involves six main safeguards and benefits:-

1 **Peer review of professional decisions.** This concept is widely accepted in medical circles in the context of clinical supervision.

2 **Protection of civil liberties.** It ensures that no client's liberty is affected (eg coming into care) without scrutiny of that decision.

3 **Protection of clients.** It ensures clients are not left in unacceptable risk situations on the basis of a single individual's assessment or actions.

4 **Protection of staff:** It ensures that professionals are not put into a position where situations may exceed their knowledge, skills or experience or where they are having to manage very stressful and emotional situations unsupported. It builds and maintains morale.

5 **Protection of the Agency.** Just as professionals are accountable to their agency, the reality is that agencies are accountable for the actions of their employees or staff they have otherwise engaged or contracted. Shared-decision making ensures a fail-safe element and confirms that the agency has taken the importance of scrutiny seriously.

6. It encourages openness and collective responsibility. At its best it creates a climate where professionals are open about their decision making process, are prepared to jointly take responsibility for it and, to achieve this, are prepared to challenge each other in the interests of the client and indeed the agency.

> *"No Social Worker can work with entire autonomy and professional supervision is the key process for balancing professional autonomy with responsibility to the client, professional ethics and standards along with accountability to the agency and society at large".*
> UNISON Scotland Position Statement on Supervision 2006.

Supervision and standards and ethics

There is remarkable consistency from a range of organisations about the importance and role of professional supervision. The British Association of Social Workers' code of ethics includes the statement ".. the supervisor's role is educational, supportive, developmental and work-focused" *(BASW Code of Ethics 4.4.2)*

The American National Association of Social Workers state "Social workers should provide services in substantive areas or use intervention techniques or approaches that are new to them only after engaging in appropriate study, training, consultation, and supervision from people who are competent in those interventions or techniques" *(NASW Code Of Ethics 1.04(b)).*

The Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers Education and Training Standing Committee outlines helpful headings for the purposes of supervision.

♦ to ensure the worker is clear about roles and responsibilities
♦ to encourage the worker to meet the professions objectives
♦ to encourage quality of service to clients
♦ to encourage professional development and provide personal support
♦ to assist in identifying and managing stress
♦ to consider the resources the worker has available to do their job and discuss issues arising where they are inadequate
♦ to provide a positive environment within which social work practice can be discussed and reviewed.

Conclusions

The term supervision is well understood by Social Work staff and forms a major role in recruitment, retention and job satisfaction. However it is often misunderstood in wider circles as an oppressive rather than supportive process geared towards quality assurance, improvement and protection.

While there is broad consensus about the role of professional supervision, the element of shared decision-making is often implied rather than explicit.

Accordingly, a brief checklist of the importance and purpose of supervision should be adopted as follows:

Professional supervision is:-

- Essential to maintaining and developing practice in the interests of clients, professionals and agencies which engage professionals.
- Delivered by an appropriately qualified Social Work professional with competency in supervision and who is recognised by the agency for that purpose.

Professional supervision involves:-

Quality Assurance:

- Ensuring clarity about agency policies and about roles and responsibilities. Ensuring that professional and agency objectives are understood and are met.
- Ensuring quality of service to clients within relevant codes of standards and ethics.
- Ensuring that practice is accountable and evidence based.
- Assessing resources available to the worker and addressing issues arising from that.

Learning and Development

- Developing individuals personally and professionally by encouraging professional development at a minimum to meet SSSC standards and identifying appropriate development opportunities.
- Ensuring that the worker and agency maintain up to date knowledge about research, evidence and practice. Using knowledge and experience to explore new ways of working.
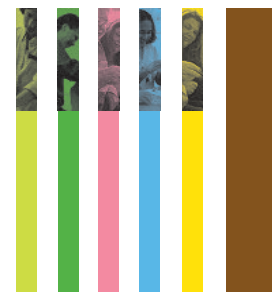
Support

- Providing a positive environment from which practice can be discussed and reviewed and morale and commitment can be maintained.
- Identifying and managing stress factors that may impinge on the worker, client or agency.
- Ensuring workloads are manageable and enable staff to meet the requirements of their role.
- Sharing, debriefing and identifying any further required resources to address responses to stressful situations.
- Challenging in a constructive way in the interests of client, worker and agency.

Shared decision-making

- Ensuring peer and management review of professional decisions and to encourage mutual learning and development.
- Ensuring that service users' safety, civil liberties and other interests are protected so that decisions affecting these factors are shared and reviewed.
- Ensuring that workers are not put in a position where situations may exceed their knowledge, skills or experience or where they are managing very stressful and emotional situations unsupported.

> "all organisations employing social workers are required to make a positive, unambiguous commitment to a strong supervision culture... professional support should be provided by an experienced social worker"
> **Social Work Task Force (England): Final Report November 2009.**

> "To be effective, social workers need appropriate technology and equipment, secure access to supervision and robust sources of research and information - and enough time to make good use of all of these resources."
> **Social Work Task Force (England): Interim Report July 2009.**

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- ♦ Ensuring safeguards to maintain agency duties and responsibilities.
- ♦ To encourage openness and collective responsibility, primarily in the interests of clients and to develop a supportive but challenging environment for managing risk.

The agency and accountability issues described above must take into account individual capacity and workload. *It is therefore essential that that agencies develop transparent and workable workload management systems that realistically match capacity to expected agency standards.* Those expected standards need to be clearly articulated and professionally valid.

Recent developments

Since the first publication of this paper, the Scottish Government has produced clear expectations about the delivery of supervision in its *Practice Governance Framework: Responsibility and Accountability in Social Work Practice (2011)* in Chapter 4 on *Guidance, Consultation and Supervision*. This lays out the duty of employers to provide supervision, staff development *and* workload management

The Social Care Institute for Excellence has produced a research briefing *'Effective supervision in social work and social care' (2012)*. It notes the lack of empirical research on supervision but concludes that good supervision contributes to more job satisfaction and less staff turnover.

Conflicts

Agencies should recognise that there is a possibility that conflicts may arise in supervision and that, for a range of reasons, the process may not function as well as it should or be as positive as it should. They should therefore develop procedures that allow for mediation, independent review and conflict resolution in addition to the normal employment policies and procedures open to practitioners.

Further Information and Selected References

Practice Governance Framework: Responsibility and Accountability in Social Work Practice, Scottish Government 2011*www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/03/24111247/6*

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Workloads: Measurement and Management, Aldershot: Avebury. Orme, J. (1995)

Other Publications

Keeping Safe in the Workplace - A Guide for Social Work Practitioners
http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/socialwork/safeworking.pdf

Helping People Change Their Lives - A Social Work manifesto for UNISON and BASW members in Scotland
www.unison-scotland.org.uk/socialwork/swmanifesto25june2009.pdf

UNISON's Ethical Care Charter for home care
http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/socialwork/

Professional Supervision in Social Work - UNISONScotland position statement for 21st Century Review 2006 *www.unison-scotland.org.uk/socialwork/supervision.html*

YOUR RIGHTS AT WORK - a guide for Personal Assistants and their Employers - SPAEN and UNISONScotland 2009 *www.unison-scotland.org.uk/socialwork/rightsdoc.pdf*

Creating and supporting an informed employer and employee relationship within the self-directed support sector - SPAEN and UNISONScotland 2009
www.unison-scotland.org.uk/socialwork/PAreportfinal.pdf

Direct Payments in Scotland: A Joint Position Statement - Joint statement agreed between UNISONScotland and key Scottish disabled people's organisations on direct payments in Scotland 2007 *www.unison-scotland.org.uk/socialwork/glossyagr.pdf*

Asylum in scotland - child's welfare paramount?: A guide for members from UNISON Scotland and BASW *www.unison-scotland.org.uk/socialwork/asylumbooklet*

For a range of other news, reports, submissions, responses and policy papers on Social Work issues see *www.unison-scotland.org.uk/socialwork*

UNISON
Scotland

Local Government Service Group

Social Work Issues Group

The UNISONScotland Social Work Issues Group comprises practitioners in social work, social care and community occupational therapy, delegated from Scotland's 32 local government branches and the community and voluntary sector.

Supporting Scotland's Social Work Services Workforce

UNISON is by far the largest union representing most Social Work and Social Care staff in Scotland. We represent social workers in all specialisms, residential workers, social care workers, OTs, home care staff and professional, admin and clerical support staff.

To join UNISON, contact your local branch
or **visit www.unison-scotland.org.uk and click on 'Join'**
or **call 0800 0 857 857**

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Supervision and Workload Management for Social Work - a negotiating resource