
the independent broker role and training requirements

a summary report

This is a summary of the main findings and recommendations from a project carried out by the National Development Team for Inclusion (NDT) for Skills for Care (SfC) London.

The ultimate aim of the project has been to identify the skills and knowledge required by people working as independent support brokers, so that appropriate training can be developed. However, the support broker role is very new, especially in the UK, and has been interpreted in widely varying ways. Without agreement on the role, training needs cannot be defined. So the project aimed, firstly, to identify a consensus on the key characteristics of the independent broker role, and then to identify the required skills and knowledge.

The project builds on earlier work carried out (in 2007/8) by the NDT, and supported by DH funding, which led to an NDT report, *Custom and Control: the training and accreditation of independent brokers* (Dowson 2008).

As this work was being undertaken, Skills for Care had separately launched the New Types of Worker (NToW) initiative to map new ways of working and new types of worker, that were emerging as social care became more personalised. Skills for Care London focused on workers linked to direct payments support, and on the broker role. The NDT was contracted by SfC London to extend its earlier work into a closer examination of broker training requirements.

The earlier NDT project had already proposed a set of principles and characteristics to describe the independent broker role. The project report, though a discussion paper, drew on interviews and seminars with a wide range of people, including users of social care across all the main user groups, and carers, as well as people with a special interest in the broker role. The SfC project supplemented these findings with a sequence of further consultations, as follows:

- A consultation with major national stakeholder organisations to identify support for the proposed broker role definition.
- A consultation with a wide range of individuals to obtain views about the skills and knowledge required by brokers, based on the role definition that had been established.
- A further invitation to national stakeholder organisations to comment on both the role definition and the training requirements, as amended from the previous stages.

The conclusions from all these consultations, in terms of the definition of the independent support broker role, and the skills required by brokers, are outlined in the following sections.



1.0 the independent support broker role

1.1 the context

As part of the personalisation of social care, disabled and older people who are eligible for council social services are being allocated a personal budget, rather than having a package of services arranged for them. They can then decide how to use this money – combined with funds from other public sources – to purchase support services or obtain other resources that they require. If people are to make the most of this opportunity, they will have to complete a series of tasks: deciding what they want to achieve, identifying and evaluating different options; identifying community resources; finding and negotiating with support provider agencies; assembling and costing the final plan. An additional set of duties, sometimes termed *secondary supports*, may be required to sustain the plan after it has been implemented. Personal assistants, for example, may have to be recruited, and payroll systems maintained. All these tasks call for a range of skills, and many people are likely to find them difficult to complete without some help or training.

There are widely differing views about how this help should be provided. Some local initiatives have put the emphasis on training, with the intention to empower disabled people and families to complete the tasks themselves. Others have looked to a range of local community and user-led organisations to provide the help as part of a wider role. In addition, it has been argued that there is a need for people – *support brokers* – who can provide this help as a specific service.

There has been growing consensus, endorsed by government, that all these sources of help have value, and that councils need to take action to ensure that they are all available locally. On the other hand, the emergence of the support broker as a specific, paid role, raises some distinct issues: in particular, about the need for independence, the range of services offered, and about quality assurance. All these have important implications for the way in which the development of brokers is supported, nationally and locally. As Skills for Care identified, these include the need for brokers to be able to access appropriate training. With the number of brokers (in some form or other) likely to increase rapidly, there has been an urgent need to achieve greater agreement on these matters.

1.2 response from consultations

The earlier work by the NDT had found that some people were opposed to any attempt to define the role of the support broker. This view was based on two concerns: firstly, that the role should be left to evolve in response to demand; and, secondly, that it would hasten brokers to acquire undesirable characteristics associated with over-professionalisation. Views obtained during the SfC project also included concerns about the risk of over-professionalisation, and suggestions for ways in which the risk could be minimised. It was emphasised by a number of respondents that independent brokers should be seen as only one source of help with the tasks of brokerage, and that other people (not least disabled people and family members) should have access to the same kind of training. Also, there was a clear consensus that people who use services should be co-trainers and partners in the delivery of broker training.

Notwithstanding these concerns, almost all respondents accepted the need to define the key characteristics of the role, and broadly endorsed the definition offered by the NDT (as set out below). There was also support from national stakeholder organisations for locally based, voluntary accreditation of brokers. The only exception to this view was from the General Social Care Council, which believes there is potentially a case for compulsory, centralised regulation; and, if that were to be so, would see themselves as the logical body to undertake that role.

There was also broad support for the proposal that the independent support broker role should not include the delivery of any 'secondary supports' required to sustain a plan after it has been implemented, particularly in view of the potential conflict of interest. However, other respondents would prefer to leave the boundary less firmly defined. Other comments identified the need to consider the implications for organisations that do provide secondary supports, and to clarify the relationship between local user-led organisations, direct payment support schemes, and broker accreditation.

1.3 key principles and characteristics of the independent broker role

The responses to the consultations highlighted important issues that need to be taken into account in the development of policy and practice in this area. It also needs to be recognised that there was a small minority of respondents who had substantial disagreements with the proposed definition, primarily arising from the perspective that brokerage cannot be described as a job and that people themselves, families and user-led organisations were the primary, if not only, deliverers of that function. Nevertheless, overall there was broad support for a definition of the role based on the following characteristics:

1.3.1 scope of the role

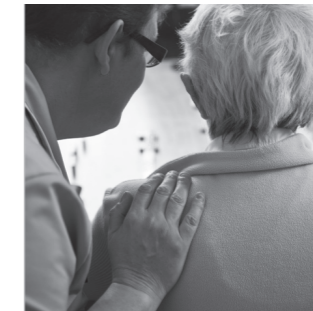
It is recommended that the independent support broker role should include assistance in the development and organisation of support plans up to the point of implementation, but should NOT extend beyond the point of implementation.

Thus the broker role includes assistance with:

- Identifying the person's preferences, needs, and resources, leading to planning goals.
- Identifying and evaluation of potential support options.
- Finding, negotiating, and contracting with support providers.
- Finding and preparing community services and resources.
- Analysing the need for secondary supports, and identifying sources.
- Writing and costing the Support Plan.
- Coordinating support arrangements and other resources within the plan in readiness for implementation.
- Initiating implementation.

The exclusion of secondary support delivery from the role is recommended because:

- It gives clarity to the role, identifying the broker's input as episodic, with clear start and end points.
- It avoids conflict of interest that could occur where a broker was advising on the choice of secondary support provider services and was also a provider of those services.
- The skills and knowledge required for the two sets of tasks are very different.



1.3.2 characteristics of the broker's services

It is recommended that the role should be developed and supported in a way that will ensure that independent support brokers:

- *Are independent.* Independence is a characteristic that makes the independent support broker role distinctive and valuable. It is also a quality that is very easily compromised. Independence means, firstly, the absence of accountability or loyalty to the council or support provider agencies. More positively, it means that the broker is person-centred and community-centred, with a perspective that values and respects the person, their networks, and their experiences.
- *Have good working relationships with social workers and support providers and mainstream community resources.* Although the broker must have independence, this must not lead to isolation from the rest of the social care system and mainstream community resources that will be an essential component of people accessing new opportunities for inclusion. The broker needs to have up-to-date information about available services, and good contacts with provider agencies and community groups to help facilitate discussions about the requirements of the person that the broker is assisting.

- *Are professional in a positive sense.* The broker should provide help that is task-focused, based on the requirements of the person they are assisting, efficiently and honestly delivered, and accountable to the person. Equally, brokers should avoid the negative characteristics that are sometimes associated with professionals. They should not judge people or their plans, or make decisions that individuals are entitled to make themselves. Wherever possible the broker should share information and skills so that the individual's ability to complete brokerage tasks for themselves is increased, not diminished.
- *Work to the requirements of each individual.* Within the overall scope of tasks which fall within the broker's role (see 1.3.1, above) the broker should deliver support only with those tasks specified by the individual, and on the terms specified by the individual.
- *Work on the basis of a customer-contractor relationship.* Identifying the relationship of the broker to the individual as that of a contractor to their customer acknowledges the reality that the broker is delivering a paid service, even if the payment is not made directly by the individual. Setting the service within the familiar commercial conventions of a customer-contractor relationship also underlines and underpins other key characteristics of the role (as above). In particular, brokers should be selected by the person, and deliver their service as specified and on the terms agreed by the person, with the contractual relationship terminated when the work has been completed to the customer's satisfaction.



1.3.3 the length and level of the broker's involvement

People deciding how to use their individual and personal budget will be able to turn to various sources of information and advice, some of them independent of the council and service providers. These are likely to include telephone helplines and other forms of 'one-off' guidance. There is a need to clarify whether these sources of help fall within the definition of the independent support broker role.

Although the boundary may be difficult to identify precisely, it is recommended that these kinds of assistance do not need to be considered as independent broker services, though the independent broker may well make use of them. The critical distinction is that the independent broker will typically work for the individual over a period of time, carrying out tasks on behalf of the individual, not just providing information, advice, and guidance while in direct contact with the individual. This implies that they will be acting as the person's agent. In order to do this effectively and ethically, they will need to have detailed information about the person's requirements and about the extent of the authority the person has given them to act on their behalf.

1.3.4 accreditation of independent brokers

It is recommended that independent brokers should be accredited in each council area by an accreditation body that is under the control of disabled people and carers. Such an arrangement should be delivered within a national framework that sets out broad standards and expectations within which there is scope for local interpretation. Where possible this body could be linked to existing user-led organisations, though there would be a need to avoid conflict of interest where the organisation is also a provider of support services. As a voluntary arrangement, this would not prevent other people from offering their services as brokers, but it would provide a list of approved brokers.

2.0 the skills and knowledge required by brokers

2.1 response from consultations

The first consultation within the SfC project asked individuals (from a variety of organisations and user groups) to respond to a preliminary list of skill and knowledge areas. This list was based on an analysis of the content of three existing training courses, as stated in published course outlines (Dowson 2008).

Substantial changes were made to this list in the light of responses, taking account of almost all the comments. Two skill/knowledge areas were added, but most of the changes concerned matters of emphasis or clarity. Skill/knowledge subsets were added to the description of each area.

The revised list was sent to national stakeholder organisations for comment. There were no responses that indicated substantial disagreement, and so the list, as follows, is recommended as the basis for the development of training for independent brokers.

2.2 minimum skill and knowledge areas required by independent support brokers

2.2.1 understands the aims and principles of self-directed supports, the role of the independent broker, and the values underpinning the role

To incorporate:

- Appreciates the international history of individualised funding, and brokers, as a movement to promote self-determination.
- Understands the aims and principles of Individual Budgets, and the role of the broker, the values on which the role is based, and is able to promote and defend the role.

2.2.2 understands the main responsibilities and structures of health and social care

A basic understanding of the structure of health and social care, incorporating an understanding of:

- The role of the council, PCT, and other government agencies in delivering local services and duties under statutory requirements.
- The role of these agencies in providing and commissioning services from other organisations.
- The distinction between health and social care, and the different access routes that apply to each, including Fair Access to Care Services.
- The main professions in health and social care and their duties, particular those professions that are associated with expertise and/or services that brokers may need to access.



2.2.3
understands the social model of disability

This knowledge deepens and extends values based on an understanding of the principle of self-determination, and includes an understanding of:

- The common experiences of disabled people.
- The barriers facing disabled people, and their causes.
- The relevance of the social model of the disability to the different social care user groups.

2.2.4
understands the needs, role and rights of the families of disabled and older people

To include:

- Understands the contribution that families make to the lives of family members with disabilities, the common experiences of carers and the difficulties they encounter.
- Understands the changing nature of the relationship between family members and the disabled person at different stages of life.
- Understands the role of family members as advocates, and the importance and limitations of this role.

2.2.5
demonstrates cultural sensitivity in working with individual and families from black and minority ethnic communities

To include:

- Acknowledges and appreciates cultural diversity.
- Is able to work sensitively with disabled and older people from BME communities, and their circles of support.

2.2.6
understands the policy context of individual budgets and brokerage in England

To incorporate:

- Awareness of the personalisation agenda, and the main policy statements and projects that have led to its emergence.
- Understanding of brokerage as a set of tasks which need to be completed, and the sources of assistance with these tasks available at different brokerage levels.
- Understanding of the independent broker role as one source of assistance with brokerage; its distinctive features and relationship to other brokerage levels, with an awareness of the relevant literature.

2.2.7
understands the processes and procedures that operate in individual budget systems, and the sources of support available with planning fund-holding

To incorporate:

- Understanding, in general terms, of the decisions and processes that are likely to be found in any individualised funding system.
- Understanding of the way in which these processes operate in the most common (or, eventually, centrally-approved) Individual Budget systems operated by councils in England.
- The ability to identify, understand, and evaluate local policy and practice within this general framework.

2.2.8
understands different forms of communication, and possesses the skills to address communication barriers

To incorporate:

- Recognises the importance of non-verbal communication.
- Is able to gather and record information which is communicated non-verbally.
- Is able to recognise when the need arises to provide support (e.g. interpreters) to enable communication.

2.2.9
has the knowledge and skills to establish and sustain an effective contractual relationship

Is able to establish a contractual relationship based on the customer's requirements; works efficiently to complete the tasks while upholding the customer's right to be involved as they choose; and reports back appropriately.

This implies:

- The interpersonal skills to establish an appropriate relationship.
- Effective listening skills, particularly in understanding the person's requirements and concerns.
- The interpersonal skills required to offer advice and assistance without undermining the customer's choice and involvement.
- The ability to manage competing priorities, adapting appropriately to changing demands.
- Understanding of ethical standards in confidentiality, and obligations arising from Data Protection legislation.
- The ability to work reflectively, in order to monitor and evaluate one's own performance.

2.2.10
understands the aims and processes of person-centred planning and support planning, and has the skills to facilitate these processes

This includes:

- Understands the logic of the planning process.
- Is able to help an individual or group to follow this process, keeping the individual at the centre of discussions.
- Understands and is able to make appropriate use of a variety of person-centred tools/ exercises to gather the information that is required.

2.2.11

knowledge of the intentions, principles and provisions of Mental Capacity Act (2005)

Has a broad understanding of this Act, sufficient to:

- Uphold the intentions of the Act to support a person in making decisions for themselves, even when that person may have difficulty in making their own decisions in every area of life.
- Recognise situations where more expert help is required to assist decision-making.

2.2.12

able to recognise signs and symptoms of abuse, and to respond effectively

To include:

- Understands the nature of abuse and its different forms.
- Has the knowledge to recognise the signs of abuse.
- Has the knowledge to take action appropriate to the situation.

2.2.13

aware of funding sources for individuals, and how to access them

To include:

- Is aware of the relevance of different sources of funding in addition to the Personal Budget.
- Has knowledge of the main kinds of funding that may be available, and the major criteria governing access to each one.
- Is able to complete the application procedures that each requires.
- Is aware of more specialist sources of advice that are likely to be available.

2.2.14

understands the benefits of mainstream/informal supports, and has the skills to make use of them

To incorporate:

- Understands the contribution and value of non-specialist services, and recognises that non-specialist services, community resources, and informal sources of support as alternative to specialist provider services.
- Has the skills to identify the potential use of these kinds of resource in the process of planning with an individual.
- Has the skills required to find, evaluate, and work effectively with community resources that are relevant to a person's requirements.

2.2.15

has skills in advocacy, negotiation, and mediation required to represent the customer's interests effectively

To include the ability to:

- Represent the person's views and support requirements in an accurate and appropriately assertive manner (for example in negotiations with support providers or the council).
- Play a mediating role, when appropriate, in situations where the person's choices are in conflict with the views and/or rights of others around them (for example, family members).
- Recognise situations that require the involvement of someone with a more specific role as advocate.

2.2.16

has the ability to identify need for secondary supports in order to ensure successful plans

To include:

- Understands the need for secondary supports that may arise, and how this need is affected by the choice of employed personal assistance, contracted support services, or informal supports.
- Is able to identify areas in a support plan where secondary support services may be advisable.
- Has knowledge of the range of sources and kinds of secondary supports that are likely to be available.

2.2.17

is able to write and cost a support plan

This includes:

- The knowledge and skill to prepare a support plan that is clearly written and set out, in keeping with local requirements for approval of plans.
- The ability to reflect the person's requirements in the way the plan is written.
- The ability to calculate annual costs (for example, support from several different sources, at varying unit costs, on the basis of a weekly programme), and to explain these costs in the Support Plan document.

It is recommended that the following areas of skill/knowledge are considered as additional areas that may optionally be included in training by training providers, and/or included in the criteria for broker accreditation set by local accreditation bodies.



2.2.18

able to facilitate person-centred planning using specific, recognised methods such as Essential Lifestyles Planning, PATH, or WRAP

2.2.19

has the knowledge and skills to operate as a self-employed person, e.g. accounts and tax returns, insurance, etc.

references

Dowson S. (2008) *Custom and Control: the training and accreditation of independent support brokers*, National Development Team, www.ndt.org.uk/projectsN/IFdocs.htm

Skills for Care London

Skills for Care promotes engagement in workforce development via networks of statutory and independent sector employers. This takes place alongside representatives of people who use services, informal carers, staff associations, educational institutions and training providers.

Skills for Care London is the main employer led body helping employers in the capital implement the training strategy for social care, Modernising the Social Care Workforce.

The Regional Committee reflects the make-up of the national Skills for Care board, with a majority of members drawn from networks of independent and statutory sector employers.

Other members are people who use services, and carers, staff groups and those with training interests.

The new types of worker programme (NToW) is evolving; In 2009, the *Workforce Action Learning Programme* will look at the way in which models of social care commissioning and provision will change as the personalisation agenda advances.

To support the change process, Skills for Care have developed a range of national and regional publications that explore the implications of workforce reform including the '*Principles of Workforce redesign*', the '*Common Core Principles*' (in collaboration with Skills for Health) and an '*Action Learning guide to Transformation*'.

Visit www.newtypesofworker.co.uk for further information

This report was commissioned by Skills for Care London

If you have any further questions about the programme, workforce development or the regional work of Skills for Care, please contact the London office:
Tel: 020 7471 6772
Email: michael.armstrong@skillsforcare.org.uk

www.london.skillsforcare.org.uk

