

An Integrated Training Strategy for the Legal Advice Sector in Northern Ireland - Summary of Research Report Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Advice organisations should consider the development need of managers in their centres, particularly those who are geographically remote from their head office and provide appropriate training and support.

Recommendation 2: Training programmes should be devised based on the NOS: IA5: Research legal information and advice using electronic sources

Recommendation 3: There is a suite of NOS specifically designed for those involved in governance i.e. senior managers, funders, board members, councillors, trustees etc. Organisations should be encouraged to consider these to inform the professional development of people involved in governance function.

Recommendation 4: There are NOS relating to case management, referral, family law and representing clients in the suite of NOS for legal Advice. These are

- HA5: Manage personal case load
- GA5: Provide and receive referrals on behalf of clients
- GA4: Enable advice and guidance clients to access referral opportunities
- DA7: Prepare cases for representation in formal proceedings
- DA3: Act on behalf of clients in informal proceedings
- DA4: Represent clients in formal proceedings
- IB34: Family law advice and case work

These should be used to inform the content of training programmes in these areas.

Recommendation 5: Consideration should be given to the production of regular update briefings in areas such as money advice and welfare benefits. These could be produced at Government Department level in a similar way to the current quarterly updates produced by HM Revenue and Customs about VAT. This could then be disseminated through umbrella organisations or electronically, to individual advisers. Alternatively, they could be produced and disseminated directly by umbrella organisations.

Recommendation 6: Training and/or qualifications should be developed in the required legal advice areas, based on the relevant knowledge units from the suite of NOS for legal advice.

Recommendation 7: The NOS for Legal Advice should be used by advice organisations and training providers to benchmark and inform both training needs analysis for individual staff and the content of training programmes for the sector.

Recommendation 8: When considering the structure of qualifications for the Legal Advice sector, Skills for Justice and the awarding bodies should consider the needs of the sector. The framework should be as flexible as possible and should contain a number of small, focused awards (1-12 credits) which can meet the needs and expectations of practitioners in the sector. It may be desirable to develop a full occupational competence qualification to meet the development needs of new advisers.

Recommendation 9: Consideration should be given to the official funding by Government Departments of training leading to formally recognised qualifications based on the NOS for Legal Advice. This would help to increase take up but its primary effect would be to enhance the quality of front line legal advice to members of the community. (Carrot approach)

Recommendation 10: Consideration should be given to making the acquisition of formally recognised qualifications based on the NOS for Legal Advice a requirement of commissioning and funding services. (stick approach). This could be built into the Quality Standards proposed by the ASA Quality Working Group (Section 3.6. of this report).

Recommendation 11: Training providers need to consider the costs and accessibility of learning opportunities to promote and encourage take up by as wide a range of individuals as possible.

Recommendation 12: Consideration should be given by national organisations and agencies as to how communication and co-operation between the private, public and voluntary/community advice sectors can be improved to enhance the efficiency and quality of service provision to the general public. Organisations include DSD, Law Society, NI Council representatives, NILSC, key voluntary/community sector agencies/organisations and other Government Departments.