Professionalising the welfare to work industry

Developing a framework for action

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Fran Parry

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Foreword

Janette Faherty OBE – Avanta

One of the underlying values of Avanta is its belief in the value of developing its people. Never has this been more important in the welfare to work sector than at this time, as the marketplace matures and contract lengths encourage organisations to invest over longer periods of time. I was delighted to be involved in the initial discussions from which came the idea to commission research and to sponsor it.

From this point, the key mantra will be not just to look at this research but to ensure that we use it as a summons to action led by the industry itself. This research provides us with the basis for that action. Avanta looks forward to being part of the leadership which will drive this.

Karen Roberts – Shaw Trust

At Shaw Trust, we recognise the importance of an appropriately qualified and motivated workforce. We are fortunate, in that we have many of the best staff in the sector among our teams, and we are keen to be able to reward and recognise that talent through the provision of relevant qualifications. That is why we are delighted to be a co-sponsor of this critical piece of research, which we firmly believe will have significant impact in professionalising the welfare to work industry. We very much look forward to seeing the outcomes and recommendations of the research being translated into actions and hope that we will soon have access to a qualification which reflects the high calibre of individuals working within this sector.

Beth Carruthers – Remploy

As an organisation dedicated to helping create a brighter future for disabled and disadvantaged people through sustainable employment, it is vital that we equip our permanent employees with the skills and knowledge to be efficient in the services we provide to our customers. With this in mind, we took the opportunity to work with Inclusion to allow us to be at the forefront of developing a bespoke welfare to work qualification for our employment advisers, which will allow us to demonstrate our commitment to them and give them security in working towards a qualification aligned specifically to the marketplace they work within.
Breege Burke – Working Links

We are one of the leading organisations in tackling social exclusion, and are proud of our track record of supporting disadvantaged individuals and communities. We believe that the skills, competencies and values of our people have been, and will continue to be the key to gaining the respect and trust of our customers. A framework for recognising these factors will be crucial if the welfare to work sector is to remain a strong, valued and reliable partner of government during a significant period of change.

As an industry, we have a window of opportunity to drive forward the professionalisation of our workforce, in order to underpin consistency in the quality standards of those employed within welfare to work. At Working Links we will continue to advocate the development of professional standards and qualifications for our people through high quality pieces of research such as this, as the catalyst for action.

Roy O’Shaughnessy – Careers Development Group

Our charity, Careers Development Group (CDG), has been delighted to work with Inclusion to put the concept of professionalisation into practice – both internally and throughout the sector.

As CDG’s capacity to support people back into work grows, the need to equip our workforce with the necessary tools and qualifications becomes more pertinent.

This paper should help to cement those plans in the minds of those with similar goals. CDG, as one of its sponsors and a long-time advocate of professionalisation, looks forward to participating in the discussions that are born from it.

I am immensely proud of the dedicated and skilled colleagues CDG has. We share the collective goal of making CDG an employer of choice – a phrase often bandied around but not always genuinely and with tangible results.

By using this important paper as a springboard and adopting a collaborative approach, we should aim to make welfare to work a sector of choice to increase the support we provide and, ultimately, reduce worklessness with maximum proficiency.
Acknowledgements

The field of skills, qualifications, continuing professional development and accreditation is a complex one, and one undergoing profound change and reform. This report has greatly benefited from the input and insights of a number of experienced practitioners and policy makers.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the following people for so generously sharing their knowledge and expertise, and to those who acted as critical friends during the drafting and development process:

Janette Faherty OBE, Avanta
David Gallagher, Working Links
Roy O’Shaughnessy, Careers Development Group
Lisa Martin, Remploy
Karen Roberts, Shaw Trust
Andy Woodall, Pertemps People Development Group
Rob Murdoch, Chair, Employment Related Services Association
Paul Warner, Association of Learning Providers
Judith Armatage, Recruitment and Employment Confederation
Dr. Deidre Hughes, President, Institute of Careers Guidance
Patricia Pugh, Lifelong Learning UK
Helen McAnally, Parkhouse Bell
Linda Hayworth, Duality
Claire McNeill, IPPR
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Gail Kovacs, Vocational Rehabilitation Association
Joan Skerry, Jobcentre Plus
Stuart Deaton, Ellie Roberts and Anthea Hollis, Inclusion
A4e for kindly sponsoring the printing, dissemination and launch of the paper
1 Introduction

Personal advisers (PAs) in the private and not-for-profit sectors are central to the delivery of effective employment support services. Throughout this report the term PA has been used (for simplicity, as a catch all) to describe the full range of tasks undertaken by staff. Working on the front line, typically providing one-to-one support to clients but also performing employer engagement, recruitment, training and tutoring roles, PAs are fundamental to helping clients move into work. At the same time, in a context where there is robust competition among providers and, increasingly, a payment by results approach, the effectiveness of PAs in supporting clients directly affects the financial success of employment services providers.

A changing policy and contracting context also highlights the importance of, and challenges for PAs. The introduction of the Work Programme by the new government moves welfare to work support from a number of specialised programmes for particular client groups to specialist support for individuals within the one overarching contracted programme. As a result, the people PAs work with are very likely to be further from work and present with a different range of barriers to employment. PAs, working at a confident and competent level, able to provide personalised and expert support, will be critical to the successful implementation of the Work Programme.

1.1 Professional development framework for PAs

Unlike other similar roles in client-facing social services, the welfare to work industry currently has no occupational standards or designated sector skills council, no required qualifications for entry, recognition framework or awarding body and the training delivered to PAs is not subject to any quality standard. While many PAs work towards an NVQ level 3 or 4 in information, advice and guidance. This qualification is not considered by most to be appropriate for the specialised requirements of this workforce.

In contrast, tutors and trainers in the industry have a full menu of mandatory professional qualifications, from ‘preparing to teach in the lifelong learning sector’ through to a ‘certificate to teach in the lifelong learning sector’ and on to a ‘diploma to teach in the lifelong learning sector’. Employees working in comparable roles in the careers, recruitment and probation sectors also have identified qualification and advancement frameworks.
At present, there is no clear route into the welfare to work sector and no defined skills escalator once one arrives in it. Yet, to meet its stretching targets, the industry must routinely attract the best advisers, retain them and become an aspirational career destination. The workforce deserves industry support to build basic core competence and individual specialisms, and to have these recognised as professional and transferable skills.

1.2 Scope and purpose

The sponsors of this research project, Avanta, Careers Development Group, Remploy, Shaw Trust and Working Links, are keenly aware of the importance of PAs. They commissioned Inclusion to investigate the issue of professionalisation of the PA workforce within the private and not for profit sectors.

The study involved two streams of work:

1. a benchmarking survey to establish core information about the characteristics of the PA workforce, its aspirations, professional development needs and the positives and negatives involved in the role; this allowed changes to be tracked over time and pointed to areas that could be affecting recruitment and retention

2. a feasibility study for the development and delivery of an industry framework.

1.3 Building on research

Inclusion’s work builds on past research, including a major IPPR report Now it’s personal: personal advisers and the new public sector workforce\(^1\) This report examined the role of advisers in providing personalised support and responding to the recession. It found that service users felt that advisers were not always able to provide individually tailored support. At the same time, the study found that half of advisers felt there were few opportunities for them to progress in responsibility or salary. The report made a number of recommendations around improving training and professional development opportunities for advisers, and developing career pathways. It also recommended enhanced status for employment advisers, particularly noting the differing status of careers and employment advisers in the UK.

A second piece of research was Activating States,\(^2\) which examined the impact of increased use of active labour market policies on PAs. This collaborative research project surveyed PAs in Australia, the UK and the Netherlands and compared


\(^2\) www.spps.unimelb.edu.au/research/projects/activating-states
responses against benchmark data from 10 years previously. The UK online survey was run in December 2008 and consisted of 100 questions about how frontline staff do their job, and their views on the employment sector. It generated a profile of the workforce and examined the types of ways in which advisers work, their training programmes, decision-making processes, interactions with jobseekers and other agencies. This research was conducted before the recession, which it is likely will have had an effect on responses to questions around salary and job satisfaction, making this study an interesting post-recession counterpoint.

Also, from an Australian perspective, Jobs Australia and the Brotherhood of St Lawrence\(^3\) undertook an extensive survey and benchmarking exercise with providers in 2005. The survey aimed to determine:

- a baseline workforce profile in terms of qualifications, age, experience, job satisfaction and challenges
- views on the effectiveness of participation requirements
- views on the effectiveness of different activities undertaken by jobseekers
- views on the responsiveness of the employment services system for key client groups

Asked how best to improve the employment services system, advisers nominated reducing administrative burden, focusing on longer term sustainability of job outcomes and improving communication between the key public agencies.

### 1.4 Structure of this report

This research project, then, seeks to take forward the debate on professionalisation within the PA workforce in the private and not for profit employment services sector. The following discussion examines definitions of, and the process towards professionalisation; reports on the findings of our baseline survey, outlining the profile of the workforce and highlighting issues; considers the qualifications framework for a number of related and relevant industries; provides an overview of the process by which to develop a qualifications framework and examines potential awarding bodies; finally, this report considers how to progress the findings and discussion outlined in this report.

2 The role of the personal adviser

Personal advisers (PAs) perform a range of different activities relating to the ultimate goal of getting people into work. The main function of PAs in employment services is to act as ‘job brokers’, which involves preparing both the jobseeker and the employer in order to fill a post appropriately, and in some cases to provide ongoing support to keep the jobseeker in work.

In its research report *Now It’s Personal*, IPPR identifies six key areas of activity that PAs undertake:

- **Employer liaison**: advisers working with employers to secure vacancies and build relationships
- **Job placing**: advisers working with clients and/or employers to place individuals into jobs
- **Specialist support**: advisers working with specific claimant groups, such as lone parents, disabled, older people or younger people
- **Outreach**: advisers who work in the community to encourage referrals
- **Aftercare**: advisers who focus on ensuring clients stay in work, liaising with employers and clients to monitor progress
- **Training and skills**: advisers who provide specific support related to learning or career development.4

2.1 Competencies

In order to undertake their role effectively, it is generally agreed upon by service users, providers and advisers that advisers need a combination of ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ skills. The core ‘soft competencies’ revolve around interpersonal skills, such as good communication. ‘Hard competencies’ focus on knowledge – of the labour market, the range of provisions available and the benefit system, as well as the basic skills needed to diagnose specialist needs.

IPPR’s report summarised the core competencies it considered were required by PAs.5

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5 Ibid, p25
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core ‘soft’ skills</th>
<th>Core ‘hard’ skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent oral communications skills</td>
<td>Job-broking skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An empathy and commitment to working with clients to help them find employment, ability to demonstrate respect and self-awareness</td>
<td>Understanding of the benefits system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to develop excellent working relationships and to market and promote services</td>
<td>Knowledge of the local labour market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>Knowledge of local services and training provision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High energy levels, proactive nature</td>
<td>Basic skills and knowledge needed to ‘diagnose’ specialist needs, such as drug or alcohol misuse, homelessness, mental health problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution-focused</td>
<td>Excellent administrative and written skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recruitment skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A more comprehensive reflection of the core competencies, comprising both hard and soft skills that providers value, is illustrated below by an output from the development in summer 2009 by Working Links of a routeway programme into the welfare to work industry.

This project was undertaken on behalf of a north east Jobcentre Plus provider network and the wider industry. As part of the development of the routeway, a detailed consultation was conducted with a range of welfare to work providers to establish the skills/competencies, knowledge/experience and behaviours that were deemed to be crucial to successful performance in frontline job roles in the industry. This consultation exercise included input from A4e, Pertemps, Working Links, Reed in Partnership, Hartlepool College of Further Education, East Durham College of Further Education and Contact Centre Professional (CCP).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Skills/competencies</strong></th>
<th><strong>Underpinning knowledge</strong></th>
<th><strong>Underpinning behaviours</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced interpersonal / communication skills</td>
<td>Data protection</td>
<td>Professionalism, including dress, attitude, housekeeping etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy (L2+)</td>
<td>Health and safety</td>
<td>Leadership and self motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numeracy (L2+)</td>
<td>Child protection / safeguarding</td>
<td>Team working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT (L2 +)</td>
<td>Equality and Diversity</td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team-working</td>
<td>Employment legislation</td>
<td>Attention to detail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing good practice</td>
<td>Labour market (local and sector based)</td>
<td>Non-judgemental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical, and negotiation and influencing skills</td>
<td>Contracts and services landscape / requirements</td>
<td>Ability to challenge behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational and planning skills</td>
<td>Customer challenges / barriers</td>
<td>Approachable / builds rapport and trust easily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical skills</td>
<td>Recruitment / job brokerages practices</td>
<td>Solutions-oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Feedback and coaching</td>
<td>Benefits system</td>
<td>Ability to resolve conflicts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitation</td>
<td>Specialist, i.e. health, homelessness, drug and alcohol</td>
<td>Empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial awareness and acumen</td>
<td></td>
<td>Patience and tolerance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing group dynamics</td>
<td></td>
<td>Resilience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative skills</td>
<td></td>
<td>Flexible, adaptable and embraces change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Enthusiastic</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Innovative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to work within agreed frameworks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Work towards targets and under pressure</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Drive / personal desire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3 The professionalisation agenda

Professionalisation is a process whereby workers undertaking similar tasks in a similar field come to develop a coherent identity as a group that holds particular skills or expertise, and come to be seen as a group of experts by society. Importantly, alongside this recognition comes the profession’s increasing influence over how tasks are practised and who may practise them.

A helpful definition comes from Australian work on professionalising their personal adviser (PA) workforce:

'A disciplined group of individuals who adhere to ethical standards and uphold themselves to, and are accepted by the public as, possessing special knowledge and skills in a widely recognised body of learning derived from research, education and training at a high level, and who are prepared to exercise this knowledge and these skills in the interest of others.'6

With its huge expansions in technology and in the provision of social welfare, health and education, the 20th century has been an era of professionalisation. For example, previously charitable activities, such as nursing or teaching, became highly regarded and highly regulated professions, largely over that period.

Integral to the process of professionalisation is the development of a body of knowledge that provides a strong theoretical underpinning to practice and the establishment of an agreed set of competencies that govern the application of skills and practices. In particular, a trade or occupation transforms itself into a true profession by establishing acceptable qualifications, creating a professional body to oversee the conduct of members of the profession and some demarcation between the qualified form and unqualified amateurs. In terms of practical mechanisms and steps, this includes:

- establishment of a regulatory body to ensure that the standards of performance or individual members of the occupation are maintained
- establishment and enforcement of a code of conduct
- establishment and maintenance of a codified body of knowledge, and expertise which provides the basis for the claim to the existence of a profession

mechanisms to control the numbers, selection and training of new entrants to the profession.

3.1 Why professionalise?

3.1.1 Recognition

As noted above, currently there is no required qualification or agreed set of competencies that PAs must have in order to operate. This means it can be difficult to recognise skills and experience in a formal way, or in a way that is understood across the industry and in wider society. It poses particular problems in terms of recognising the transferrable skills held by those entering the welfare to work industry from other professions or those seeking to move from welfare to work into a new sector.

Further, many providers train their staff extensively as part of their induction and actively support ongoing professional development. Indeed, some providers have had their in-house training accredited, although many have not. However, without an externally assessed, universally accepted framework of qualifications and standards, it will remain difficult to recognise the attainment of skills and experience and ensure transferability.

3.1.2 Confidence and competence

Contracted employment services play a hugely important role in individuals’ lives, helping them retrain, regain confidence and move into work to their own and their family’s benefit. With such potential to profoundly affect an individual, it is right that there are assurance mechanisms in place, to ensure the quality of the advice, guidance and support services provided. Professionalisation, and the rigour it brings to delivery of services, is one way of assuring quality for clients.

Equally, commissioners want to have confidence in the key deliverers of contracted services. The black box model of the Work Programme allows providers significant freedom of delivery. In this context, the confidence of commissioners will be engendered by a professionalised workforce.

3.1.3 Recruitment and retention

Having a clearly identified career development pathway, from entry to the industry through to advanced practitioner or specialist, is important to recruiting the best college and university graduates, and also attracting talented people from other industries. It is central to retaining high performing advisers, because they need to have confidence of a fulfilling and rewarding career, in terms of salary, status and
opportunities for progression. Recruiting and retaining the best will only become more important in a context where employment service contractors will increasingly operate on the basis of payment for outcomes and where there is a need for specialists to work across the full range of clients’ needs.

3.1.4 Horizontal and vertical progression

Related to the point above, in such a varied role, it is important to facilitate both horizontal and vertical progression to ensure a flexible and fulfilling career path.

Lifelong Learning UK recently published an *Occupational Map for Career Guidance*. Like PAs in employment services, careers guidance practitioners can come from many backgrounds and need a diverse range of skills. Their progression routes are equally diverse. The map below illustrates how an individual career adviser (in the centre) can enter the industry from a number of routes and progress horizontally, into a specialism, or vertically, as a manager, or potentially both.

The goal of a professionalisation framework for the welfare to work industry must be to facilitate this kind of diverse entry, and horizontal and vertical progression.
Occupational map for career guidance

- Supporting role
- Related occupational area
- Unrelated occupational area
- Undergraduate study

- NVQ level 4
- Postgraduate study

- Project management
- Careers adviser

- Supporting role
- Subject specialism
- Project management
- Careers adviser

- Team leader
- Senior management
- Head of service

- Entry points
- Additional responsibilities
- Subject specialism
- Project management
- Careers adviser

- Vertical progression
- Horizontal progression

- Additional training

Key

Lifelong Learning UK, www.lluk.org/4336.htm
3.1.5 Compassion, challenge and autonomy

PAs daily balance the need to engage effectively with clients and establish rapport and trust, with the need to challenge them on their jobseeking activities and aspirations. At the same time, it is well recognised that some of the major barriers to an individual moving into work are psychological – their own motivation, anxieties and apprehensions. To be both supportive and challenging with an often vulnerable client group is a highly skilled task which requires and deserves high levels of training and ongoing development to maintain and refresh skills, and keep abreast of new techniques.

The Work Programme will present a new contracting environment, one focused entirely on outcomes, with very little specified by way of process. It will also bring previously inactive benefit recipients (i.e. incapacity benefit claimants, lone parents) into job-seeking activity who will likely present more challenging barriers to work.

The Work Programme will potentially give PAs new levels of autonomy but also greater responsibility for their clients’ success. Ensuring they are confident in their own competence to diagnose, support and refer clients accurately will be important to an effective service. It will also be important to ensuring commissioners continue to have confidence in provision delivered in this black box model.

3.1.6 Self determination and competition

Employment services providers are central to the delivery and achievement of key government priorities, so it is quite likely that the government will start to want more formal and more structured quality assurance around the skills and expertise of key staff. The pattern of many industries in the field of social care – health, education, social work – has been one of increasing professionalisation and increasing requirement for qualifications and other standards as they have come within the purview of the state.

At the same time, there are large education and training bodies which develop and sell accredited industry-specific training. It may be the case that such an organisation sees an opportunity to bring a welfare to work qualification to market ahead of an industry-led body, denying the industry a potential income stream.

There is an opportunity here for the industry to take the lead in developing a framework and ensure it fully reflects the needs of the industry, rather than its having something imposed.
3.1.7 Status

The framework and structures that come with professionalisation also point to the industry positioning itself as an integral part of a key public service and a group of skilled professionals that takes itself seriously. At the same time, a challenge has been presented to private sector and non-profit employment services providers to equal the professional development plans of their public-sector colleagues. Jobcentre Plus’s programme, Advisory Services of the Future, aims to set the standard in the UK for the delivery of employment-related PA service and position being a PA as a profession with a clear and accredited career path, with ongoing professional development.

3.2 Considerations and caveats

In considering the case for a more coherent qualifications framework for PAs, a number of challenges arise which must be acknowledged.

3.2.1 Outcomes based industry

The employment services industry is a targets-based industry. Organisations are contractually required to meet targets on number of clients seen, types of support provided and in what timeframe and, ultimately, the number of sustained job placements. This filters through to individual adviser targets. The government’s new Work Programme contracts place great emphasis on providers achieving outcomes rather than monitoring process.

From a professionalisation perspective, there is a challenge that asks whether it is necessary to introduce industry standards or qualification levels when there is a concrete and easily identified indicator of success and quality. In consultation, this point was well made by one leading provider:

‘It’s important to remember this is a performance-driven industry: the best performing PA may not be the most “well qualified”.’

Retaining wide scope for entry to the industry was also highlighted. In consultation discussions for this research, the importance of transferrable ‘soft’ skills over industry-specific knowledge or skills was emphasised.

‘It’s quite a generalist job so it’s important to identify the right people, after that you can train them quite quickly. The key success factors are attitudinal and psychological – things like resilience, being optimistic, being a people person. The mechanical, skills and knowledge aspects can be taught but the attitudes and attributes are more inherent.’
This is a point made in research on employee performance in a careers guidance setting. Lifelong Learning UK cites research in its report on developing a progression framework for the careers guidance workforce that:

'Levels of qualification were important as a measure of “hard skills” in identifying appropriate candidates, but for virtually all jobs the primary focus was on behavioural competences (soft skills) including initiative, perseverance, time management and team working.'

3.2.2 Transferrable skills

A further challenge to professionalisation within this industry is to consider how best to ensure those transferrable skills and inherent qualities are recognised within any qualifications framework. It is important that talented potential advisers are not prevented from moving into the role of PA by unnecessary barriers.

3.2.3 Evidence of effectiveness

A final consideration is the benefit of increasing professionalisation within the workforce on employment services providers’ financial bottom line. The development and implementation of a qualifications, standards and competencies framework must be industry led. Understandably, providers will wish to have some assurance that their investment of time and resource in developing the framework and in training staff in line with it, makes a positive contribution to their bottom line.

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4 Survey findings

A fundamental element of the research was an online survey of personal advisers (PAs). This aimed to generate a profile of the PA workforce, establish the level of current qualifications held by PAs and get feedback on professional development needs and attitudes of personal employment advisers working for private and third-sector employment services providers.

4.1 Method

The 14 prime contractors for the Flexible New Deal phase 1 (FND1) contract package areas were approached to support this research. Ten agreed to participate and we would like to acknowledge the support offered by the following:

- A4E
- Ingeus
- Pertemps People Development Group
- Remploy
- Seetec
- Serco
- Skills Training UK Ltd
- The Wise Group
- TNG
- Working Links

The survey was circulated to PAs both directly employed by FND1 prime contractors and those employed by sub-contractors. It was also circulated to PAs employed by Shaw Trust and its supply chain providing Pathways to Work. It was cascaded to PAs via operational managers working for the prime.

We received 505 responses to the survey.

At the same time, we asked managers to report on the number of PAs employed directly and within their supply chain to estimate the size of the PA workforce. We calculate this is around 3,600 PAs across the whole of the FND1 contracting area. As such, we estimate that the response from PAs represents approximately 15% of the advisers currently providing support to claimants in FND1 areas.
It is important to note that these findings are indicative and illustrative. They are useful to gaining an insight into the background of PAs and into the issues and challenges they experience, but they should not be regarded as representative of the PA population as a whole, as we are unable to verify the representativeness of the respondent sample.

4.2 The PA workforce profile

4.2.1 Vital statistics

Gender and age: The profile of the respondents is predominantly female (64%) and young: nearly half of the respondents were aged between 25 and 39 (48%); over a third of respondents were aged between 40 and 54 (36%). Almost all (92%) work full time.

Prime and sector: 67% of respondents report they are employed by a prime contractor and 28.5% reported that they were employed by a sub-contractor. The majority of respondents reported that they work within the private sector, 21% reported they work in the public sector, and only 11% reported they work in the voluntary and community sector.

Compared against the workforce questionnaire completed by operational managers, we believe there may have been some confusion over these questions, and that, given the nature of their role, some respondents may have reported that they work for the public sector when actually they work for a private-sector or voluntary and community sector provider.

Entry route: The majority (59%) of respondents entered the welfare to work sector by responding to adverts for a particular post. However, significant proportions of respondents entered the sector via recruitment drives by employers or were previously service users: 15% and 14% respectively. Other options that respondents listed included: through friends, family and speculative CVs, and also through job referrals, having been head-hunted or through volunteering.

4.2.2 Length of employment in welfare to work

Half (50%) of the respondents had been employed in the welfare to work sector for less than one year. A further 22% had been employed in the sector for one to three years. Almost 9% of respondents had been employed in the sector for between three and five years, and the remaining respondents (19%) had been employed for over five years.
One explanation for the high numbers of new recruits to welfare to work could be that FND and Pathways to Work are both new programmes that attracted new providers with new staff. However, the providers that participated in the research are mostly well established, rather than new entrants to the UK market. Nonetheless, those contracting developments have changed the landscape of provision, which may have resulted in recruitment.

**Length of employment in welfare to work sector**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Employment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>50.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–2 years</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;2–3 years</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;3–4 years</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;4–5 years</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;5–10 years</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**4.2.3 Length of employment with current employer**

Over two thirds of respondents (68%) had been working as a PA with their current employer for less than one year. Of the remaining third, the majority had been with their current employer for between one and three years. Approximately 10% of respondents had been with their current employer for more than three years.
This raises an interesting question about churn in the workforce.

Over one-third of respondents reported that they have had more than one employer in the welfare to work sector. Half of respondents have been working within the sector for less than one year and, we assume, therefore have had just the one employer during their time in the sector. However, over two thirds of respondents report working for their current employer for less than one year.

These findings suggest that a significant proportion of the more experienced respondents have moved between employers. Indeed, the findings further indicate that around half of those who report having had more than one employer have moved within the past year, suggesting that there is a reasonable degree of churn within the industry. This was reflected in comments during consultation:

‘Money and training relate to turnover. PAs tend to move to get a pay rise.’

4.3 Qualifications, training and development

4.3.1 Highest level of qualification

Respondents are a quite well-qualified group: over one-third (36%) had qualifications at level 5 or above (including HNCs, HNDs and bachelor’s degrees). This compares with the rate within the general population, where just over one-fifth
hold a degree. One-quarter (25%) had qualifications at level 3 and one-fifth (21%) had qualifications at level 2. Only 1% respondents said that they had no qualifications at all.

Interestingly, there is a pronounced gap in the number reporting level 4 qualifications, which can be thought of as the ‘senior practitioner’ level. This may reflect either a progression route that jumps from the widely used NVQ level 3 in information, advice and guidance to a degree, including foundation degrees in England.

There was little difference in the qualifications profile of primes and sub-contractors, nor between those working in large, medium-sized or small organisations. However, PAs working for larger organisation tended to be slightly more highly qualified than those working in medium-sized and small organisations.

### 4.3.2 Working towards qualifications

Nearly one-quarter (23%) of respondents reported that they were working towards other work-related qualifications. The majority of these were at level 3 (41%) or level 4 (29%). Smaller proportions of respondents were working towards lower or higher qualifications. The dominance of level 3 possibly reflects the widely accepted information, advice and guidance NVQ level 3 as a default qualification for advisers.
Respondents are more likely to be working towards other qualifications if they have been in the industry for up to four years. The proportion of those studying steadily increases to a peak of 35% at three to four years in the sector. Again, this likely reflects the predominance of studying for the information, advice and guidance NVQ. After this, the trend declines, and is lowest for those who have been in the sector for more than 10 years (12%).

Importantly, an overwhelming majority of respondents (92%) stated that they would like to take part in further or new forms of professional learning or training.

### Level of qualification currently working towards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 5 or above</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.3.3 Training and development

A large majority of respondents (64%) reported that they participated in some form of training or development related to their work at least once or twice every three months. Nearly one-quarter (23%) of respondents reported that they undertook some kind of training once or twice a year. However, nearly 10% stated that they did not receive any training or development at all.
The overwhelming majority (90%) of respondents report participating in in-house training. External training and awaydays were also quite common (47%), although whether this is accredited was not indicated. Interestingly, over one-third (34%) report taking part in personal development – ‘confidence building, management etc’. This suggests advisers are interested in developing insights into their own practice, as well as gaining specific job-relevant skills. Other training activities respondents reported included: online training or e-learning and Jobcentre Plus workshops.
As asked about their satisfaction with training and development, a majority of respondents reported that it is more than adequate or adequate for both the requirements of their jobs (75%) and their personal needs (65%). Only a minority felt the training was inadequate for the requirements of the job (12.5%) or for their own needs (16%).

We were keen to examine transferrable skills. Almost all (97%) respondents felt that the skills and qualifications that they brought with them helped them to perform tasks relevant to their existing role. Three quarters (75%) felt that their skills and qualifications were recognised by their employers but, interestingly, only 54% of respondents felt that these had been developed by their employer. This is a still a majority, but suggests some untapped potential.
Do you think that the skills and qualifications you brought with you into this role...

4.4 Satisfactions and challenges

4.4.1 Daily duties

Respondents reported spending the vast majority of their time delivering employment-related advice and employability support (including help with CVs and interview skills). This was followed by administrative duties. Relatively little time was reported being spent delivering wraparound support and job brokerage.

There was generally a very high degree of confidence among respondents in their abilities to perform the main aspects of their job, with 90% reporting that they were either ‘confident’ or ‘very confident’. Related to the little time spent delivering wraparound support, they reported feeling ‘less confident’ in abilities to deliver non-employment-related support.

There were only slight differences between the sectors and, unsurprisingly, those more experienced advisers reported greater confidence than new entrants.
### How confident do you feel in your ability to deliver each aspect of your job?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Level of Confidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delivering employment related advice and guidance</td>
<td>4.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivering employability support (CVs, interview skills)</td>
<td>4.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivering wrap around advice and guidance (debt, health, childcare etc)</td>
<td>3.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job brokerage/employer engagement</td>
<td>3.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivering training</td>
<td>3.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.4.2 Job satisfaction

There were generally high levels of job satisfaction, with over 80% responding ‘very much so’ to the statement ‘I am satisfied in my work’. Slightly fewer (but still relatively high) positive responses were given to statements about feeling valued and supported by employers.

Across the three categories, respondents from smaller organisations appeared to feel slightly more satisfied and valued by their employers, and more supported in their roles in comparison to those from medium-sized and large companies.

Those who had been in the job for a shorter period of time (less than three years) reported that they felt marginally more satisfied, valued and supported than their more-experienced colleagues.
Levels of satisfaction and support

Looking more closely at how advisers feel about their jobs, respondents seem to be highly motivated by a desire to help customers, and they also seem to enjoy the challenges that the job presents. However, important for retention, it seems that they are less satisfied with their current levels of salary and prospects for progression.

How do you feel about your job?

There were no major differences in feelings about the job between organisations of different sizes, although those from small companies appeared to be more optimistic.
about their career development and were more positive about work-life balance in comparison to those from both medium-sized and large companies. Those from large organisations reported that they were marginally happier with their salary in comparison to those from medium-sized and small organisations.

### 4.4.3 Challenges

Over two-thirds of respondents reported the biggest challenge they faced was not having enough time available to spend with each client. This was closely followed by juggling the competing demands of the role, and achieving positive outcomes for customers. Reinforcing the result that respondents enjoy the challenge of the role, less than 5% of respondents stated that they do not feel challenged in their daily work.

#### Three biggest challenges faced in daily work

Cross-analysed by size of organisation, the three biggest challenges for all respondents were juggling demands of the role, achieving positive outcomes for customers and time available to spend with each client. However, having enough time available to spend with each client seemed to be a particular challenge for those employed in large companies, and achieving positive outcomes for customers was reported as a bigger challenge for both the medium-sized and large organisations. As might be expected, the small organisations reported that keeping up to date with policy was a bigger challenge than the other two groups.
4.4.4 Frustrations

A number of additional and important challenges were raised in comments made by respondents. Some of these were around practical frustrations including ‘slow’ and ‘sometimes non-existent’ IT structures, as well as the administration load, which was described as ‘ever increasing’ and ‘taking time away from customers’.

Another of the themes that emerged was the pressure of hitting targets. A strong theme was that targets were sometimes unrealistic and over prioritised. There was a perception that this had led the industry to shift its focus away from helping people.

Reinforcing earlier findings, respondents also highlighted a disappointing lack of progression and career development, as well as frustration about low pay. Respondents were, however, very interested in development opportunities and progressing in the sector:

‘I also feel that the industry does not place enough emphasis on developing its staff and allowing them to gain worthwhile qualifications like the advice and guidance NVQ. In addition, depending on the provider, the pay is not very good, and the opportunity for progression very limited – even more so in the current climate.’

‘I am a capable adviser but don’t feel there is much room for personal development or progression.’

4.5 Perceptions of the industry

Being perceived as a desirable profession is an important element in attracting the best candidates. Overall, the majority of PAs regard the welfare to work sector as a good one to work in. In particular, respondents very strongly agreed that the sector is ‘a great place to work for people who want to help others’. Not far behind, respondents strongly agreed that the sector is ‘great for people focused on moving people into meaningful employment’.
However, the responses suggest that the industry’s image is weaker in terms of being seen as a high status, desirable career destination. Reinforcing earlier findings on job satisfaction, in relation to salary and progression, respondents were slightly less positive about the industry’s ability to provide opportunities for progression.

Nonetheless, the respondents, who already work in the industry enjoy the role sufficiently to report that over three-quarters (78%) are likely to take their next job within the welfare to work sector. Most (63%) plan to stay in the industry more than five years, which may in part be a consequence of half being very new and largely young recruits.

### 4.6 Findings and conclusions

The survey, though not definitive, provides important insights into the shape of, and challenges affecting the PA workforce. Key findings include:

- It is a relatively young and inexperienced workforce and one that experiences high levels of job satisfaction, with most respondents planning to stay in the field.

- However, there is churn in the experienced adviser workforce, with nearly half experienced advisers moving jobs within the past year. This suggests they feel they have to leave to progress in experience and salary.

- Salary and progression are areas of weakness for the sector. Respondents rated these areas lowest in terms of their own job satisfaction and expressed very high
levels of interest in training and professional development. They also indicated that those outside the sector do not always perceive the industry as a desirable one, with great career prospects.

- Most working in this area are motivated by an altruistic desire to help others. It is of concern that responses found the biggest challenges and frustrations about the job are: lack of time with clients, juggling the competing demands of the job, the administrative burden and the impact of pursuing targets. Respondents expressed their frustration that they were not able to dedicate as much time to clients as they would like because of these issues.
5 Learning from related professions

The role of personal advisers (PAs) in the welfare to work field ranges across the full breadth of tasks and duties involved in getting an individual back to work, including:

- providing tailored advice related to career aspirations
- taking a holistic approach to advising on the full range of an individual’s needs, for example housing, health or debt issues
- diagnosing skills needs
- offering and providing training
- improving general employability skills, for example punctuality or team work
- improving specific employability skills, such as presentation of CVs or interviewing skills
- liaising with employers about vacancies and candidates
- ongoing coaching and mentoring support.

Many of these duties and skills are found in, and cross over between, recruitment, information, advice and careers guidance, rehabilitation and coaching. To inform and guide the discussion around the development of a qualifications framework for the private and non-profit sector PA workforce, it is helpful to consider the approaches taken to professionalisation by these related industries. Also, Jobcentre Plus performs a very similar role within the public sector setting making it a useful example. There is much to be learned from international experience, particularly from Australia and the Netherlands, which have similar contracting arrangements to the UK.

Outlined below are details of frameworks for the sectors of recruitment, information, advice and careers guidance, coaching and rehabilitation as well as Jobcentre Plus and the approach taken in Australia and Europe. The key features considered included:

- routes into the industry
- whether a qualification is mandatory
- the levels of qualification
- the structure of qualifications
the content, in terms of competencies, skills and knowledge areas, that the qualification teaches and tests

whether there is a quality standard, who sets it and oversees it

which industry body oversees the awarding

who is the awarding body?

major providers of training.

5.1 Recruitment

The Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC) is the professional membership body for private-sector staffing agencies, and oversees a code of professional practice and a qualifications framework. A recent development that sits within the REC is the Institute for Recruitment Professionals, which promotes and recognises professional development among individual staff members. The establishment of the institute is part of the REC’s move to professionalise the industry by supporting individual employees to develop their skills and knowledge further.

There are no mandatory qualifications or registration processes that a would-be recruitment officer must hold. However, the REC has established a four level qualifications framework that individuals can choose to undertake.

Certificate: the certificate is the foundation-level qualification for the recruitment industry. It is comprised of four modules covering areas including: legislation and procedures, developing relationships with clients and candidates, interviewing techniques, and marketing. The course can be done intensively in less than one week or by distance learning over a longer time. Provision has also been made for those agents with significant experience but no qualifications and who want their experience ‘endorsed’.

The REC has developed a programme to accredit and endorse agencies’ in-house core skills training that they provide to new staff, meaning the agency is able to deliver the certificate.

Completion of the certificate entitles individuals to use CertRP after their name and offers membership of the Institute of Recruitment Professionals.

Diploma: the diploma is designed as the progression route for those who have completed the certificate. It comprises four modules that examine the recruitment process, law and ethics, and interviewing skills, and requires candidates to complete a business research project. It usually takes about one year to complete by distance, with workshops held at intervals during the semester.
The diploma is accredited by Middlesex University Business School and holders can use the qualification to gain advanced entry onto the recruitment degree programme. Completion of the diploma entitles individuals to use DipRP after their name and offers membership of the Institute of Recruitment Professionals.

**Degree:** Middlesex University Business School also delivers and accredits a foundation degree in recruitment practices which combines classroom and work-based learning modules. Those who have already completed the diploma are exempt from the first year. Successful completion of the first two years leads to the award of the foundation degree, progression to the third year and award of a bachelor’s (honours) degree in recruitment practice.

**Master’s:** for practitioners with significant levels of experience in the industry, a master’s programme has been developed and accredited by Middlesex University Business School and endorsed by REC.

**Institute of Recruitment Professionals**

As well as the qualifications framework, a key element in its drive to professionalise the sector is the establishment of the Institute of Recruitment Professionals. It oversees the code of ethical practice and professional conduct and, through the entitlement to use AIRP (affiliate), MIRP (member) or FIRP (fellow), allows an individual to demonstrate their skills, experience and commitment to professionalism.

In common with many professional bodies, members of the institute are entitled to a range of lifestyle benefits, including discounts on travel, insurance and other products.

**5.2 Information, advice and careers guidance**

Information, advice and careers guidance is a fundamental element of a PA’s role, as it links individual talents, experience and aspirations with labour market information. It is defined by the Institute of Career Guidance as ‘services and activities intended to assist individuals of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices, and to manage their careers’. Careers guidance officers can go by many titles and can be found in schools, universities and colleges, in training institutions, in public employment services, in the workplace, in the voluntary and community sector, and in the private sector.

Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) is the sector skills council responsible for the UK’s career guidance sector. As the body responsible for career guidance in the UK, LLUK has developed a set of national occupational standards (NOS) for those who deliver
information, advice and guidance. The current NOS for advice and guidance is owned by ENTO. At present there are 30 standards related to advice and guidance. For each standard ENTO provides information on what one must be able to do and what evidence is required to meet that standard.

Unlike Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, where a unified all-ages service is provided, in England, careers guidance is currently divided between advice and guidance for young people (Connexions) and for adults (Next Step). The Children’s Workforce Development Council has responsibility for the qualifications and continuing professional development framework for careers guidance practitioners working with young people in England.

### 5.2.1 Qualifications

The key qualifications for career guidance are:

- the joint award of the qualification in careers guidance and postgraduate diploma in careers guidance, which are accredited by the industry body, the Institute for Careers Guidance
- a degree in careers guidance from a higher education institution
- the national or Scottish vocational qualification in advice and guidance (at levels 3 and 4).

A foundation degree is also available, as well as a number of master’s degrees from a range of universities.

To become a fully qualified Connexions PA, prospective advisers must hold, or be working towards, a professional qualification which is equivalent to at least NVQ level 4 in a relevant subject, such as advice and guidance, youth work, career guidance, education, youth justice or social work, and have undertaken relevant appropriate assessment training.

### 5.2.2 Criticism of NVQs

However, LLUK and Alliance Sector Skills research and consultation have both heavily criticised the information, advice and guidance NVQ:

‘NVQs are cause for concern for many career guidance practitioners. Standards are considered too uneven across the UK, with considerable variation in the abilities of people who gain the qualification and inconsistency in the amount of effort required to obtain the NVQ. The

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8 Advice and guidance: national occupational standards [www.entco.co.uk/standards/advice_guidance](http://www.entco.co.uk/standards/advice_guidance)
qualification is not seen as robust or developed enough to be a benchmark for the occupation.9

NVQs are being removed as part of wider reform of qualifications under the auspices of the qualifications and credit framework (QCF). In consultation, the LLUK advised that the NVQ level 4 in information, advice and guidance will be phased out, and that there are now three new qualifications under development at QCF levels 3, 4 and 6 that are more context-specific than the previous one. These qualifications should be available during autumn 2010. Development is being led by OCR and the Institute of Careers Guidance. The new qualifications are intended to enhance the academic rigour learners go through and ensure there are robust learning processes, which will overcome some concern that there was inconsistency in the standards and efforts required to achieve the NVQ.10

Consultation with the members of the sector echo the concerns about the NVQ:

‘When we entered the UK market there really wasn’t any relevant or satisfactory provision. We’ve sent people on the NVQ but we’re fairly sceptical and I don’t think it’s the best for a welfare to work PA.’

‘Most of my PAs have, or want, the information, advice and guidance NVQ because it is the nearest industry qualification, and they want recognition and confirmation that they’re a good PA, but it’s not really suitable.’

5.2.3 Taskforce on careers profession

The information, advice and guidance sector in England is in a process of profound structural change. A taskforce on the careers profession was set up following the publication in October 2009 of Quality, choice and aspiration: a strategy for young people’s information advice and guidance.11 The taskforce’s role is to look at how the information, advice and guidance industry can attract well qualified people from all backgrounds. It will also look at how best to retain careers guidance practitioners already in the industry, ensure practice is of a consistently high standard and facilitate ongoing professional development. The taskforce will report to ministers at the end of September 2010.

The research for the taskforce (www.lluk.org/career-guidance.htm) has involved mapping qualifications and reviewing competencies:

9 Alliance Sector Skills, UK Qualifications Strategy for Careers Guidance, p2 www.lluk.org/4338.htm
10 www.lluk.org/documents/careerguidanceawardingorganisationguidance.pdf
The taskforce is likely to consider whether England should continue to separate delivery of careers guidance by age or bring the provision together as an all-ages service. Both members of the new coalition government were committed to a single, unified service before the election.

5.3 Coaching

Coaching is relatively new as a discrete, recognised discipline and there are no mandatory or minimum qualifications required in order to practise. It can be seen as a type of counselling, in that it has a theoretical underpinning or philosophy that informs practice. For example, some coaches use techniques drawn from cognitive behavioural therapy or neurolinguistic programming. However, it tends to be focused on supporting an individual to identify life or career goals, helping them to understand personal barriers that may prevent attaining those goals and encouraging action towards achieving them.

A definition provided by the Association for Coaching is:

'A collaborative solution-focused, results-orientated and systematic process in which the coach facilitates the enhancement of work performance, life experience, self-directed learning and personal growth of the coachee.'

As such, the major areas of work with an individual will likely be around motivation, self awareness and making sustainable change.

There are three main bodies that UK coaches can be accredited by: the International Coach Federation, the European Coaching Institute and the Association for Coaching. These three bodies currently work independently of each other, but they all work with similar criteria:

- evidence of a coaching qualification
- continuous professional development
- a demonstration of practical coaching skills

12 www.associationforcoaching.com/about/about03.htm
the ability to explain a coaching philosophy or practice and back this up with case studies and client testimonials

appropriate insurance

belonging to a coaching body that includes adhering to a code of ethics.

As the industry matures, an increasing number of coaches are becoming accredited, which is important particularly to work as an ‘executive coach’ with senior managers in the private sector. Indeed, in response to these drivers, the Association for Coaching recently reviewed its accreditation process and developed a new, four level accreditation framework representing degrees of skill/experience, from entry or trainee practitioner through to ‘master coach’.

Qualifications for coaching are still in their infancy and each accreditation body gives a list of the courses they recognise, delivered by a number of training organisations, consultancies and universities. Each course is, in turn, separately accredited by accreditation bodies, such as the European Mentoring and Coaching Council, the Association of Coaching and the International Coaching Federation.

5.4 Jobcentre Plus: Advisory Service of the Future

As the primary government body delivering back to work advice and administering out of work benefits, Jobcentre Plus is the backbone of the employment services industry.

Currently, there are no formal academic qualifications required to be an adviser. However, there is a competency requirement and potential new advisers have to demonstrate these competencies.

Jobcentre Plus has developed a learning and development routeway for PAs, which has three distinct levels of achievement and capability: entry, established and experienced.

The routeway is aligned to NVQ 3 in advice and guidance. However, to achieve accreditation, PAs have to be externally assessed to ensure their competence to the external standards. The NVQ is an interim approach until the system can migrate to the QCF later in 2010.

To support the learning needs of advisers, the following are available to PAs:

- induction and foundation learning to provide an introduction to their working environment
learning specific to the PA job role, consisting of ‘adviser skills’ learning with a core series of ‘adviser skills’ workshops, periods of supported workplace consolidation, and knowledge and procedural learning.

activities are also available for specialist adviser roles, such as the disability employment adviser.

5.4.1 Advisory Services of the Future

Jobcentre Plus is currently implementing the Advisory Services of the Future programme. This provides a framework to update its practices and approaches, in order to increase its ability to provide more personalised service that better meets the needs of individual clients. Fundamental to this is working towards greater PA autonomy. Jobcentre Plus acknowledges that, while its service is very efficient, it tends to be very process-driven with a focus on completing a task in a set timescale rather than on the outcome of the task. In future, the service will

- allow advisers more scope to use their skills to help customers
- be efficient and ensure that every time an adviser speaks with a customer it allows them to help the customer move closer to work, not just to tick a box
- be customer-driven and focus on individual customer needs
- be consistent in advice and standards of quality while leaving room for meeting specific local needs
- empower advisers to be demanding of partners, to act as the honest broker where customers have choice and seek value for money.

The overarching goal of the programme is that Jobcentre Plus is recognised as world class in delivering advisory services and that it sets the standard in the UK for the delivery of employment related PA services. To do this, action will be taken to position the personal advisory service as a profession, with a clear accredited career path, ongoing professional development and delivering to a set of agreed standards recognised internally and externally as best in class. It will also equip PAs to offer a much more personalised support package to customers to deliver welfare to work policy objectives.

The first stage was to provide a new and improved learning routeway. This has been available from April 2010. The three levels of this routeway (see above) offer advisers, in conjunction with their line managers, a means of assessing their capability level in order to plan their learning and enhance their advisory skills. The role of the line manager as coach is firmly embedded in the design of the learning. There is greater emphasis on consolidation and competence against external benchmarks which are aligned to NVQ achievement. Line managers are required to complete periodic observations of interviews conducted by PAs within their teams.
and provide feedback and coaching to the PA against the behaviours and activities included in quality assessment frameworks.

Delivery channels for learning include both facilitated and e-learning products. The learning will place greater emphasis on the need for personalisation and flexibility, enabling advisers to build stronger relationships with customers and achieve increased results. Other learning products are currently being designed to ensure that other Jobcentre Plus staff members have similar professional learning and development support available.

The accreditation and cross-government services team is currently working with Jobcentre Plus to investigate the accreditation options available. In September, Jobcentre Plus senior managers will identify which options offer the best fit in line with business needs, and further development work will then inform the shape of the final accreditation framework.

PAs currently work to level 3 and, with QCF, may work to level 4. Delivery mechanisms for learning will be similar to those currently, with a variety of approaches, including facilitated (by designated learning and development officers), coaching from line managers and the completion of open learning products.

5.5 Rehabilitation support services

Vocational rehabilitation is a process which enables people with physical, cognitive and other impairments or health conditions to overcome barriers to accessing, maintaining or returning to employment, or other useful occupation. There are large overlaps between the role of PA in a vocational rehabilitation and mainstream employment service context.

A number of qualifications are offered at degree or post graduate level, as well as shorter courses and workshops by private training organisations and universities.

In 2001–02 a research process was undertaken to:

- establish the occupational area encompassed by those working in the field
- produce occupational and functional maps
- consult the sector and key stakeholders
- map functions against NOS and Scottish/ national vocational qualifications.

This found that the qualifications available did not meet the needs of practitioners in the sector. Also, a gap analysis found that while existing NOS matched about half of the identified functions, new standards were needed to cover the remaining elements of the role.
Since the original research, the Vocational Rehabilitation Service has led the development and publication of standards of practice and is also progressing towards a qualifications framework and self-regulation.

5.6 Australia: National Employment Services Association

The Australian peak body for welfare to work providers, the National Employment Services Association (NESA), undertook a similar process to professionalise the PA workforce. The result of their work was the development of the employment services professional recognition framework. It is not mandatory to be registered with NESA nor qualified within the framework, but doing so offers recognition of skill, experience and professional standards of conduct.

The framework is the product of an in-depth research, development and consultation process that analysed the detail of practitioner roles and responsibilities, and reviewed the units of competency already contained in accredited employment services qualifications. The framework is designed to provide a basis for high standards of professional practice in delivering employment advice, guidance and support, to enhance the reputation of the industry and to provide reassurance about the professionalism of practitioners. It provides:

- agreed minimum professional standards
- a set of foundation competencies
- a framework for professional development and ethical conduct
- recognition of existing skills and expertise
- certification of professional status at different levels (entry through to life fellow) and details the requirements to advance up the levels in terms of knowledge, skills and qualifications
- accredited qualifications
- non-accredited training endorsed by NESA for initial and continuing professional development.

Practitioners are registered at five levels:
- Level 1 – associate provisional employment service practitioner
- Level 2 – registered employment service practitioner
- Level 3 – certified employment service practitioner
- Level 4 – employment service certified professional
- Level 5 – life fellow.

At all levels, practitioners must commit to the rules of the employment services professional recognition framework, the continuing professional development requirements and code of ethics. The table below outlines the requirements of each level:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Minimum qualifications</th>
<th>Work experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – Associate</td>
<td>None– but must complete level 2 requirements within 18 months</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – Registered Employment Service Practitioner</td>
<td>NESA endorsed ‘foundations of employment’ qualification or equivalent qualification or demonstrated equivalent knowledge, skills and experience</td>
<td>6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – Certified Employment Service Practitioner</td>
<td>Certificate IV in employment services or equivalent NESA endorsed qualification or knowledge, skills and experience</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – Employment Service Certified Professional</td>
<td>Diploma in employment services or equivalent NESA endorsed qualification or knowledge, skills and experience</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – Life fellow</td>
<td>Awarded for achievements and contribution to the industry after going through the nomination process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Registered training organisations (RTOs), which are registered to deliver qualifications in Australia, must meet high quality standards and are audited by the registering body on an annual basis in order to retain registration. Private RTOs and publicly funded TAFE Colleges (equivalent to further education colleges) deliver the units of competency and full qualifications. Students can take a learning and assessment pathway to gain a qualification or have their current competency recognised through what is termed a ‘recognition of prior learning’ process.

In an effort to widen the entry criteria for the industry, a number of other professions are considered equivalent, for example certificate IV in disability services, or in community services work or career development.
5.7 Other international comparisons

The requirements for recruitment as an employment adviser or guidance counsellor with the public employment service differ from country to country.

5.7.1 The Netherlands

Reflecting the central role and relative autonomy given to PAs in the Dutch system, being a work coach commands a good starting salary and above average pay. Most coaches have a relevant degree (e.g. psychology). Training is considered very important and there is a public employment system academy, which manages an ongoing training programme. The training is accredited and coaches are expected to participate in continuing professional development.

5.7.2 Germany

In Germany, recruitment and initial training for public employment service guidance staff is at three levels: assistant level, professional level and higher professional level. Assistant level takes place largely between the ages of 16 to 20, with a three-year training programme linked to the dual-system (on-the-job training combined with college based study). Professional level training consists of three-year courses leading to bachelor’s degrees in vocational counselling or public administration (the latter includes placement and social-insurance administration). The higher professional level training includes leadership roles, and professional psychological and medical roles. Entrants at this level have to have university degrees or professional qualifications.13

5.7.3 Spain

In Spain, advisers are required to have a degree in psychology, pedagogy (teaching in social work and education) or social work, with training and/or experience in personal interviews, professional guidance and knowledge of motivation techniques and communication.14

5.7.4 Ireland

In Ireland, all employment service officers must have a certificate in adult guidance, theory and practice as a minimum qualification. The course aims to address the needs of those working in a guidance capacity with unemployed adults. After working for at least three years and after having obtained their certificate, officers can then apply

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to follow a diploma or higher diploma in ‘arts: adult guidance and counselling’. This course is designed to serve as an accredited training for people working with adults in a guidance setting, providing information, advice and placement services. In particular this course provides officers with the skills and knowledge to become familiar with appropriate interventions and strategies while also enabling them to deal with the effects of social exclusion and marginalisation on individual and groups.\textsuperscript{15}

\section*{5.7.5 Belgium}

Belgium offers a common induction programme for all Public Employment Service employees, so that each is familiar with the same core of knowledge about the institution, and each is aware of others’ roles within the network of services offered. This is followed up with specialised training for the different groups.\textsuperscript{16}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{15} Sultana, R. G and Watts, A.G., op cit, p79
\bibitem{16} Ibid, p80
\end{thebibliography}
6 Scoping a professionalisation framework

The preceding chapters have outlined a case for professionalisation within the personal adviser (PA) workforce. Increased recruitment, retention, confidence, recognition and status are powerful drivers for professionalising the sector, as is the opportunity to seize the agenda and develop a framework led by the sector and responsive to its particular needs. The survey showed that there are high levels of job satisfaction and a strong motivation to support clients among PAs, but ongoing frustration at progression opportunities. The overview of other related professions highlighted just how complex the PA role is – taking in ‘soft’ coaching skills to ‘hard’ skills, like labour-market analysis.

6.1 Common elements

Examining those various frameworks reveals some common elements:

- an endorsing body, perceived by the industry as representative and the voice of the industry
- research, analysis and wide consultation on roles and skills required
- agreed standards that define what ‘good’ provision looks like and what a ‘good’ professional knows and can do
- staged progression through qualifications levels
- facilitating horizontal and vertical progression
- involvement of one or more awarding bodies that accredit and/or provide qualifications
- in most cases, the industry body endorses qualifications provided by more than one provider
- the importance of industry respect for qualifications in order for them to have value
- the recognition that society at large, customers and commissioners increasingly expect some way of distinguishing between providers.

6.2 A process for professionalisation

With these elements in mind, outlined below are a number of steps within a process of professionalisation for the welfare to work sector.
6.2.1  An industry body

As a first step, it would be important to have a body on whose authority any qualifications framework will be developed. There are a number of options for lead bodies.

**An existing organisation:** the Employment Related Services Association or the Association of Learning Providers could be the industry body. Other candidates include those already mentioned – the Recruitment and Employment Confederation and the Institute for Careers Guidance.

In the consultation undertaken as part of this research, there was no consensus on which existing body should take on this role, although it ought to be noted that the consultation was limited in scope.

**A new organisation:** Alternatively, there is potential for a new overarching body to take on the role of co-ordinating and endorsing a professionalisation framework. A new body – the Welfare to Work Development Council, say, or the Institute for Employment Advice – could be an alliance or joint venture that all the currently existing relevant professional bodies sign up to. This would allow both individual practitioners and organisations to be members.

**A new peak body:** The Institute for Careers Guidance is part of a new peak body for the careers industry, the Careers Colloquium. It is modelled on the Career Industry Council of Australia, bringing together various professional bodies under an umbrella.

The PA is a highly multi-faceted role. Developing a professionalisation framework across the sectoral divides under an umbrella organisation would ensure cross endorsement of qualifications specific to each particular sector or skill (e.g. careers guidance or training) and, of particular importance, support transferability of skills between the related industries.

6.2.2  Defining the role

A next step would be to undertake or commission research to develop a detailed overview and definition of the PA role. This was a point made in consultation:

'The PA role is still very new. We need to define the ideal PA or job description of competencies. We need a common understanding of the role, because different people will consider PAs as doing different things.'
There is great variance in job title, working cultures and practice approaches, and focus within the PA role. Creating a clearly defined job description is a vital first step to ensuring qualifications train advisers in the right skills.

The diagram below, taken from Lifelong Learning UK’s publication *Functional Map for Careers Guidance*, illustrates the key areas within the practice of providing careers guidance and the specific functions within the areas to provide a comprehensive map of the career guidance practitioner role.
6.2.3 Mapping standards – defining ‘good’

Hand in hand with identifying the role and functions of a PA comes defining standards of knowledge, skill and practice – establishing what ‘good’ looks like for an adviser in the context of contracted employment services provision.

Sector skills councils set national occupational standards that guide the development of publicly funded training provision, but professional bodies equally are central to establishing standards that map to qualifications outside public provision. Many national occupational standards relevant to the defined role of PAs will already exist, but are held by different bodies. As the Vocational Rehabilitation Association found, mapping national standards revealed gaps where no relevant standard existed.

Once the standards have been analysed, it will be important to consult widely and involve the full range of relevant professional bodies and practitioners to ensure the standards and definitions are robust, and new and additional ones developed where necessary.

6.2.4 Mapping qualifications and training provision

Once a definition of the PA role has been developed and a set of standards agreed, a next step would be to analyse the range of relevant qualifications and training already in existence. Unpicking the content of those qualifications will allow areas of duplication and gaps in training to be revealed.

It will also be important to include non-accredited training. Some providers have had their in-house training accredited, although it does not form part of a qualification. However, many providers have not accredited the training they develop and deliver, and it would be a mistake to overlook areas of good practice by focusing solely on accredited training.

6.2.5 Developing and delivering a qualification

Taken together, defining the PA role, setting practice and knowledge standards, and mapping provision should lay the foundation for the industry body to develop a qualification with a set of core, universal units and to determine which areas are specialisms and can be taken as electives.

Sponsors and stakeholders agreed that the industry body would likely not be the awarding body, but rather give the qualification an endorsement on behalf of the industry:
'The industry body should work with a recognised accrediting organisation to develop some kind of diploma or set minimum standards. We need a third party to create the programme, but not deliver it.’

'We need something that’s recognised by the market, developed by the industry and stewarded by the industry.’

Developing a qualification so that it meets the stringent accreditation requirements is a complex and detailed task and it will be necessary to work with a well-established awarding body to ensure success in its being accepted as a qualification.

In terms of delivery, an important principle is to ensure there is a dynamic market of provision. Some providers already sell their training packages and are likely to continue doing so within any new qualifications framework. However, employment services providers operate in a competitive market and may well be reluctant to be trained by ‘the competition’. A diverse, robust market of potential qualifications providers will be important to ensuring quality provision. The reforms to the qualifications system, outlined below, will be helpful to creating such a dynamic market.

6.3 Considerations and issues

6.3.1 Industry adoption

Central to the value of a qualifications framework for PAs is industry buy-in. A primary benefit and source of status is that advisers holding an industry endorsed qualification can confidently promote themselves and be recognised as qualified to a high, industry-specific standard. As such, it is important that providers adopt the qualification and use it as the benchmark.

6.3.2 Money

A key consideration in developing the qualifications framework in the first instance is who will fund the initial stages. Comments in the consultation highlighted this:

‘An industry-wide certification system would be great, but I’m not confident it can be done because providers don’t want to put in the money to fund it. There must be a business plan for it, to show how it will add value to the business’

Thought will need to be given to how to encourage involvement in development and early adoption so that the majority sign up to the framework concept. It is the case that it will work better collectively, otherwise there is a risk that some will behave as ‘freeloaders’, benefiting from any change but not contributing to it.
6.3.3 Recognition of learning and soft skills

Welfare to work a new industry without minimum or mandatory qualifications requirements, so many effective PAs will not hold industry-specific qualifications. In developing a qualifications framework it is important that a process to recognise prior learning is implemented to acknowledge pre-existing skills and experience, and fast-track eligible practitioners to higher levels of certification, avoiding unnecessary duplication of learning.

6.3.4 Evaluation strategy

Providers operate with limited budgets and in a tough financial environment. The shift to outcomes-based payment, at a time when moving clients into work is very challenging because of the recession and a lack of jobs, puts additional pressure on providers to achieve successful job outcomes. It is important to set up an evaluation framework alongside the qualifications framework so that the impact of increasing professionalisation can be monitored and measured. The qualification will succeed if it is widely accepted and actively adopted by providers. Acceptance and adoption will be made easier if the costs of developing and implementing the framework can be shown to have had a positive benefit.

An evaluation strategy will also form the foundation of continuing learning and improvement and the qualification and framework evolve over time.

6.3.5 Reform – the Qualifications and Credit Framework

Major reform to the qualifications and accreditation system in England is currently underway. The qualifications and credit framework (QCF) will replace the national qualifications framework from December 2010 and is the new framework for creating and accrediting qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The QCF is designed to be more learner and employer-friendly, and ensure that no learning successfully completed goes to waste. It takes a modular approach, where units are the building block of qualifications. Every unit and qualification has a level (difficulty), ranging from entry to level 8, and qualifications have three sizes (award, certificate or diploma), which is measured as credited hours of learning (one credit equals 10 hours' learning). Whole qualifications are made up of a number of units.

In part, this reform is designed to encourage employers to support employees to upskill by taking just the units needed – not having to commit to a whole qualification. This means learners are able to complete individual units at their own pace and steadily accumulate credit towards a whole qualification. It also means there is far greater freedom for learners to take a ‘mix and match’ approach in
selecting providers of particular units because, by being on the QCF, all units by all providers are accredited.

This modular approach has a major potential benefit for the welfare to work industry and for such a multi-faceted role as PA. There is a wealth of provision already developed and being delivered. As outlined above, much of this will be accredited to the QCF. This means the industry does not have to develop the content of an entire qualification from scratch but rather stitch together already accredited units into a cohesive whole in a way that is tailored to the needs of the private or non-profit employment services market. It will also facilitate specialisms, as core and elective units can be clearly separated and provided by different training organisations.

For those current welfare to work providers that sell their accredited training, or have well developed training programmes, it will mean they have the potential to be providers within any new qualification. The modular approach means a range of providers delivering one, some or all of the relevant units are likely to be involved in an individual’s learning.

However, at present sector skills councils are the designated bodies to sign off units and set the ‘rules of combination’ which determine the make-up of whole qualifications. The welfare to work industry does not have a sector skills council. Furthermore, their future is not yet certain, as the new coalition government seeks to cut costs and streamline government business through disbanding or collapsing non-government departmental bodies.

Regardless of the future of sector skills councils, if the welfare to work industry wishes to develop a qualification, it will need to examine the most appropriate body to act as its intermediary with the QCF, in order to have a qualification for PAs accepted onto its framework.

6.3.6 Scotland

Skills and qualifications is a devolved issue, and Scotland has its own qualifications framework. The welfare to work sector operates across the UK and so it is important that any qualification is applicable and carries weight within each of the frameworks. The new QCF is part of the work underway to bring greater coherence to the credit frameworks across the four nations but attention will need to be given to ensuring any qualification is functional in a Scottish setting.
7 Next steps

To move this research from a discussion of the potential for a qualifications framework to beginning the process to develop an actual qualifications framework, some immediate decisions and steps must be taken:

1 Agree that such a framework is necessary and desirable.

2 Establish a small working group to take forward the concept, ensuring that members are drawn from across the sector (small, large, primes, sub-contractors) and have the leadership and enthusiasm to drive it forward.

3 Commission or undertake research to develop a definition and functional map of the personal adviser (PA) role, as it is practised in the private and non-government employment services sector. This would establish the ideal PA and necessary competencies. This will involve significant consultation with relevant peak bodies, as well as providers and individual advisers.

4 Commission or undertake research to map the current ‘mosaic’ of national occupational standards applicable to the newly defined PA role to identify gaps.

5 Commission or undertake research to map the content of relevant qualifications and accredited training available on the qualifications credit framework, and examine in-house, unaccredited training. Cross referencing the course content against the functional map will highlight what should be core modules and where there are gaps in this ‘foundation’ universal learning stage.

Once these research and scoping stages are completed, the industry will be able to begin considering which existing or new organisation should take forward further work to develop a new qualification – either in entirety or as a patchwork stitched together from pre-existing modules – and the framework around it.