



An Evaluation of the Delivery of the
Professional Practice Award

Executive Summary

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February 2019

1. Introduction and Summary

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this evaluation is to consider how effectively the Professional Practice Award (PPA) meets the needs of the independent advocacy sector in Scotland in establishing appropriate learning opportunities and qualifications for the sector.

For the purposes of this evaluation, independent advocacy is defined as the body of activity undertaken by agencies providing independent advocacy in Scotland who are members of The Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance (SIAA). As members, they subscribe to the Principles & Standards and Code of Practice for independent advocacy.

The sector is comprised of a diverse mix of providing agencies, most of whom employ staff or volunteers in the direct delivery of services.

The three main operational models relate to providing support through:

- Professional advocacy: salaried workers
- Volunteer/citizen advocacy: unpaid workers
- Collective advocacy: salaried and unpaid workers

1.2 Context of Independent Advocacy Qualifications in Scotland

There are no other qualifications available in Scotland that are specific to generic independent advocacy. Most projects have developed and implemented internal, non-accredited training programmes for their workforce that are customised for their specific service and processes.

There is debate about the merits of a structured, recognised and verified learning and development framework for the advocacy sector. This evaluation is about testing whether the PPA meets this challenge both within The Advocacy Project (TAP) and for the participating pilot organisations and candidates. This has been examined in detail with the range of contributors to this evaluation.

In terms of learning and development for advocacy, currently there is one award available; the independent domestic abuse advocacy (IDAA) specialised award for domestic abuse which is designed to meet the needs of independent advocates working in the domestic abuse court structure in Scotland.

There is also an award for peer advocates developed by REACH which is geared to 1:1 peer support for people recovering from alcohol and substance misuse.

In England and Wales there are City and Guilds qualifications and online awards offered by KMT.

1.3 Development of the PPA

The Advocacy Project believes that professional learning pathways represent the most competent and effective method of learning & development. This has culminated in the development of the Professional Practice Award for independent advocate practitioners in Scotland at SCQF Level 7 which has been credit rated by Edinburgh Napier University.

The award has been shaped and developed by the work experience and insights gained over 25 years of supporting people in Glasgow, Lanarkshire and East Renfrewshire. Advocates at The Advocacy Project have been a key driver in the desire for accredited learning. This is in recognition of the skills, challenges and demands of the job role of professional independent advocacy.

This has also been supplemented by a rigorous commitment to quality assurance, the development of a team of SQA qualified workplace assessors, the engagement of the wider learning and development sector (SCQF/SQA/Napier University) in the development of the award and assistance from external learning providers such as Training and Enterprise Development (TED) Scotland.

The award has been developed and is owned by The Advocacy Project. The Advocacy Project has implemented the award internally and progressed all advocate practitioners onto it, with staff graduating on an ongoing basis. Internal delivery began in late 2016 and, by September 2018, more than 30 advocate practitioners have been enrolled on the award which continues to be delivered. As part of the Pilot, 7 candidates from external advocacy organisations have each completed one Unit of the PPA.

The high completion rate is an indication that the award meets the needs of candidates, is manageable and that the award is effectively delivered and assessed by TAP. These points were reinforced by the 100% completion rate of candidates on the Pilot and their feedback on their experience of the PPA. This feedback is explained in detail later in the report.

1.4 Structure of the PPA

The PPA is at SCQF Level 7 with the following Units:

- Unit 1: Engaging Individuals in Advocacy Support
- Unit 2: Effective Communication in Advocacy
- Unit 3: Individual Rights and Safeguards
- Unit 4: Case Work Management and Review

Additionally, The Advocacy Project staff undertake a credit rated CPD Unit at SCQF Level 8.

More details of the PPA are available on the SCQF database of qualifications at www.scqf.org.uk or from The Advocacy Project at www.theadvocacyproject.org.uk.

1.5 Proposed Framework of Qualifications

The organisational business strategy of The Advocacy Project includes being the leader in the field and evidencing best practice in the provision of advocacy. They feel that they are partly meeting these objectives and are taking additional steps to progress the PPA, to consider the development of an advanced practitioner award at SCQF Level 8 and a new to advocacy introductory award for individuals new to the sector at SCQF Level 6.

TAP feel that this initial framework of qualifications will lay the foundations for a career pathway in Scotland for advocacy practitioners, from beginner to advanced practitioner levels. The hope is that the whole sector can benefit from this progress and The Advocacy Project is keen to expand the beneficial effects and commercial advantage this may promise to both The Advocacy Project and members of the SIAA sector.

This evaluation of the PPA pilot has also included consultation with a range of stakeholders about the relevance of a framework of qualifications for the independent advocacy sector in Scotland.

1.6 Rationale for the PPA Pilot

The pilot delivery of the PPA has been undertaken by professional advocate practitioners who have experience of supporting a professional advocacy case load. This group of practitioners is the primary focus for the PPA.

Participating organisations may also be providing advocacy through a blended model using a volunteer model coexisting with professional advocacy service delivery. The Scottish advocacy sector incorporates a diverse mix of services and workers from a range of backgrounds. The evaluation includes consultation on the viability of the PPA being relevant for both salaried and volunteer advocates and any insights or suggestions on this.

The Advocacy Project organised various events within the advocacy sector to raise awareness of the PPA and to determine interest in participating in the PPA Pilot.

The Pilot involved the delivery of the Professional Practice Award to staff in 4 advocacy organisations in 5 different geographical areas of Scotland. Each candidate undertook one Unit of the PPA. This has been delivered, assessed and verified by The Advocacy Project. The Units undertaken by candidates in the Pilot covered a spread across Units 1-3 of the PPA.

Organisation	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3
Independent Advocacy Perth and Kinross (IAPK)		1 candidate	1 candidate
Caertas Advocacy	1 candidate		
Forth Valley Advocacy	1 candidate	1 candidate	
Partners in Advocacy (Glasgow, Edinburgh)		2 candidates	

1.7 PPA Pilot Delivery Model

Adapting the model of delivery

The previous model of delivery of the PPA internally to staff within The Advocacy Project was adapted to meet the needs of candidates who were based in agencies in different geographical areas. The timescale for completing a Unit as part of the Pilot was over a 3 month period between May and July 2018. Views on the effectiveness of the revised delivery model was included in consultation schedules with those involved in the Pilot and is examined later in the report.

Induction process

Pre-course information was circulated to staff who had agreed to participate in the Pilot. They all attended a one-day Induction Session held at the premises of The Advocacy Project and co-facilitated by staff from The Advocacy Project and Teresa Dolan of Training and Enterprise Development (TED). The programme for this session was modelled on that delivered internally to staff of The Advocacy Project. During induction, each candidate was introduced to their assessor from The Advocacy Project who would work with them during the Pilot.

Support and assessment approach

Following induction, each candidate arranged a meeting with their assessor to begin work on the Unit that they had selected and, in particular, to develop and agree an Assessment Plan. Further meetings were mutually agreed and scheduled at appropriate stages of the work. This was combined with contact by email and telephone for ongoing support and advice outwith these scheduled meetings. In most instances, meetings between the candidate and assessor were arranged at the candidates' workplaces. However, if preferred and more convenient, there was an option to meet at the premises of The Advocacy Project and this was the preference for one candidate on the Pilot.

Administration

The Advocacy Project managed the administration, delivery, support and assessment for the Pilot.

2. Purpose and Objectives

2.1 Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation is to consider how effectively the PPA meets the needs of the Independent Advocacy Sector in Scotland in establishing appropriate learning opportunities and qualifications for the sector.

It is important to recognise that the PPA is primarily an award for advocacy practitioners and, as such, feedback from practitioners will be the dominant part of this evaluation. This is both in terms of their experience of undertaking a Unit of the PPA as part of the Pilot or the full award internally within The Advocacy Project and their views on its effectiveness at meeting learning needs of practitioners in the advocacy sector in Scotland.

The evaluation also consulted other relevant stakeholders as outlined in Section 5 and their feedback is examined in the report

2.2 Objectives of the Evaluation

The objectives agreed for this evaluation fall into two distinct but connected strands as below.

Strand 1: Review of the PPA

- Objective 1: To review the content, structure and delivery model of the PPA.
- Objective 2: To identify and establish the appropriateness and effectiveness of the PPA to develop the knowledge, skills and practice of independent advocacy practitioners and providing agencies.
- Objective 3: To consider the challenges of delivering the PPA in external sites across Scotland.

Strand 2: Establish Current and Future Learning Needs of the Scottish Advocacy Sector

- Objective 4: To establish the current and future learning needs of independent advocacy practitioners and providing agencies.
- Objective 5: To review the findings of the evaluation to recommend possible strategies to develop and deliver learning qualifications to meet the needs of the independent advocacy sector in Scotland.

2.3 Evaluation Methodology

Key features of the evaluation approach were as follows:

Qualitative Approach:

Research and information gathering to:

- Clarify the background, content and structure of the PPA;
- Establish the context of current qualifications for independent advocacy practitioners in Scotland

Evaluative feedback from The Advocacy Project staff:

- Evaluation feedback report (2016)
- Focus group and individual questionnaires

Consultation with those involved with the pilot:

- Advocacy workers
- Managers in 4 participating organisations
- TAP Assessors

External stakeholders representative of:

- National organisations for the advocacy sector;
- Commissioning organisations;
- Qualifications' development organisations

The methodology and approach used in this evaluation are explained in detail Appendix 1.

3. Executive Summary

3.1 Key findings of Strand 1: Review of the PPA

3.1.1 Content, Structure and Delivery

"The pilot has shown that the PCs are accurate for the role and transferable to all advocacy organisations." - TAP Assessor

All contributors to the consultation felt that the topics and supporting content for the units in the award represented key elements of advocacy service delivery and that the recommended sequence was logical.

The award encouraged candidates to:

- Review and develop their practice-based skills and approaches;
- Understand how legislative requirements should be applied;
- Develop skills as a reflective practitioner.

3.1.2 Assessment

"I liked the mix of theory and practice in the award and how it connects to the day to day work practice and can be applied within own caseload. There is seldom an opportunity for bespoke training for independent advocacy workers. It is often the case that they have to 'shoehorn' into other qualifications." - Manager in Pilot Organisation

Positive features identified were:

- Mix of assessment methods such as written assignment, reflective account, presentation, patchwork, portfolio;
- Evidence readily available from day to day casework;
- Ease of establishing and maintaining contact with their assessor;
- Positive and constructive feedback;
- Extensive knowledge, expertise and experience of the advocacy sector and the role of advocacy workers;
- Providing support to candidates to identify sources of evidence.

3.1.3 Impact

Impact was identified both in relation to the individual work practices of candidates and to organisational systems and procedures. Key factors noted were:

- Increased confidence in knowledge, understanding and professional approach;
- Reflection on why as well as how they do certain things in their role. "It made me reflect more and acted as reminder of the complexity of the role that I do." Pilot Candidate;
- Relevance: *"It made me look at my practice and think about how I could improve things or do them differently."* - Pilot Candidate;
- The importance of record keeping systems and gathering feedback;
- Identifying new approaches to offering advocacy support:
 - "It made us think about things that we might have become slightly complacent about and so prompted us to reflect on our practice and make it even better. As well as benefits for the individual staff members undertaking a unit in the pilot, had expected that there would be gains for the organisation and this proved to be the case."* - Manager in Pilot organisation
- Improved understanding of legislation and effective ways to apply this for their advocacy partners.
 - "It has made me more aware of how I work and why I do certain things. Some elements of the assessment were timely refreshers such as equalities and organisational policies and procedures. Now more conscious of the impact of these on my work and in turn its impact on others."* - Pilot Candidate
- Awareness of different approaches to delivering advocacy services across the sector in Scotland.
 - "Participation in the PPA has challenged the generally held assumption that all advocacy organisations tend to operate in similar ways."* - Pilot Candidate;
- Professional discussions with other team members.
 - "It also encouraged me to discuss elements from the unit with my colleagues."* - Pilot Candidate.

3.2 Key findings of Strand 2: Current and future learning needs of the Scottish advocacy sector

3.2.1 Key learning needs

Professionalisation of advocacy

"Our participation in the pilot has created lots of conversations with other staff in our organisation. The general feeling about it is very positive and that there is nothing wrong with establishing a qualification to determine the professionalism of advocacy workers." - Pilot Candidate

External status/contracts/legislation

"It would also be good as part of the tendering process as a means of providing evidence of professionalism and consistency." - Pilot Candidate

Accessibility to staff from different backgrounds and abilities

"I strongly support the PPA as a vehicle to establish a professional benchmark for the sector. This does reflect the increased complexity of the role of independent advocacy combined with legislative confidentiality requirements. There may still be a role for volunteers in some specific areas such as citizen advocacy (possible the level 6 qualification may be appropriate for this role)." - Manager in Pilot organisation

Developing a Learning Framework

"There is such a lack of qualifications in advocacy and it could be possible to create a really wide-ranging framework of qualifications right up to postgraduate level aimed at workers and managers. It would give more credence to work including when staff take on a new role." - Pilot Candidate

3.2.2 Extending the delivery of the PPA

"Keen to do the whole PPA as found it interesting. Organisational issues in terms of cost and caseload may be the only barrier. Initially, had worried that participation in the pilot might have impacted on my day job but now realise that it is achievable within my day job. Now that I understand the paperwork involved in assessments, other units would be less daunting." - Pilot Candidate

Key points that should be considered in terms of extending the PPA delivery to other organisations were identified:

- Costs, time and funding restrictions;
- Available resources within TAP to administer, deliver, assess and verify a higher number of candidates;
- Adapting the delivery model to meet the needs of candidates from a geographical spread and ensure cost effectiveness;
- Reviewing materials to ensure that they represent the range of advocacy service delivery, models and systems operated across the independent advocacy sector in Scotland.

3.3 Some Conclusions

From a review of the wide-ranging feedback from contributors to the evaluation, the following points were emphasised:

- Changing landscape for advocacy services in Scotland to respond to legislative demands, the complexity of the role of independent advocacy, validation of the role with external agencies and tendering processes for contracts;
- Support for the independent advocacy sector to develop professional qualifications;
- Acknowledgement that the PPA is an appropriate qualification for independent advocacy workers in Scotland;
- High level of interest in the delivery of the PPA being extended to organisations across the advocacy sector in Scotland. Some minor amendments to the content and delivery model have been suggested and are under consideration;
- The PPA Pilot has provided evidence that the PPA could be delivered across Scotland, dependent on capacity of TAP and cost considerations;
- Support to develop qualifications at different levels to respond to the needs for all staff in the independent advocacy sector as part of a framework that will support initial and continuing learning and development.