

# THE BIG QUESTION

THIS MONTH WE ASK

## What is sufficient supervision?



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Firstly I would have to ask what type of supervision is meant. Supervision can be split into three kinds. Supervision for training, teaching, giving constructive feedback and developing good professional relationships with the staff is termed direct. Another type of supervision is with regards to administration, organising staff and making sure the daily tasks are performed (indirect). The third type is remote supervision. The balance of these three types of supervision is necessary so that it benefits both the staff and the organisation.

Supervision in helping staff gain training and competency requires a lot of time by the supervisor, but once staff are trained and competent (they understand their limits of practice), supervision is reduced and focused on the organisation of the staff and making sure the work is undertaken. There should be enough supervision so that any poor performance can be identified and measures put in place to prevent further occurrences. It also enables the supervision to address any potential problems within the staff. The amount of supervision should be in the context of the staff you have. New starters need more supervision than established staff who are competent in their roles.

Sufficient supervision is based on the need of your staff and the supervisor must always observe the staff work, where appropriate, even if competent.

IMAGE: ISTOCK



### Wendy Leversuch

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The best response I can come up with is “it depends”. There are many factors at play in answering a question like this. What is being supervised? Who is being supervised? What is the consequence and outcome?

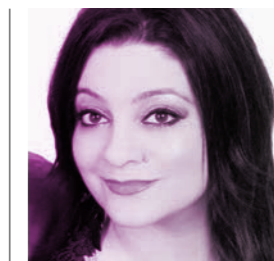
Supervision is defined as “observe and direct the execution of a task or activity”. Translating this into the laboratory environment is the challenge. I’m sure I’m not alone in considering supervision to have levels and interpretation can vary. Does it mean looking over someone’s shoulder, or being present to provide support and guidance?

Managers are considered supervisors, but have additional layers of organisational structure cascading supervision as appropriate. Part of our HCPC registration ensures we work to our own personal limits and scope of practice, both of which should limit the level of supervision required.

I would be surprised to find a laboratory that operates a competency framework that doesn’t reference supervision.

My organisation distinguishes between the ability to perform a task under supervision and unsupervised.

In a practical sense, all staff undertaking new tasks will require direct supervision, which comes as part of a training programme, until they achieve an appropriate level of competency. The role of the individual and the nature of the particular task will determine what level of supervision is sufficient.



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One-to-one supervision between a trainer and member of staff is a must, until they are fully trained and signed off as competent to perform tasks on their own. However, we should not confuse this with ensuring that support is still available, if required. The supervisor may be in a different part of the laboratory, but can be approached should a need arise. I would refer to this as distant general supervision.

*One-to-one supervision is a must, until someone is fully trained and competent*