

## Health and Community Care

# Workforce and Employment Issues Surrounding Self-Directed Support

Reid Howie Associates

A study was carried out between March and September 2009 to provide evidence to identify workforce issues surrounding people in receipt of Self-Directed Support (SDS), to identify ways to support SDS clients as employers and to develop strategies to develop and support the Personal Assistant (PA) workforce.

## Main Findings

- In the view of a wide range of participants, most SDS packages were working smoothly.
- Employers used both formal and informal means of recruitment and selection, with a relatively high number recruiting people known to them.
- Around two thirds of employers experienced difficulties with recruitment. Problems related to labour market issues and the recruitment process.
- While many employers required work experience and references from PAs, fewer required qualifications and a significant minority never use Disclosure Scotland checks.
- The PA workforce was largely female, white, and aged, on average, just over 40 years.
- A significant minority of PAs did not have employment contracts, terms and conditions and job descriptions and there was little evidence of protective policies and procedures.
- Most PAs received paid holidays. There was a low level of provision of sick pay beyond Statutory Sick Pay, little evidence of pension provision and few PAs were members of a trade union.
- The average PA pay was around £8.45 per hour, but there were clear variations.
- The employment of PAs by individuals was reported to have had little impact on recruitment and retention of workers in other areas of social care although there were some reports of loss of PAs to other employers offering better pay and conditions.
- Many employers received help from a support service and considered this valuable, but there were variations in the provision and capacity of support services, gaps in support with some issues and to some groups (particularly people with learning disability). There was no dedicated support service for PAs.
- Concerns were raised by a wide range of participants, including issues with retention of staff, documentation, PA tasks, pay and a lack of support to PAs.
- Some concerns were also raised relating to the role as employer, including issues with the overall experience, employment law, insurance, administration and paperwork, management and supervision. PAs had little knowledge of employment rights and some felt isolated in their role.
- There was little provision and take-up of training for employers or PAs, and mixed views of the value of this among employers. There was a higher level of interest in training amongst PAs. Those who received training generally considered it valuable.
- Overall there was a lack availability of training. Barriers and gaps identified in training for employers and PAs included: accessibility and awareness of training available; lack of funding to cover training and expenses, lack of training for specific skills for PAs such as moving and handling, first aid etc.

## Background

Self-Directed Support (SDS) provides funding for people to arrange their own support to meet some, or all of their assessed care needs. Most people use the money to buy support from a service provider and / or to employ a personal assistant (PA). The Scottish Government is committed to increasing the uptake of SDS which, in turn, is likely to increase the demand for and pressures on PAs. The Scottish Government commissioned research to identify the issues facing SDS users as employers and their employees, and to assess their training and support needs. The overall aim was to identify workforce issues surrounding people in receipt of SDS; to identify ways to support SDS clients as employers and to develop strategies to develop and support the PA workforce.

## Methods

The research involved: a literature review; postal surveys of employers (495 responses) and PAs (512 responses); detailed discussions with employers and PAs in 4 study areas (128 participants); interviews with local stakeholders in the study areas (24); interviews with national stakeholders (14); a telephone survey of staff of employer support organisations (29); an assessment of training and support available to PAs; a telephone survey of community care provider agencies in the study areas (14); and a findings workshop with 16 national and local stakeholders.

## Research findings

Overall, participants of all types considered that most SDS packages were working smoothly. Employers stressed the benefits of SDS, and its importance for independent living.

### Recruitment

Employers used formal and informal means of recruitment and selection, with considerable use of informal methods such as employing people known to them. Many employers required work experience and references from their PAs, although relatively few required qualifications. A significant minority never used Disclosure Scotland checks.

### Profile of the PA workforce

The PA workforce was predominantly female, white and with an average age just over 40 years. Just under 40% had a qualification in a relevant discipline and many had second jobs, not always in social care. PAs worked an average of 18 hours per week.

PAs carried out a range of tasks, most commonly personal and domestic care. A high number (66%) also provided support to enable employers to participate in leisure and social activities, employment, education and training.

The composition of the workforce was similar in most respects to the wider social care workforce and there appeared to be low levels of staff turnover. In the view of

community care providers and local authorities, the employment of PAs by individuals did not appear to have had an impact on recruitment and retention of workers in other areas of social care. However, there was some evidence, particularly in rural areas, of a loss of PAs to other sectors which were able to provide better pay and conditions.

### Working conditions

Of those PAs surveyed over 80% had employment contracts and job descriptions and 73% had terms and conditions and in place. There was little evidence of protective policies and procedures e.g. health and safety. Average pay was around £8.45 per hour, but there were clear variations with higher average rates of pay in rural areas.

Most PAs received paid holidays. There was a low level of provision of sick pay beyond Statutory Sick Pay, pension provision and few PAs belonged to a trade union.

### Working arrangements

The employment and management of a PA involved administrative and managerial tasks which were compared to running a small business. Management arrangements were usually informal and there was general satisfaction with this among employers and PAs. Most employers used a payroll service, but there was variation in uptake of indemnity insurance. Many employers received support with recruitment, employment and management, although the level varied. Where support was received, it was considered valuable.

There were mixed views as to the desirability of registration of the PA workforce. Advantages mentioned included increased professionalism and protection for employers. Others felt registration might undermine the flexibility of SDS. Some stakeholders preferred an approach focusing on development of the workforce through the introduction of codes of practice etc.

### Views on training

There was little current provision and take-up of training for employers beyond one-to-one provision by support services. However, there was no widespread view amongst employers that they required more training.

There was little provision of general training for PAs, and patchy availability of specialist training, although a pilot programme in one college had recently been developed. Just over half of PAs received some form of training in their role, most commonly from their SDS employer. There was a strong view among employers and PAs that PA work should not require formal qualifications, but most PAs considered access to training desirable.

Employers and PAs who have received training generally considered it valuable.

### Concerns

A high proportion of employers experienced difficulties with recruitment. Difficulties included shortages of labour in some areas particularly rural areas, transport problems, difficulties in filling particular posts, nature of the work and hours of

work. Some employers had difficulties with the process of recruitment e.g. advertising, the time taken to get someone in post, disclosure checks etc.

Some employers' perceived that being an employer was daunting; and had concerns about employment law and insurance; the volume and nature of administrative and paper work; the management and supervision of their PAs. There were variations in the types of support offered, and in some locations, gaps relating to particular issues e.g. ongoing support with paperwork, employment law etc.

Concerns were also expressed by PAs about the absence of documentation or regulation; the nature of some tasks; the level of pay; both a lack of holidays and conditions attached to taking them; a lack of clarity about employment rights and information; isolation for some and the lack of dedicated support service for PAs.

There was an overall lack of training for employers and PAs. Specific barriers and gaps identified were, geographical gaps and gaps in specific types of training e.g. skills training; issues with accessibility, awareness and timing of training; lack of capacity of providers and viability of training; lack of funding; and aspects of the nature of training. Common areas in which further training was seen to be required for employers were: overall management and administration; general employment law and practice; and some personal skills e.g. peer training was identified as important.

It was also suggested that unpaid carers, managing packages on behalf of a family member, could also benefit from training.

For PAs, training was required in: moving and assisting; food hygiene; first aid; communication skills; training relating to specific conditions or impairments; and training in independent living and disability rights. Some PAs would like access to Scottish Vocational Qualifications.

## Recommendations

Development and promotion of the PA role and employment practice

- The role of a PA should be defined and occupational standards developed, to encourage potential employees and promote awareness of the role.
- Pay, conditions and benefits for PAs should be adequate to attract and retain staff, and to comply with the law and good practice.
- Problems with advertising and recruitment processes should be raised with relevant organisations.
- New ways of enabling access to temporary staff in emergencies should be explored.

### Good employment practice

- Local authorities and support services should proactively assist employers to fully comply with employment law and ensure good practice in employment.
- Guidance should be provided on minimum wage legislation as this applies to sleepovers.

- A definitive "how to" guide covering recruitment, employment and management should be developed including the provision of standard basic employment documentation.
- The Association of Directors of Social Work and SDSS should consider how to promote best practice among employers.
- Awareness raising should be carried out with existing PAs about employment rights.
- Consideration should also be given to the issues of: indemnity insurance; legal issues relating to the definition of "employer"; and the issues surrounding redundancy.

### Development of support

- Minimum levels and standards for support services should be identified and incorporated into Scottish Government or CIPFA guidance .
- Local authorities should be encouraged to provide funding to enable services to meet the standards, and capacity building work by SDSS should be developed.
- Support services should be encouraged to develop peer support and identify ways of meeting the specific needs of groups of employers.
- A PA support service should be developed.

### Development of training

- New mechanisms for delivering training should be developed and new training evaluated.
- Existing training packages for employers should be brought together, and consideration given to a post of national training coordinator.
- The work to develop occupational standards should guide the development of an overall strategy for PA training.
- Specialist organisations of and for SDS client groups should input to training.
- Training needs should be included in SDS assessments and should be reviewed regularly.
- Funding should be provided for training for employers and PAs.
- PAs' access to training should be improved and a means of recording their training and work histories developed.
- Unpaid carers should be given access to training.

## Conclusion

This study has identified key workforce issues relating to the use of SDS to employ PAs. The findings should inform the development of the roles of employers and PAs in the future.

This document, along with “Workforce and Employment Issues Surrounding Self-Directed Support” the full research report of the project, and further information about social and policy research commissioned and published on behalf of the Scottish Government, can be viewed on the Internet at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch>. If you have any further queries about social research, please contact us at [socialresearch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:socialresearch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk) or on 0131-244 7560.



ISBN 978-0-7559-7885-4

