



Supporting advice in London: a review of infrastructure needs

Summary of research findings

The independent advice sector is a key component of London's Voluntary and Community Sector. Over 700 organisations form a considerable and distinct constituency, providing vital advice and information about rights, entitlements and responsibilities on issues such as housing, employment and income maximisation for individuals and communities within inner and outer London. It is widely recognised that socially excluded people face a disproportionate number of these problems, and that if problems are not dealt with quickly, more can occur as a result.

The infrastructure support to the independent advice sector is well established and high profile, being primarily delivered by advice networks such as Age Concern London, *advice*^{UK} London, Citizens Advice London region, Law Centres Federation London unit and Youth Access. This research demonstrates that the infrastructure support provided by these networks is well used and highly valued.

In terms of future need, independent advice organisations identified priorities related specifically to their advice giving functions. These include:

- Ensuring the need for advice is taken into account in local plans, as well as local, regional and national policy development
- Securing funding for advice work
- Identifying and training sufficient advice staff

- Ensuring staff and board members work effectively together to plan advice services
- Demonstrating outcomes and the impact of advice work
- Resourcing organisations with ICT and being able to use ICT effectively in advice giving.

In commissioning this research, the advice networks are committed to exploring an increased strategic and collaborative approach to providing infrastructure support, whilst retaining their individual niche provision. Any strategy for future development of London's independent advice should prioritise:

Making the case for advice – the key challenge is ensuring that infrastructure providers work more effectively with London stakeholders, such as Association of London Government, Greater London Authority and Government Office for London, to raise the profile of advice, and its contribution and impact on key social objectives. The potential to increase the structure and co-ordination for policy and promotion should be explored.

Responding to workforce development needs – the research has indicated ongoing issues with the recruitment and training of advice staff as well as a gap in the provision of support for management. A range of approaches have been identified to develop a more coherent approach to the provision of support.

Planning and developing services to adapt to change – the research was undertaken at a time of considerable change for independent advice providers, for example, the new Community Legal Service strategy and changes to the Association of London Government grants scheme. Much of this change is impending and organisations have highlighted that it is a high priority that they are supported and assisted in responding to such changes.

Increasing organisational infrastructure – the research confirmed a distinction between the support needs of larger and smaller organisations, particularly for smaller community-based organisations where advice may be just one of a range of services provided to meet the needs of their local community.

Identified support requirements

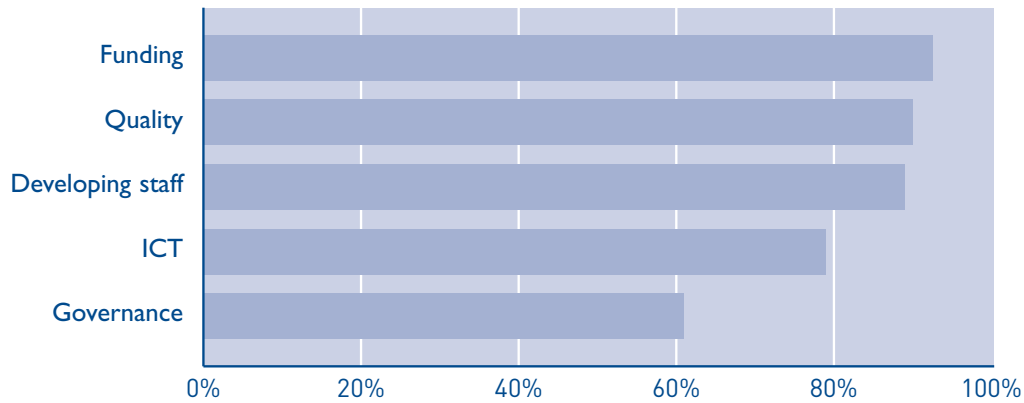
The support that organisations anticipate accessing or wanting in the future reflects current patterns of access with funding, quality and developing staff remaining the main priorities. However, ICT and governance also signify a higher need for support than currently accessed. (See *graph overleaf*.)



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Identified support requirements



In each area eg funding, quality, etc, respondents were asked to indicate if they anticipated needing support with a range of issues related to that area. There were no limits on how many issues one organisation could list.

Significantly, the areas of support that respondents prioritised related specifically to their advice giving functions, for example:

- Ensuring the need for advice is taken into account in local plans, as well as in local, regional and national policy developments
- Securing funding for advice work
- Identifying and training sufficient advice staff
- Ensuring staff and board members work effectively together to plan advice services
- Demonstrating outcomes and the impact of advice work
- Resourcing the organisation with ICT and being able to use ICT effectively in advice giving.

What needs to be done?

Making the case for advice

Identified needs

- To ensure links with key strategies and policies are drawn to the attention of priority stakeholders and key funders of advice services eg GLA, GOL, ALG, Legal Services Commission, Big Lottery Fund, etc
- To promote contribution of advice to cross cutting policies including specific clients groups such as young people and refugees
- To maximise potential for emerging advice forums to contribute views and practice
- To co-ordinate distribution of policy material to ensure organisations can prioritise policy issues that need to respond to
- To create a system to collect views on policy
- To provide support that helps organisations distinguish advice from other activities.

Potential response

- ✓ Create case for central network neutral resource to co-ordinate policy work in relation to advice across London government stakeholders
- ✓ Develop an Advice for Londoners strategy that includes collaborative work on case for advice vision to share with GLA, ALG and London Funders Group
- ✓ Prioritise a strategy to maximise impact of advice forums – regional co-ordination through London Advice Forum; link in to central policy resource; website to facilitate sharing of materials; dissemination of good practice
- ✓ Work with ASA and national networks on manifesto for advice to create clear and commonly understood definition of advice
- ✓ Explore the feasibility of collecting common core monitoring data to demonstrate impact of advice
- ✓ Produce promotional materials and marketing toolkit for London advice providers for use at local and regional levels.

Workforce development

Identified needs

- To respond to workforce gaps and recruitment issues
- To meet development and support needs of managers
- To increase access to training in advice skills ranging from introductory, refresher and specific areas of advice
- To increase ICT skills of advice sector workers, in terms of, for example, electronic case recording, monitoring statistics, etc.

Potential response

- ✓ Utilise Advice Sector Workforce Development Plan¹ (due August 2006) to develop a 5–10 year strategy to encourage new entrants and provide an induction support programme
- ✓ Mapping of existing advice skills development training and resources
- ✓ Co-ordinate the promotion of range of training programmes via creation of central database/website booking
- ✓ Explore managerial support mechanisms eg action learning sets, peer support arrangements, access to coaching and mentoring for managers of advice services.
- ✓ Investigate potential linkages with Learning and Skills Councils programmes for skills development of trainee advice workers
- ✓ Expansion of Circuit riders scheme to work with advice agencies in planning effective ICT strategies to enable advisers to work more effectively and efficiently by way of establishing basic competencies.

Planning and developing services to adapt to change

Identified needs

- To respond to changing funding environment eg commissioning, social enterprise culture
- To meet specific training needs eg Full Cost Recovery
- To provide guidance with analysing options for organisational structure eg mergers, partnerships
- To develop support for organisations to respond to legal advice changes eg changes to NfP LSC contracts, preferred suppliers, CLACs and CLANs.

Potential response

- ✓ Develop a strategy for London advice provision that takes into account response to changing environment, for example, CLS strategy and Preferred Suppliers model, new ALG commissioning scheme, etc
- ✓ Share training resources to develop support programme addressing issues such as Full Cost Recovery, partnerships working, contract issues, etc that are shared across networks
- ✓ Source training/support on issues such as change management, Human Resources functions and governance, and ensure access to all network members and advice providers.

¹ The NOS4 Advice Project is due to publish a major survey of the advice workforce in England and Wales.

Increasing organisational infrastructure eg ICT

Identified needs

- To identify common strategy in relation to organisational quality standard/auditing to replace CLS Quality Mark
- To meet development and support needs of smaller, emerging advice providers
- To increase access to ICT support.

Potential response

- ✓ Engage, or initiate, strategy re: future auditing etc of organisational quality standards with ASA and national networks
- ✓ Work with London infrastructure organisations eg Women's Resource Centre, Evelyn Oldfield Unit and other specialist agencies to identify potential advice specific training courses
- ✓ Work with ICT hub to identify ICT support for London advice agencies and advisers
- ✓ Produce good practice materials for London advice providers.

About the research

The research was undertaken by ADP Consultancy, an independent consultancy organisation on behalf of the Advice Sub-Group of the London Change Up Consortium consisting of *advice^{UK}* London, Age Concerns in London, Citizens Advice London, DIAL UK, Law Centres Federation London Unit and Youth Access and convened and supported by London Advice Services Alliance. These groups also meet up, with others, as the London Advice Forum², which aims to work collaboratively and strategically around issues affecting advice provision within Greater London.

The aim of the research is to identify the infrastructure needs of frontline advice agencies and to establish recommendations that will allow the capacity of these organisations to be developed and sustained within an independent context.

In particular, the research identifies the specific support needs that relate to advice giving functions that cannot be met by generic infrastructure support.

ADP devised and undertook an online and postal questionnaire

survey based on the ChangeUp themes identified above with a wide range of advice providers:

- Members of each of the advice networks eg Age Concerns in London, *advice^{UK}* London, Citizens Advice London, DIAL UK, Law Centres Federation London and Youth Access
- Organisations that tend not to have been specifically set up to provide legal advice but instead are called on to provide advice and information alongside existing service provision. Both Evelyn Oldfield Unit and Women's Resource Centre members were included in the survey
- Inner and Outer London borough organisations.

Issues arising from the survey were then explored with a range of stakeholders including a diverse spread of London forums. Issues arising from the research were discussed with the Advisory group as the research progressed and this final report incorporates the basis of a future strategy for developing infrastructure support agreed by that group.

2 London Advice Forum includes *advice^{UK}* London region, Advice Services Alliance, Age Concern, Citizens Advice London region, DIAL UK, Homeless Link, Law Centres Federation London Unit, Legal Action Group, London Advice Services Alliance, and Youth Access.

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