

A GUIDE TO THE SUPERVISION OF APPRENTICES AND TRAINEES

Supervision is a key element of the Training Contract* between an employer and their apprentice/trainee. Supervision in the workplace is critical to enabling the apprentice/trainee to become competent within a safe work environment.

Levels of supervision vary according to the working conditions and progress in the apprentice's/trainee's confidence and abilities. This guide aims to assist employers to provide supervision arrangements that are not only sufficient for their apprentice or trainee at any particular time but that also meet legislative (legal) requirements.

* Under the terms of the Training Contract, an employer must provide the appropriate facilities and experienced persons to facilitate the training and supervise the apprentice/trainee while at work, in accordance with the Training Plan. See the end of this guide for definitions of terms such as Training Contract and Training Plan.

Supervision staff

Staff member	Supervisory responsibilities
The employer	Assessing whether the workplace is an appropriate environment for the apprentice/trainee. Deciding what level of supervision should apply at various stages of the apprenticeship/traineeship.
The Workplace Supervisor**	Ensuring that the apprentice/trainee is given opportunities to learn and practice skills in structured training and on-the-job.
The Workplace Coach**	A more 'hands on' role, teaching, training, mentoring and monitoring progress on a daily basis.

** In some workplaces, both the supervisor and coach will be the same person. In all cases, supervision staff must be appropriately qualified to undertake that role.

Supervising progress

The competency of an apprentice or trainee depends on successful demonstration of:

- **Task skills**
Being able to competently carry out a given task or a specific piece of work.
- **Task management**
Learning to plan ahead and manage several different tasks side-by-side.
- **Contingency management**
Coping with the unexpected, and confidently undertaking appropriate jobs that are unusual or that depart from the normal routine.
- **Overall job management**
Dealing appropriately with the demands of the work environment and the employer and working satisfactorily with others at all levels.

Note: The *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2005* requires that employers provide the necessary supervision to allow their employees to work in a safe manner without risk to their health. **The advice in this guide does not remove or limit an employer's duty under Occupational Health and Safety legislation**, or under any legislation or common law relating to duty of care and negligence.

Levels of supervision and when they apply

Apprentices and trainees need varying levels of supervision as they acquire skills and gain confidence. This supervision falls into two categories: Direct and General. Apprentices/trainees begin learning a particular skill under Direct Supervision. When they achieve competence in the skill they move to General Supervision while they are undertaking work where that skill is required.

Direct Supervision

Direct Supervision is one-on-one supervision. It is essential for every new apprentice or trainee and must be maintained in the teaching of a particular skill until the apprentice/trainee has been officially deemed competent in that skill.

Direct Supervision can be provided by the employer, the Workplace Supervisor, Workplace Coach or another qualified employee.

If an apprentice or trainee becomes competent in one particular skill (and it has been signed off by the Registered Training Organisation – the RTO), they do not move from Direct Supervision to General Supervision for other skills that they are still learning or have yet to learn under Direct Supervision. In reality, they will be moving from Direct to General Supervision on a regular basis as they become competent in additional skills.

This means the Workplace Coach is to work with the apprentice/trainee, constantly reviewing the work practices and standard of the apprentice's work. A Workplace Coach with appropriate experience must be on site the vast majority of the time.

General Supervision

General Supervision is a stage that apprentices or trainees enter as they gain skills that allow them to function more independently of Direct Supervision. They will be moving from Direct to General Supervision in respect of different skills as they train in and become competent in those skills.

To work under General Supervision, the apprentice or trainee will have had their competence formally assessed (as with Direct Supervision). It is expected that they will also have gained enough experience to undertake a task to the same standard as staff qualified in that skill.

This underlines the need for the apprentice/trainee to have regular attendance of the Workplace Coach on site. A Workplace Coach with appropriate experience is required to check the work being performed and provide the apprentice with associated instructions and assistance.

Employer responsibility

Whoever undertakes the training, the employer remains responsible for the quality and safety of the training, and both the Direct and General Supervision being provided. This also allows the employer to ensure that the apprentice/employee is made aware of just how the employer wants them to be involved in the business, so that a good employer-employee understanding is reached, for the benefit of all.

Summary

It is the employer's responsibility to guide the apprentice/trainee through their training via the stages of Direct and General Supervision. The employer is assisted by:

- the Workplace Supervisor, who provides training
- the Workplace Coach, who acts as mentor as well as trainer

- the Training Plan, which provides details of the tasks to be completed
- advice from an Apprenticeship Field Officer, if desired.

Only when an apprentice/trainee under Direct Supervision has been assessed as competent in a skill or set of skills, and this has been documented ('signed off') by the RTO, can the employer allow them to progress to General Supervision for that skill or set of skills. This procedure must apply to all tasks or skills until the apprenticeship or traineeship is complete.

Case study – Direct Supervision

John's story

John has been a painting apprentice with a small painting firm for five months. As part of this apprenticeship John enrolled at the local TAFE Institute, and has completed one week of off-the-job training. During that week, TAFE induction and some OH&S education was completed.

John's employer, Peter, has been impressed by the apprentice's performance at work, especially the filling and sanding of walls. This is now familiar work for John, who, while employed by Peter, has been doing this type of work under the direction of a tradesman for the past two months.

However, being left alone at the worksite on several occasions left Lee feeling uneasy and he decided to ring the apprenticeship hotline to ask for advice about this.

An Apprenticeship Field Officer arranged to meet with Peter and John to discuss the situation. It was agreed at this meeting that although John had developed some basic skills it was not appropriate that he be left on-site alone at this stage of his apprenticeship.

The decision to keep John under Direct Supervision was made because of the following factors:

- Despite two months workplace experience in the particular skills of filling and sanding, Lee had not yet commenced the relevant TAFE structured training ('off-the-job training' or 'workplace based training') that was necessary to provide an underpinning knowledge of those tasks.
- The competencies relating to these tasks were not signed off on the Training Plan by the Registered Training Organisation.
- For this worksite, OH&S procedures relating to induction and risk analysis were not being properly followed.

Case study – General Supervision

Laurie's story

Laurie, a fourth-year carpentry apprentice working for a medium-sized builder, has completed all his off-the-job training at the local TAFE Institute.

Laurie's employer, Michael, is currently building a new home in the area. Michael has been building new homes for the last 20 years, and has exposed Laurie to all areas of the business during his apprenticeship.

Michael and Laurie are currently at the fit-out stage of the new home. A delivery of ten doors arrives at the site and, while they are being unloaded, Michael has a call on his mobile phone from a client who wants an urgent quote that will require Michael to leave the worksite.

Michael and Laurie discuss the procedures required to hang the doors to make sure that Laurie is fully aware of all that is required. Michael then talks to the two subcontractor plumbers who are on-site to confirm that they will be remaining there for the whole day. After confirming that Laurie is confident about performing the task, and that a mobile phone is available if contact is necessary, Michael decides that it will be all right to leave for a short time to prepare the quote. Michael also makes sure that the plumbers know he will only be gone for a short period.

Laurie has hung half the doors when Michael returns. Michael examines the work and discusses the few problems that have been encountered by Laurie before giving Laurie feedback on the performance of the task.

They then hang the remaining five doors together.

Michael's decision to leave Laurie for a short time was appropriate for the following reasons:

- Laurie had completed all relevant TAFE training, and therefore had a strong underpinning knowledge of the skills required for the task.
- The competencies relating to this task had been signed off by the Registered Training Organisation (TAFE) and the employer.
- Laurie had already performed this task several times during his apprenticeship.
- OH&S procedures had been conducted for the worksite, and subcontracted tradesmen were on-site for the whole time, meaning that Laurie would not be working alone.
- Before leaving the worksite, Michael spent time discussing the full and correct process for the job with Laurie, and then spent further time providing feedback after his return.

Definitions of terms

Apprenticeship Field Officer	An officer from the Skills Victoria available to assist apprentices and employers at the workplace.
Direct supervision	Constant review of an apprentice's work practices and the standard of the apprentice's work required in areas where the apprentice is not yet competent.
General supervision	Regular checking of the work being performed by the apprentice and provision of associated instructions and assistance.
Structured training	Training organised or facilitated by a Registered Training Organisation. It may be delivered off-the-job in a formal setting or be workplace based.
Practical experience in the occupation.	Workplace based work and training
Registered Training Organisation	A Training Provider registered by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (e.g., a TAFE Institute, an Adult and Community Education or private training provider).
Training contract	A legally binding agreement signed by an employer and apprentice or trainee (and parent or guardian if applicable). It is an agreement to work and train together with the help of a Registered Training Organisation.
Training plan	The document developed by the Registered Training Organisation and the apprentice or trainee and the employer. It sets out the details of the training to be undertaken and identifies the workplace coach/supervisor.
Workplace coach	An appropriately skilled mentor who helps apprentices and trainees understand the skills they are gaining.
Workplace supervisor	This may be the employer, or another appropriately qualified or experienced person in the workplace. Their responsibility is to ensure apprentices and trainees receive appropriate training.