

**RNIB Scotland response to the Scottish Government’s consultation on Social Security Advocacy Service Standards**

RNIB Scotland is the leading charity working with blind and partially sighted people across Scotland. We deliver services our members need and campaign for their civil and welfare rights.

We have answered all questions in this consultation, combining questions where appropriate. We welcome any further engagement with the Scottish Government on the issues raised in this response.

**Standards**

**Q1 Do you agree with the definition of advocacy?**

The consultation document states that “Your advocacy worker will not provide advice”. We welcome this distinction between the role of advocacy and the role of advice services. It is important that advocacy is not confused with advice and that the two services are kept separate.

We are concerned that in order to receive advocacy support the individual must both define themselves as having a disability and that it is because of that disability that they need help with the system. Some blind and partially sighted people do not consider themselves to have a disability. For example, older people who associate their sight loss with aging, people who lose their sight gradually, and people who don’t see sight loss fitting in with their definition of disability may not consider themselves to have a disability. On top of this, this definition of advocacy requires our client group to state that it is because of their visual impairment that they need someone to advocate for them. It can be difficult for people to admit that they can’t do something because of a disability. Throughout our discussions with visually impaired people to feed into various Scottish Government social security consultations people with sight loss have told us that they would like a social security system that focuses on what they can do rather than what they can’t. This would force people to focus on what they can’t do. [Not clear here.]

**Q2 Is anything missing from the definition of advocacy and if so, what?**

To make it clear that advocacy services are available for people with sight loss who would not consider themselves to have a disability we suggest that “sensory impairment” is explicitly mentioned. For example, “or sensory impairment" could be added after “disability” to the first line under definition of advocacy, “You are entitled…. Scottish social security system.”

We also suggest making it clear that advocacy services are available to people who are represented by parents, guardians or carers. We believe that this should be explicitly stated within the definition.

**Q3 Do you agree with the principle of “independence”?**

**Q4 Do you agree with the standards?**

We generally agree with the standards and believe that the principle of independence is important. We think that “Your advocacy worker will only provide you with advocacy support” and “Advocacy records will be kept separately from other records” are particularly important to ensuring that the standard “Advocacy services will be as free from conflicts of interest as possible” is carried out.

**Q5 Is anything missing from the standards and if so, what?**

N/A

**Q6 Do you agree with the principle of “person centred”?**

**Q7 Do you agree with the standards?**

We agree with the principle of “person centred” and the standards.

**Q8 Is anything missing from the standards and if so, what?**

The standard “Your advocacy worker will obtain your formal agreement before acting on your behalf” should be broadened to include people who cannot formally agree and would be represented by someone else.

**Q9 Do you agree with the principle of “accessible”?**

It is vital for people with sight loss that advocacy is accessible. This includes but is not limited to accessible information and accessible venues if meeting with advocacy service workers face to face.

**Q10 Do you agree with the standards?**

We agree with the standards but think it would be clearer if some of the standards were separated out into other principles.

The standard “If you tell your advocacy worker that you may be at risk of harm or that you want to harm yourself or someone else they will discuss this with you but may need to share this information with others without your consent” is less about accessibility and more about safeguarding. This would be better placed in a separate safeguarding section where it could be expanded upon.

The standards “Advocacy services and workers must be aware of and meet confidentiality requirements” and “If an organisation provides advocacy and other services, the advocacy service must not share information with those other services without your permission” also don’t fit with the principle of accessibility but it is important that they are included. We recommend a separate principle being created that these standards could fit into.

**Q11 Is anything missing from the standards and if so, what?**

As well as stating that people should be communicated with in an accessible way, the standards should also state that information relating to the advocacy services will be provided in accessible formats. This would include promotional material for the service such as flyers and documents which people pick up before communicating with the service.

**Q12 Do you agree with having a principle of “trained”?**

We believe this principle should be called “expertise” rather than “trained”.

**Q13 Do you agree with the standards?**

“Trained” as mentioned in the standard “Advocacy workers will be trained and continue to develop their knowledge, skills and experience” should be defined. Before endorsing this standard we would need to know what type of training it was, who it was carried out by and what level of training it would be.

**Q14 Is anything missing from the standards and if so, what?**

In order to put the standard “Advocacy workers will understand your needs and any barriers you face” into practice advocacy workers would also need to have detailed knowledge of the conditions of people seeking their support. It should be explicitly included in the standards that “Advocacy workers will have detailed knowledge of the conditions the people they are advocating on behalf of have”.

**Q15 Do you agree with having a principle of “quality assured”?**

Yes.

**Q16 Do you agree with the standards?**

We agree with the standards and particularly welcome the standard “Feedback and complaints forms will be available in accessible formats,

without having to be requested”. This will mean that people who require accessible formats will be able to get these documents at the same time as anyone else using the system.

**Q17 Is anything missing from the standards and if so, what?**

We believe in order to get fair and balanced feedback the system should be actively seeking feedback from individuals using advocacy services. It should be explicitly included in the standards that optional feedback will be sought from individuals using advocacy services as a matter of course.

**Impact Assessments**

**Equality Impact Assessment**

**Q18 Are you aware of any impacts on groups who share protected characteristics that we have not identified here?**

The “Disability” section could be elaborated on in much more detail. As disability is a very broad term covering a range of conditions, we would appreciate detailed analysis of the impact on different categories of conditions.

**Q19 If yes, please provide details.**

See answer to Q18.

**Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment**

**Q20 Are you aware of any impacts on children's rights and wellbeing which are not identified here?**

Whilst we generally agree with the impact assessment it is not reflected in the standards. In particular, the right for a parent to seek advocacy support if acting on behalf of a child or young person should be included in the standards.

**Q21 If yes, please provide details.**

See answer to Q20.

**Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment Summary**

**Q22 Are you aware of any impacts on businesses which are not identified here?**

In order for the system to be accessible it is important that it is properly resourced. We would expect an increase in requests for information in accessible formats and in order that individuals receive accessible information in timely manner it is important that the system is properly resourced. How the system will be resourced in this way may be something to include in this impact assessment.

**Q23 If yes, please provide details**

See answer to Q22.

**Island Screening Assessment**

**Q24 Are you aware of any impacts on island communities which are not identified here?**

Island communities can often miss out on face-to-face service provision. We would like to know what plans are in place to ensure that a face-to-face service is available to island communities. This should be explicitly referenced in the assessment.

**Q25 If yes, please provide details.**

See answer to Q24.

**Contact**

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