

Preparing for personalisation

The relevance of SISCO/Care Skillsbase in supporting communication and number skills needs for direct employers

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Terminology

Varying terms are in use to describe policies, processes and stakeholders involved in personalisation. For the purposes of this report, the following definitions are used:

Direct employer: a person who directly employs a personal assistant/s to provide personal care services for them; many direct employers are able to employ PAs using the funds released by Direct Payments

Direct payments: cash funds provided by councils to people who use care services, in lieu of services they have been assessed as needing. The payment must be sufficient to enable the person to purchase services to meet their needs

Individual budgets: budgets allocated by councils to people who use care services which cover a number of funding streams besides adult social care, including Supporting People, Disabled Facilities Grant, Independent Living Funds and Access to Work

Micro-provider: small, flexible and person-centred organisations, based in local communities, that employ five individuals or less

Personal assistant or PA: a person who provides care services to one or more individuals, usually in the individual's home; PAs may be employed by the direct employer, or self-employed, or work for micro-providers or for larger care staff agencies

Personalisation: a transformative change in social care that gives people choice and control over the nature and delivery of care services they use, through a process of self-directed support; individual budgets, direct payments and personal budgets are all part of the overall personalisation process

Personal budgets: an allocation of funding given after a needs assessment. People can choose to take their personal budget as a direct payment and use this to purchase their own services. Or they can choose to leave councils with the responsibility to purchase the services. Or they can choose some combination of the two.

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Executive summary

Background and scope

Skills for Care and the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) have developed a web-based resource, currently known as SISCO (www.sisco.org.uk), to help employers take action on communication and number skills issues within the care workforce. In late 2008 SISCO will be renamed Care Skillsbase (www.scie-careskillsbase.org.uk).

The principal target users for the current SISCO/Care Skillsbase tools are employers in mainstream care in England, who provide residential, day care and home care services to people with a range of different support needs.

Social care is undergoing a major policy shift, towards what is broadly termed personalisation or self-directed support. In spring 2008, Skills for Care asked the SISCO/Care Skillsbase team to explore the possible utility of the SISCO/Care Skillsbase web tools for people who directly employ personal assistants (PAs) to provide care services for them.

This report, based on a mix of desk research and expert interviews (covering both stakeholder organisations and individuals who use services and employ PAs), describes the findings.

Findings

Desk research findings

Most of the current academic, policy and grey literature on personalisation focuses on user satisfaction and/or policy issues. However, a small number of sources are directly relevant and provided insights.

Direct employers and personal assistants

As of March 2008, there were over 73,000 people in England in receipt of direct payments who employ personal assistants – a 35% increase on the previous year. On average, these direct employers employ two PAs at any one time.

Of those currently using direct payments:

- 30% are physically disabled people and those with long-term illness
- 24% are older people requiring support services
- 2% are people with sensory impairments
- 12% are people with learning disabilities
- 4% are people with mental health problems or alcohol/drug problems
- 27% are carers.

There are estimated to be 76,000 personal assistants funded through direct payments.

While there is no definitive data on the size and shape of the PA workforce, research completed earlier this year suggests most are female, white, over 25 years old, work less than 15 hours a week and are in their first PA role. Just under half have a combined household income of £15k or less. About half are previously known to their employers and a significant proportion have been carers for a friend or relative.

Activities commonly undertaken by PAs include:

- personal care
- support for independent living (housework, shopping, driving, paying bills etc.)
- providing massage/exercises to improve mobility and comfort
- assisting with social activities, work and/or education.

Regarding conditions of work, it appears that PAs typically

- experience higher job satisfaction and less stress than other care workers
- work unsocial hours for low wages
- perceive themselves as overworked and underpaid
- lack benefits standard in other sectors (including some parts of social care), such as annual leave beyond the statutory minimum, sick pay higher than Statutory Sick Pay, occupational pension provision.

Skills issues for direct employers

Studies found that skills needs for direct employers related to recruiting and employing PAs. Even direct employers who appear confident are likely to benefit from more support than they currently receive. Learning needs cited by direct employers include general management skills such as planning, decision-making, book-keeping, time management, personnel management and employment law. Managing issues of employee competence and capability is another area of significant need.

Employer attitudes to the skills needs and development of PAs

Employers recruit PAs for friendliness and flexibility rather than skills or experience, and are responsible for very little of the training reported by PAs. The majority of direct employers see no need for further training for PAs. Even where PAs identify learning needs in order to become fully proficient, their employers tend not to recognise those needs. Direct employers are typically unwilling to fund training, citing high cost and/or the belief that they are not responsible for the training and development of their PA.

PA attitudes to skills and development

Current research suggests PAs tend to value training and development. Almost all saw training as useful and just under half considered it essential. Reported needs tended to relate to occupational tasks such as moving and handling.

Services that currently support skills

Employers lack awareness of where to access support and funding for training (for both themselves and their PAs). The help direct employers do receive tends to relate to financial and legal issues. That help typically comes either from a friend or relative, the local authority or from a peer support group.

There was very little evidence of any support services at all for PAs.

Almost a quarter of the PAs who report planning to leave PA work within five years give the lack of training and career development opportunities as their reason.

Communication and number skills issues

There is little explicit reference in current personalisation research to communication and number skills. A minority of employers reported communication-related difficulties, including language barriers at

recruitment, and a few had arranged communication-related training, including training in IT skills, 'people skills' and 'communication skills'.

Core documents produced for the proposed social care Skills Academy list the top three generic skills required by the majority of the social care workforce as:

- literacy, language and numeracy skills
- the knowledge and skills outlined in the Common Induction Standards, and
- communication and inter-personal skills.

Direct employers are said to need "generic business skills, management skills and the skills to assess, plan and manage their own care needs".

The communication-related learning needs cited by PAs appear to refer to specialist communication skills including sign language, BSL and communicating with people with learning difficulties.

One piece of work that does directly link communication and number skills to the personalisation agenda is the NIACE-led 'Is it for me?' direct payments project, funded by the Department of Health and three LSC regions. The project has piloted learning on direct payments for people who use mental health services. The learning is linked to the Skills for Life Curriculum and aims to help participants develop the skills they need to access and manage direct payments.

Project interim findings include:

- demand for learning on direct payments from mental health service users
- communication and number skills needs among participants
- little or no awareness of, and in some cases a reluctance to engage with, Skills for Life issues among mental health providers.

Having found that participants with Skills for Life needs were confident users of web tools such as Facebook and Youtube, the project has made its learning materials available online.

More general research into adult literacy and numeracy levels indicates that some 20% of people lack literacy and/or numeracy skills, but that individuals tend not to acknowledge poor skills. There is no reason to suppose this will not apply to both direct employers and PAs. It is also likely that there will be English language needs among both groups.

Generally, skills are poorest in deprived areas and among older people. This would suggest that as the number of direct employers grows, communication and number skills needs will become more and more of an issue.

Sectoral views

General concerns identified by interviewees

Experts expressed concern regarding resources for personalisation and the tension between achieving cost-savings through individual budgets and providing high-quality support services for direct employers and their PAs. Concerns were also expressed about the shortage of care workers and the casualisation of the PA workforce, not least in relation to training and quality assurance.

Key roles and relationships

Roles identified by the experts included people who use services, direct employers, personal assistants (PAs), intermediaries (including peer-led organisations), private providers/agencies (including micro-providers) and local authorities. The central relationships were identified as those of the direct employer and the personal assistant; and the local authority, direct employer and the personal assistant.

Skills needs and skill development

Interviewees identified skills needs relating to:

- the employment relationship between PA and direct employer (direct employers, PAs)
- the bureaucracy around individual budgets (direct employers)
- employment practice (social workers, direct employers, PAs)
- English language skills (PAs, direct employers)
- communication (direct employers, PAs, peer support organisations, micro-providers)
- running a business (micro-providers).

The current lack of workforce/quality standards for PAs and of dedicated resources for PA training were also noted.

Relevance of SISCO

The experts considered that SISCO tools, and in particular its Skills Checks, have potential to support direct employers, PAs, user-led intermediary groups, agencies and micro-providers. The current presentation of the tools (including both style and content) should be revised in consultation with the intended users.

Views of people who use services

General concerns identified by direct employers

Concerns identified included difficulties in:

- recruiting PAs
- dealing with the system that manages individual budgets, including the bureaucratic demands of different funding streams (e.g. Direct Payments and Access to Work)
- matching care packages to funding/support packages
- meeting care needs that evolve, requiring new skills and qualities from PAs, possibly leading to the need to recruit different PAs.

Key roles and relationships

Beyond the direct employer, their personal assistant and the local authority (as the manager of the funding system), informants identified the importance of suppliers of guidance.

Skills needs and skill development

Areas where direct employers needed knowledge and skills include:

- recruitment
- payroll
- bureaucracy associated with funding
- financial management
- accessing support.

Regarding PA skills, direct employers consulted were sceptical of qualifications as predictors of performance and had no history of using workforce standards or codes of practice. Informants reported assessing their PAs informally against their own tacit criteria. They did however note that they would expect their PAs to have at least functional literacy and also drew attention to the value of internet literacy for online tasks such as renewing car tax.

Informants identified the relationship between direct employer and PA as the key arena for communication skills. They noted also that a constructive relationship includes dialogue between direct employer and PA, facilitated by communication skills and care knowledge on the part of both.

Number skills would be useful in relation to both direct employer and PA in employment-related areas such as budgets, timesheets, payroll requirements, holiday hours, wages and payslips; also handling money, dealing with medication, time-keeping, and dealing with numerical information in e.g. bus timetables.

Relevance of SISCO

Direct employers responded positively to the SISCO website and its resources, characterising SISCO as friendly, easy-to-access and effective. Despite being averse to testing at recruitment (for fear of putting applicants off), informants felt SISCO Skills Checks offered valuable support to address important issues.

While noting that the website's language would need to be appropriately revised for direct employers and PAs, informants felt SISCO could help direct employers better understand themselves as employers. Informants made a number of practical suggestions as to how SISCO might be presented for direct employers, and stressed the importance of involving direct employers and personal assistants in any further development of SISCO for direct employers.

Existing web resources

While there are many web resources relating to personalisation and self-directed support, the majority have a policy orientation and/or are aimed at local authorities. Relatively few offer practical skills support for either the direct employer or the PA. Where practical content is offered, technical, design and editorial standards are of a variable standard. The NIACE-led direct payments project is making some learning resources available online.

Conclusions

The number of direct employers and PAs, already estimated at around 200,000, is set to expand considerably in the immediate future. A significant proportion (perhaps one in five) is likely to lack functional communication and/or number skills. While some multilingual guidance is available, there is virtually no other support for communication and number skills within current personalisation resources. Nor, with the exception of the NIACE-led project, does there appear to have been consideration of how limited basic skills might impact on direct employers and PAs.

Support needs of direct employers

There is general agreement that direct employers need more support in a range of areas. Communication and/or number skills are relevant to many of these areas, including:

- dealing with the bureaucracy associated with direct payments

- recruiting and selecting PAs
- managing the employment of PAs
- establishing and maintaining an appropriate relationship with a personal assistant
- selecting and purchasing services from providers.

Support needs of PA-employees and micro-providers

At the moment, PAs are typically white females, aged over 25, from a low income household, working part-time and without relevant qualifications. Skills for Life and care sector research suggest they are also likely to lack functional communication and/or number skills. The expansion of direct employment makes it likely that many more people who lack communication and number skills are likely to join the PA workforce, including significant numbers of people who speak English as an additional language.

PAs without the communication and number skills their roles require, working for direct employers who may also lack those skills, pose obvious risks to safety and quality across a range of tasks and also threaten the 'care dialogue' between PA and employer.

Similar issues apply to micro-providers, who may be providing a wider range of services, including specialist services. Micro-providers, though, are responsible for their own skills. It is not clear who is responsible for the skills of the PA.

Access to skills development for direct employers, PAs and micro-providers

There is limited support available to direct employers and generally it does not address communication and number skills.

Micro-providers may have access to a wider range of training, including Skills for Life training, but must both recognise their own need for it and be able to afford it.

PAs seem to be least-well supported. Despite evidence that they are eager to develop their skills, their options seem limited. PAs lack the resources to fund their own training. Direct employers are reluctant to train PAs. Where an employer is supportive of training, practical problems make it difficult.

The proposed Social Care Skills Academy plans to offer personalised care programmes, including a 'new small employer programme'. It identifies the skills needs of direct employers as 'generic business skills, management skills and the skills to assess, plan and manage their own care needs'. It lists communication and number skills as one of the key areas of need within social care generally.

Issues arising in relation to communication and number skills

The risks that poor literacy, English language and numeracy skills pose in SISCO's present context – regulated care services provided by employer-organisations – are likely to be magnified as personalisation moves care services beyond current quality assurance mechanisms. Not only do direct employers lack the resources available to employer-organisations to mitigate these risks, they appear less likely to identify the risks in the first place (e.g. recruiting for personality not skills). The likelihood that significant numbers of direct employers themselves will lack communication and number skills is another complicating factor. Care commissioners may also lack awareness of communication and number skills issues.

Beyond the issue of risk management, it is also worth noting the issue of skills development. However limited the opportunities may be for employees of care providers to develop their communication and number skills, the opportunities for PAs are likely to be more limited still.

Relevance of SISCO to direct employers, PAs and micro-providers

SISCO highlights the importance of communication and number skills to those involved in the delivery of care services and helps them identify, assess and manage the issues that arise from limited communication and number skills.

The sectoral experts, direct employers and PAs consulted felt SISCO's support for the effective application of communication and number skills was of relevance and value to direct employers, personal assistants and micro-providers.

The other aspect of SISCO that appears to be attractive to direct employers is its emphasis on empowering users to make their own, informed decisions about skills needs, based on local circumstances. The direct employers consulted saw this open-ended, user-centred approach as being consistent with the essential aims of personalisation.

This flexibility in the SISCO approach appears to be equally attractive to micro-providers.

Recommendations

At the moment, despite evidence of need, there is virtually no support for the communication and number skills of direct employers or PAs. SISCO/Care Skillsbase is currently the sector's main support for communication and number skills. It may offer a cost-effective way of reaching the very large number of widely distributed employers that individual budgets are intended to create. Building on SISCO/Care Skillsbase would also enable the sector to deliver a consistent message to different types of employers. The likelihood that many personal assistants will move between direct employers and care provider organisations will only increase the value of such consistency.

The recommendations below outline a possible shape and approach for a repurposed product to address the communication and number skills issues posed by personalisation.

- The target users of the products/services should be direct employers.
- Development methodology should be user-centred.
- Delivery format should be both web and print-based.
- Core functions should be more narrowly focused on supporting direct employers to manage skills issues.
- Of the current SISCO/CareSkillsbase tools, Skills Checks should be repurposed and Manage Skills resources should be revised.
- Project structure: identify potential partners from full range of stakeholders, and investigate fit with other care sector skills initiatives such as the planned care sector Skills Academy.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Skills for Care and the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) have been supporting a programme of work addressing communication and number skills in the care workforce since 2006. The principal output is a website, currently known as SISCo (www.sisco.org.uk), to be renamed Care Skillsbase (www.scie-careskillsbase.org.uk) in late 2008. The website provides guidance and activities to help employers identify, assess and take action on communication and number skills issues within the care workforce.

The principal target users for the current SISCo/Care Skillsbase tools are employers in mainstream care in England, who provide residential, day care and home care services to people with a range of different support needs. The tools are also proving useful to learning providers, NVQ assessors and skills intermediaries such as skills brokers.

1.2 Rationale for this research

Social care is undergoing a major policy shift, towards a goal broadly termed personalisation. The aim is to give people choice and control over the services they receive. One of the principal elements of this shift is a change in how services are purchased. Instead of local authorities purchasing services on behalf of a service user, the person using the service will be allocated an 'individual budget' or 'personal budget'. They will then be able to decide how that budget should be used to support them. Some, or all, of these budgets can be received as a 'direct payment', which the person uses to purchase their own care. Often, the person uses the money to actually employ someone to provide care services. This shift therefore represents the beginning of a major change in the nature of care employers.

In spring 2008 Skills for Care asked the SISCo/Care Skillsbase team to undertake some initial research into whether the SISCo/Care Skillsbase web tools might have utility for people who directly employ others to provide care services for them.

1.3 Scope

Direct payments were introduced in 1997. Direct payments enable people who use services to become employers, and are therefore the main subject of this review, rather than individual or personal budgets.

For the purposes of this report we have referred to the person using the services as the 'direct employer' and the person they employ to provide the services as the 'personal assistant' or 'PA'.

Our research focuses on the skills issues that arise for direct employers, PAs and other stakeholders. In particular it focuses on the need for communication and number skills and the relevance of the SISCo/Care Skillsbase web tools as personalisation gathers pace.

Our approach is exploratory and uses a mix of desk research and expert interviews. The expert interviews cover both stakeholder organisations and individuals who use services and either already employ PAs or anticipate doing so.

The following individuals were consulted:

- Sue Bott: National Centres for Independent Living

- Members of Expert Voices Eastern (EVE) group (Cambridge)¹
- Nick Johnson: Social Care Association
- Jo Lenham, Richard Humphries: Social Care Institute for Excellence
- Sian Lockwood: Chief Executive National Association for Adult Placement Services² and lead on DH-funded research on micro-providers
- Helga Pile: Unison
- Rachel Porter: Skills for Care
- Rachel Richardson-Wright and Nicola Jones: Individual budgets team at Essex County Council
- Jim Thomas: Skills for Care

A semi-structured interview schedule was used as the basis for telephone and face to face interviews and focus group scripts. See Appendices 1 and 2 for details of scripts.

2. Findings

2.1 Desk research findings

There is academic, policy and grey literature on the general topics of personalisation, self-directed support and individual and personal budgets. Most focuses on user satisfaction and/or policy issues (SCIE 2007). Research into the employer/employee interaction in the context of direct payments or of individual budgets more generally is relatively scarce. However, a small number of key references have provided insights into our research question:

- *Employment Aspects and Workforce Implications of Direct Payments* (IFF Research for Skills for Care 2008)
- *Creating and Supporting an Informed Employer and Employee Relationship within the Self-directed Support Sector* (SPAEN/Unison 2008)
- *Review of Self-directed Support in Scotland* (Homer and Gilder for Scottish Government 2008)
- 'Choice, control and individual budgets: emerging themes' (SCIE 2007)
- 'Learning and development questionnaire' (Change Consultancy for Skills for Care Eastern in press)

a. Who are the current direct employers?

As of March 2008, the Commission for Social Care Inspection estimates there are 73,500 people who use services in receipt of direct payments in England who employ personal assistants.³ This represents a 35% increase on the previous year. On average, an employer employs just over two PAs at any one time using direct payments.

Of those currently using direct payments:

¹ Our thanks to Tony Smith and Cathy Neat for facilitating the EVE consultations

² NAAPS is a UK charity which represents the interests of all those involved in Shared Lives (formerly Adult Placement), other Small Community Services and Homeshare and promotes high standards of practice. <http://www.naaps.co.uk/>

³ This includes people who employ PAs from agencies, from micro-providers and self-employed PAs.

- 30% are physically disabled people and those with long-term illness
 - 24% are older people requiring support services
 - 2% are people with sensory impairments
 - 12% are people with learning disabilities
 - 4% are people with mental health problems or alcohol/drug problems
 - 27% are carers.
- (IFF Research 2008)

Clearly the number of people employing PAs will increase as personalisation of services is fully implemented and individual budgets are extended in all local authorities.

b. Who are the current employees?

There are estimated to be 76,000 personal assistants whose employment is funded through direct payments. There is no definitive data on the size and shape of the PA workforce. The IFF research for Skills for Care (2008), using a sample of 486 PAs, is the most comprehensive to date.

Demographics

- 87% of PAs are female
 - 92% are white
 - 44% have a combined household income of £15k or less
 - 13% are under 25 years of age
 - 50% were previously known to their employers.
- (IFF Research 2008)

Work experience and qualifications

- 60% have experience of working in the care sector; 40% of these in residential care and 32% in domiciliary care
 - 20% have experience of working in hospitals
 - 42% have health and social care qualifications; 12% have NVQ level 2, 6% have level 3
 - 33% had no previous paid employment providing care
 - 40% have jobs outside their PA roles in which they work more hours
 - 25% have another paid role within social care
 - 70% are in their first PA role
 - 40% have been or are unpaid carers for a friend or relative.
- (IFF Research 2008)

Pay and work activities

- The average hourly wage is £7.60.
 - Approximately 8% of PAs earn below the minimum wage of £5.52/hr.
 - The average number of hours worked per week is 14; most PAs have variable hours.
 - 38% of PAs work fewer than 8 hours a week.
- (IFF Research 2008)

The most common support needs of older employers arise from dementia or Alzheimer's disease; amongst adults the common support needs arise from physical disabilities. PAs supporting children and

young adults are more likely to be assisting individuals with learning disabilities and emotional problems. The most common activities undertaken by PAs include:

- personal care, including
- washing, bathing, dressing
- help with getting to and using the toilet
- help with getting into and out of bed and chairs
- help with eating and drinking
- giving medicine, other medical tasks
- cooking and preparing food
- cleaning and housework
- providing massage/exercises to improve mobility and comfort
- shopping
- assisting with medical visits
- assisting with meeting people and socialising
- leisure activities
- driving/getting around/visiting friends
- banking/paying bills/collecting pension/benefits
- assisting with work or education.

(IFF Research 2008)

Conditions of work

In the SPAEN/Unison research (2008), “the majority of employees did not have access to the conditions of employment common in other sectors including access to annual leave beyond the statutory minimum, sick pay higher than SSP. Most employees were not paying into a pension fund.”

According to the SCIE research briefing, most research shows that:

“Throughout the world, PAs are often on low wages... may work unsocial hours, have little in the way of a job description and receive very little support in what can be a demanding job. A recent survey in Staffordshire found a mixed picture: the pay and conditions of PAs were poorer than those of home care workers employed by the local authority, but they reported higher job satisfaction and less stress.” (SCIE 2007)

The IFF (2008) research reported that, “the vast majority of PAs are happy in their role, finding the work enjoyable and rewarding...However, around one-third feel they are not paid enough, and one-fifth feel they work too many hours.”

c. What are the skills issues?

For direct employers

A common theme in the research is the need for support for individual budget holders as they become direct employers:

“Becoming an employer was a major challenge for all [self-directed support] clients... The existence of an effective support service providing support to clients in their employer role was key to the success of self-directed support (SDS).” (Homer and Gilder 2008)

“Studies... have all found that difficulties in finding personal assistants and anxieties about organising their employment have been high on recipients’ lists of challenges.” (SCIE 2007)

The IFF research found that the majority of employers were ‘generally confident’ about taking on the role of employer, but the researchers noted that this confidence was related to the length of time spent in the employer role. Those new to the role, and those from specific groups such as older people, were less confident. The authors also point out that confidence does not necessarily imply expertise:

“Responses to the questions asked about approaches to recruitment and employment of personal assistants do perhaps indicate that employers would benefit from more guidance in this area than they are currently getting.” (IFF 2008)

According to research by Skills for Care Eastern (2008), 40% of the 77 employers interviewed identified a current or future learning/development need. Most often cited are general management skills including planning, decision-making, book-keeping, time management, personnel management and employment law. Employers also cited their own learning needs in the care-specific areas of lifting and handling and management of conditions such as multiple sclerosis.

In the SPAEN/Unison research, “A significant minority of employers expressed difficulty in knowing how to deal with managing issues of employee competency and capability.”

For PAs

According to the IFF research, “employers tend to value personality traits over proven skills and experience.” Only 10% of the IFF sample specified qualifications when recruiting, and 20% specified previous experience. The key attributes employers are looking for are general friendliness and flexibility around hours and work tasks. PAs themselves reported needing to develop certain skills in order to become fully proficient, most particularly in the areas of administering medication, moving and handling and personal care.

Employers were less likely to note these as problems areas, and are reported as generally unwilling to fund training, citing high cost or in some cases feeling that training and development of their employee is not their responsibility.

See Appendix 3 for tabular presentation of attributes and skills valued by employers and PAs.

Ninety-nine percent of PAs feel that training is useful for working as a PA, and 42% say it is essential. Forty-four percent reported having previous training relevant to their work. Of these, the majority focus on practical skills: 69% report training in moving and handling and 54% training in health and safety. Only 5% report training in people skills (details unspecified) and 5% training in communication (details unspecified).

Only a small proportion of the training undertaken by PAs is a result of investment and impetus on the part of direct employers. 84% of employers felt that no further training was necessary for their PAs.

See Appendix 4 for tabular presentation of PA skills that employers and PAs think useful.

According to the Skills for Care Eastern research (2008), 42% of 122 PAs reported a current or future learning/development need. Moving and handling was the most frequently cited, followed by 'learning and development' (detail unspecified), washing, training to work with children with disabilities and specialist communication skills (BSL, Makaton).

d. What services currently support skills?

According to the SPAEN/Unison research (2008), "There was a lack of awareness amongst employers of where to access support on training and funding for training. This includes training for themselves and their employees." Homer and Gilder's report for the Scottish Government (2008) suggests: "Becoming an employer was a major challenge for all SDS clients, and while the available support was greatly valued, more needs to be done to improve access to PA employer training and provide more personalised client support."

Of the direct employers in the IFF research, 42% had received some help in the financial and legal issues pertaining to ongoing employment of PAs. Of these, 36% received help from their local authority, 26% from a Direct Payments support group, 19% from relative or friend, 6% from an accountant.

Appendix 5 shows in tabular form the areas direct employers felt support services should cover.

According to the research reviewed, support services for the PAs appear to be very scarce. In the IFF research, 23% of PAs who are planning to leave PA work within 5 years cite lack of training and career development opportunities as the reason.

e. Communication and number skills issues

Current research makes very little explicit reference to communication and number skills or Skills for Life. However, of the 61% of DEs recruiting someone they did not previously know who reported difficulties in recruitment, 11% specify 'language barrier' as a reason (ranked 11th out of 12 types of difficulty identified).

Of the 7% of employers who have arranged training for their PAs, around 10% arranged IT training, 7% training in 'people skills' (unspecified) and 4% 'communication' training (unspecified).

In the Skills for Care Eastern research, 'communication skills' are in the top five learning needs identified by PAs themselves – this seems to refer to specialist communication skills including sign language, BSL and communicating with people with learning difficulties.

We can also extrapolate from previous research on the general population and on the care workforce. Figures indicate at least 20% of the current care workforce has literacy and numeracy skills below level 2.⁴ It is also estimated that 20% of the workforce has training needs in English for speakers of other languages.

⁴ Eborall, C. (2004) *Basic Skills for Social Care Workers* TopssEngland; see also DfES (2003) *The Skills for Life Survey: A National Needs and Impact Survey of Literacy, Numeracy and IT Skills* and Health and social care sub-sample by Aldridge, F. (2004) *NHSU Briefing Paper on The Skills for Life Survey*qNIACE

Core documents produced for the proposed Social Care Skills Academy⁵ include a note of the skills requirements for the social care workforce. Referencing the June 2008 Skills for Care report on the adult social care workforce⁶, the note lists:

- literacy, language and numeracy skills
- the knowledge and skills outlined in the Common Induction Standards, and
- communication and inter-personal skills

as the top three generic skills required by the majority of the workforce. (The note goes on to state that 'Direct employers need generic business skills, management skills and the skills to assess, plan and manage their own care needs.')

The DfES national Skills for Life survey in 2003 found that across England as a whole:

- in literacy, 16.5% of adults test below Level 1, 56% below Level 2
- in numeracy 21% test below Level 1

It also revealed that individuals tend not to acknowledge poor skills and that skills are typically poorest in deprived areas and among older people. This would suggest that as individual budgets and direct payments become more widespread, Skills for Life needs will become more and more of an issue.

The NIACE-led 'Is it for me?' Direct Payments project was the only piece of work identified that directly linked literacy, English language and numeracy skills to the personalisation agenda. This pilot project is funded over a two-year period (2007-09) by the Department of Health (Section 64) and three LSC regions (London, South West and East of England), to deliver a two-hour introductory session ('Is it for me?') followed by a short course ('I'll give it a go') promoting the availability of Direct Payments to people who use mental health services. The 10 week course is linked to the Skills for Life Curriculum and aims to help participants develop the skills they need to access and manage direct payments.

The project reports the following interim findings:

- demand from mental health service users for both the introductory session and the short course
- clear evidence of Skills for Life needs (including literacy, English language and numeracy needs) among course participants
- little or no awareness of, and in some cases a reluctance to engage with, Skills for Life issues among mental health providers, including NHS trusts, voluntary and community organisations
- some reluctance among mental health trusts to engage with direct payments
- clear evidence that participation on the course enabled people who use mental health services to better access and manage direct payments and
- recognition by commissioners and direct payments managers of the value of the course.

Of particular additional interest for this piece of research, the project has identified e-learning as a viable and potentially valuable delivery mode. Having found that typically course participants with Skills for Life needs were confident users of web tools such as Facebook and Youtube, the project has made its learning materials available through the NIACE Moodle site.⁷

2.2 Sectoral views

⁵ <http://www.skillsacademyforsocialcare.org.uk/documents.asp> accessed 6 October 2008

⁶ Skills for Care (2008) *State of adult social care workforce, 2008* (Workforce data for 2006/7)

⁷ More information on the project is available at www.niace.org.uk/mentalhealth/projects/directpayments

This section presents findings from interviews with experts within the sector.

a. General concerns identified by interviewees

Summary

General concerns regarding personalisation centred on resources and the tension between achieving cost-savings through individual budgets and providing high-quality support services for direct employers and their personal assistants. Concerns were also expressed about the shortage of care workers and the casualisation of the PA workforce, not least in relation to training and quality assurance.

Helga Pile, Unison

Funding, particularly with the promotion of individual budgets as a route to cost savings, is the principal concern. Local authorities may seek to achieve cost savings by using individual budgets to reduce their employment costs.

Associated concerns included the casualisation of a significant element of the social care workforce and the need to invest in good quality support services for individual budget holding employers, particularly in respect of:

- employment law
- employer's responsibilities
- information about providers of services (i.e. their quality and what else is known about them).

There is also potential for individual budgets to impact negatively on local authority services and so on the people who use them, particularly people who choose not to become individual budget holders.

Sue Bott, NCIL

Resources and equity are the main concerns. Against a background of insufficient resources, personalisation is likely to create winners and losers with a possible reduction in resources for people aged over 65 years.

Nick Johnson, SCA

Scaling up, with its tendency towards standardised approaches and quick fixes (e.g. for social workers), may prove problematic. Local authorities are already unable to monitor services for people in receipt of direct payments effectively. The loss of today's economies of scale in the sector will lead to increased costs, raising the issue of how to recover/reduce those costs. There is a current shortage of care workers and consequently a question as to where the PAs needed for personalisation will come from. Migrant workers and informal carers are the two most likely sources. Quality assurance of PAs will be an issue. Technology can help monitor PAs, but personal attributes and issues such as trust and confidence are key to successful care.

Richard Humphries, for SCIE

The proposed changes are huge (part of the transformational agenda expressed in the Putting People First concordat) and our current state of knowledge is insufficient; the IBSEN project (National evaluation of the Individual Budgets Pilot Projects) will help to identify the issues.

Jim Thomas, Skills for Care

There is a potential problem at the interface between social care and NHS Trusts, where the medical model and the social model clash, as well as different approaches to funding. Also, direct payment support services are sometimes just a different version of home care. There needs to be a paradigm shift to run these services from a business perspective.

Rachel Porter, Skills for Care

There are gaps in local authorities' support for direct employers. Conforming to employment legislation is the issue most likely to concern direct employers. The General Social Care Council are currently consulting on registration for PAs.

Essex individual budget holder team (Rachel Richardson-Wright and Nicola Jones)

There is a lack of support for individual budget holders to function effectively as employers. The quality of their care may depend on this ability. The boundaries between employer and employee are complex and particular sensitivities arise from such a close working relationship and from services most often being provided in the individual's own home.

Sian Lockwood, NAAPS

Micro-providers⁸ have an important role to play in supporting personalisation, but are declining in number, partly due to lack of support and the burden of bureaucracy. Standards such as the Common Induction Standards (CIS) may be difficult for micro-providers to meet. More general concerns include the potential vulnerability of both workers and employers arising from the fragmentation of individual budgets. Current commissioning practice and economies of scale may also present barriers to personalisation.

b. Key roles and relationships

Summary

Roles identified include people who use services, direct employers, personal assistants (PAs), intermediaries (including peer-led organisations), private providers/agencies (including micro-providers) and local authorities. The central relationships were identified as those of the direct employer and the personal assistant; and the local authority, direct employer and the personal assistant.

Helga Pile, Unison

Personal assistants can expect to undertake a wider range of work than domiciliary care workers. Bearing this in mind, and given the potential casualisation of these workers, entitlement and access to training may become an issue. Unison is pro the registration of care workers, provided it brings support and protection to workers, including requirements and entitlements to training and skills. The Swedish experience of personalisation suggests that clarity around the remit of the PA may be an ongoing issue (i.e. defining what falls within the PA's remit and how the PA should respond to requests outside it). A Unison project in Scotland has also highlighted issues around the PA's relationship not just to the individual budget holder who is employing them, but also to that person's family and advocates, in particular how the PA should respond to instructions from family and advocates that countermand those of their employer. Personal advocates will often be drawn from the direct employer's family, but may also be professional brokers, analogous to independent financial advisors; their regulation and

⁸ NAAPS defines micro-providers as small, flexible and person-centred organisations, based in local communities, that employ five individuals or less. See www.naaps.co.uk/en/small-community-services/?PHPSESSID=79d102dc369dbc9c35f83a54059d5c11

training is an issue of concern. Private providers/agencies may be discouraged from entering this market on account of slim margins.

Sue Bott, NCIL

The central objective of individual budgets is that, through becoming an employer, the person who uses services will be in control of their relationship with the person providing services. Due to the range and variety of caring requirements, employers prefer PAs with no preconceptions as to what 'caring' means; that way the employer can more easily communicate their own requirements to the person they employ. People who use services are often quite nervous of having a PA and so not assertive enough in communicating their requirements at the beginning of the employment relationship. Working conditions for PAs are a concern. Levels of pay for personal assistants are very low. This can lead employers to recruit people whose limited English restricts their access to better-paid employment. Budget holders may seek to recruit overseas via agencies in countries such as South Africa. Another source of PAs is foreign students wishing to visit the UK to improve their English. Local authority social workers typically don't make good intermediaries because they do not understand what it means to be an employer. Staffing agencies may help people who use services to cope with employment issues (i.e. by taking on the employer role). Whatever the arrangement, good local support services will be key.

Nick Johnson, SCA

The key relationships are between people who use services, their PAs, agencies, and local authorities as monitors.

Richard Humphries, for SCIE

Personalisation is not just about individual budgets. It will affect social care workers in traditional settings too. Everyone working in social care needs to think about how they can best meet the individual needs of people they are working with, rather than just expect them to fit into the routines of the service, e.g. care homes giving residents a choice about mealtimes and the ability to book a table. The aim is to establish a culture of individualisation that is needs-led. Examples of where existing posts are directly affected by personalisation include a care home setting up an outreach or floating support team to help people who live nearby; and care workers who wish to change jobs and become a personal assistant to someone on direct payments.

Jim Thomas, Skills for Care

Personalisation and individual budgets will enhance the role of the social worker. The typical employer will be from all client groups except older people – it will be a long time before everyone is able to access all the benefits of self-directed services.

Physically disabled people, people with learning disabilities and people with mental health problems will all use them.

The typical employee will be at least level 3 and will be better educated and more flexible than the current care worker. The stakeholder/supporting agencies should be business enterprise services such as Businesslink. The direct employer is effectively a small start-up business and support services should speak to them in that language. This will change the whole dynamic and how the direct employer is perceived, i.e. as contributor to the community because they are an employer.

Rachel Porter, Skills for Care

The direct employer, the employee and the local authority are the key roles.

Essex individual budget holder team (Rachel Richardson-Wright and Nicola Jones)

The typical employer in the Essex pilot was someone who was already on direct payments.⁹ Of those, 60% are adults with physical disabilities; 30% are people with a learning disability. Significant intermediaries in Essex include peer-led organisations such as the Liberation Partnership, which provide users moving into self-directed services with support and mentoring to help them plan their services. From there, if users decide they want to use monies to employ someone, they go to Essex Independent Living Advocacy, who provide employment advice and support. After that they may choose to use Essex PASS (Essex Personal Assistance Support Service), an organisation whose main role is to assist disabled people employ PAs, both directly and through agencies. PASS provides payroll services and also training for the PA and the service user employer. (See section 2.4 on existing web resources for more on these services.)

Sian Lockwood, NAAPS

Micro-providers play a key role which is often overlooked: they are often single entrepreneurs providing a service to multiple individuals.

c. Skills needs and skill development

Summary

Skills needs identified include:

- skills required to sustain the employment relationship between PA and individual budget holder employer, including communication skills
- skills needed to enable the individual budget holder employer to cope with the bureaucracy around individual budgets
- knowledge and skills for social workers related to employment practice
- English language for PAs (and perhaps individual budget holder employers)
- communication skills for peer support organisations and micro-providers, who are also likely to benefit from business support.

Also commented on was the current lack of any workforce/quality standards for PAs and the lack of dedicated resources for PA training.

Helga Pile, Unison

Direct employers and their PAs will benefit from skills and knowledge related to:

- the formalisation of the employment relationship
- working outside the areas specified in a job description
- administering medicine
- confidentiality
- responding to conflicting demands (e.g. countermanding instructions given by family and/or advocates).

With the expected sharp increase in the numbers of direct employers, estimates of skill levels in the general population become relevant. According to the DfES's 2003 national Skills for Life survey, a

⁹ Essex had 2500 people receiving direct payments, a relatively large number, at the time of its IB pilot. The IB pilot involved 150 of these DP holders.

substantial number of individual budget holders as well as PAs may lack functional literacy and numeracy.

Sue Bott, NCIL

There are currently no workforce standards for PAs, and NCIL tends to be sceptical of workforce standards in general. Standards may conflict with giving primacy to individual circumstances; they may be of little practical value and may even serve to obscure the actual quality of care a person is receiving. Disabled people are sceptical of NVQs, due partly to feeling they were not consulted during the development of NVQs. ESOL support has relevance; however there is little scope for training within present arrangements. Regarding intermediaries: local authority social workers typically lack skills and knowledge relating to employment law and people management, including:

- pay negotiation
- insurance
- employee rights (e.g. maternity pay and ensuring the pregnant worker is not put at risk, terminating a contract, redundancy payments)
- health and safety
- risk management
- cover procedures – for example what happens to the PA when the employer goes into hospital
- conflict management.

Nick Johnson, SCA

Direct payments allow eight hours for induction. PAs are subject to no regulation or training requirements. Priority skill areas include ESOL, interpersonal skills and information processing.

Richard Humphries, for SCIE

Personalisation will bring skills needs for people inducted into existing jobs and roles (e.g. care workers in residential homes, social workers) to enable those post-holders to deliver services in a more personalised way. Skills needs will also arise from modifications to those jobs as a result of personalisation e.g. social workers becoming brokers. There will also be skills needs associated with entirely new jobs and roles e.g. directly employed personal assistants. There will be different layers of issues around employment status, health and safety, public liability, regulation, safeguarding etc.

Jim Thomas, Skills for Care

The skills the direct employer needs are business skills, negotiating skills. Instead of being supported in developing a 'care plan', they should be supported in developing what is effectively a business plan. Understanding what skills they need recruits to have, identifying cost issues.

Rachel Porter, Skills for Care

There is no inspection regime so no incentive to look at existing care standards and there is a great variation in direct employers' knowledge of standards. They may not feel existing care standards (e.g. the CIS) are relevant or easily useable. Direct employers will need knowledge of employment legislation. Many direct employers may not have access to computers. If a direct employer does not have English as first language then they may be more concerned about the PA's skills in the employer's own language than in English. Direct employers are likely to see training as something they deliver to their PA on the job.

Essex individual budget holder team (Rachel Richardson-Wright and Nicola Jones)

Employers need to understand their own needs, and the skills that an effective PA needs; they need the basic financial and business skills required of any effective employer. The PA skill set will vary according to employer needs, but includes a core set of knowledge and skills which could be equated with CIS. Individual budget holders have difficulty dealing with bureaucracy and with budgets, and there is limited support for them. The intermediaries need to be able to support individual budget holders to be good employers, understanding their own business needs and responsibilities as well as understanding care services. Peer-run organisations that are the intermediaries can themselves lack the language skills and number skills needed to deal with care bureaucracy and with employer bureaucracy.

Sian Lockwood, NAAPS

PAs will need tailored training customised to their employer's needs; employers may need some form of leadership and management training. Self-assessment may be useful for both. Micro-providers may need specialised communication skills training (such as Makaton), as well as business support.

d. Relevance of SISCO/Care Skillsbase

Summary

SISCO has potential to support direct employers, PAs, user-led intermediary groups, agencies and micro-providers. The Skills Checks in particular appear useful. The current presentation (including both style and content) would need to be revised and the intended users need to be fully consulted in any revision. The ability of individual budget holder employers to access the web should not be taken for granted.

Helga Pile, Unison

SISCO could provide a valuable resource for both individual budget holders and PAs, helping them address the issues around the working relationship.

Sue Bott, NCIL

SISCO could be useful to employers, but it would need their input. Useful issues to address include managing the conflicts that can arise when employing someone in your own home. Web use among direct employers should not be assumed. Some lack the necessary information to get an internet connection.

Nick Johnson, SCA

Inducting someone as an employer is not SISCO's role; that is the job of organisations such as In Control. However, any of SISCO's products aimed at supporting care in the home will be relevant to the personalisation agenda. Regarding access to the web, partnerships with private companies might help to supply individuals with internet access.

Richard Humphries, for SCIE

SISCO can help employers deliver induction processes that are fully aligned to the personalisation agenda. SISCO can help disseminate sectoral guidance for staff and employers.

Jim Thomas, Skills for Care

The current product's tone would not be appropriate – it needs to speak to direct employers as equals. The hook, though, is the same: individual budget holder employers need to recognise their responsibilities as an employer and 'being a responsible employer means making sure your staff have a

meaningful working life'. Accessibility may also be an issue: will everyone get it if it is a web only service?

Rachel Porter, Skills for Care

The resources could support the skills of the direct employer, or the employee skills, or enable the direct employer and PA to learn together, or enable both to self-assess. There is potential for scenario-based learning, showing people how to bring up communication and number skills issues and what to do about them. It's focusing more on the communication skills of the direct employer. The "select skills checks by job role" option currently offered in SISCO would need to be replaced by something task-based.¹⁰

Essex individual budget holder team (Rachel Richardson-Wright and Nicola Jones)

The language and number skills of direct employers are the first priority, then those of the employee, then those of user-led intermediary groups. Improving communication and number skills can contribute much to the overall well-being of the individual budget holder and PA. In some circumstances training might be paid for by the local authority, if it could be shown to relate directly to an outcome specified in the support plan. SISCO Skills Checks are potentially very useful.

Sian Lockwood, NAAPS

SISCO Skills Checks could in principle be of use for micro-providers, but their communication focus could usefully be wider (e.g. including specialists skills such as Makaton). Self-assessment tools and business support tools would both be useful for micro-providers.

2.3 Views of people who use services

To elicit the views of people who use services as direct employers, we consulted the Expert Voices East group (EVE). Three members of the EVE group volunteered to participate in the consultation. One of the three purchased services on behalf of dependent children; the other two did so on behalf of themselves in connection with physical impairment. One EVE member was accompanied by their PA, who had previous experience of residential care work and union membership. The PA contributed to the focus group discussion. One of the three direct employers also works as a PA and so spoke from experience of both employing and being employed through direct payments.

The results of this small consultation correlated strongly with the desk research findings reported in section 2.1 above.

a. General concerns identified by direct employers

Our informants reported concerns regarding:

- recruiting suitable personal assistants
- the system that manages individual budgets, including the need for persistence and strong self-advocacy to negotiate the system successfully, as well as the time and skills required to cope with paperwork involved

¹⁰ The original pilot version of SISCO did present skills checks by work activity: this was the category least used by the mainstream employers who were SISCO target users.

- coping with the bureaucratic demands of different funding streams (e.g. Direct Payments and Access to Work)
- matching care packages to funding/support packages
- care needs that evolve, requiring new skills and qualities from PAs, possibly leading to the need to recruit different PAs.

Informants noted that local authority staff often had an incomplete understanding of their own policies and procedures, as well as of the support that individual budget holders were entitled to. Informants felt the onus should be on making the system more straightforward, rather than expecting individual budget holders to develop the skills to cope with a complex system.

b. Key roles and relationships

Beyond the direct employer, their personal assistant and the local authority (as the manager of the funding system), informants identified the importance of suppliers of guidance. Their main sources of guidance were local authority support and Business Link. The PA attending the focus group identified Unison as a valuable source of support for care workers, on the basis of previous experience when working in residential care.

c. Skills needs and skill development

Regarding the knowledge and skills needed by the direct employer, informants identified the following general areas:

- recruitment/interviewing processes, techniques and skills, including knowledge of employment law and practices, e.g. CRB checks, holiday entitlement
- payroll systems and services, whether run by the direct employer, the local authority or a private provider of payroll services
- form-filling associated with drawing down funding, including the requirement to use specific terminology in record-keeping
- financial management implicit in being an individual budget holder
- how to access support from a range of sources, including local authorities, brokerages, web sites, peers and peer support groups.

Regarding the knowledge and skills needed by the personal assistant, our informants were sceptical of qualifications as predictors of performance and had no history of using workforce standards or codes of practice. Informants reported assessing their PAs informally against their own tacit criteria.

In relation to communication and number skills, informants identified the relationship between the direct employer and the PA as the key arena for communication skills. They noted that it was important to establish and maintain clear ground rules and boundaries, but also that a constructive relationship would include dialogue between direct employer and personal assistant. Communication skills and care knowledge on the part of both the direct employer and the personal assistant would facilitate this dialogue. The importance of the PA understanding and respecting confidentiality was also noted by our informants.

In terms of written communication skills, informants agreed that they would expect their PAs to have at least functional literacy. While one of our informants identified themselves as dyslexic and reported that their PA's ability to support their written communication was valuable, they also noted that literacy

skills would only be of concern in relation to care tasks. Informants also drew attention to the increasing need to accomplish online tasks, such as renewing car tax online.

Areas where informants thought number skills would be useful included budgets, timesheets, payroll requirements, holiday hours, wages and payslips; also handling money, dealing with medication, time-keeping, and dealing with numerical information in e.g. bus timetables.

d. Relevance of SISCo/Care Skillsbase

Our informants responded positively to the SISCo website and its resources. While noting that the website's language would need to be revised to be appropriate in the context of direct payments and individual budgets, what it offered would be relevant to direct employers and PAs. One informant considered SISCo covers 'all the right things' and characterised it as friendly, easy-to-access and effective. This informant valued SISCo's compare standards tool, and also the regional resources.

Despite being averse to testing at recruitment (for fear of putting applicants off), informants were strongly positive regarding SISCo Skills Checks. Asked to review Skills Check 10 ('Different Ways People Communicate Feelings'), informants commented that the Skills Check offered an excellent way to structure a difficult discussion. The feedback form ensured that the Skills Check could be fed into an induction/probationary period; it also allowed the Skills Check to be treated as an appraisal. It was also good that the Skills Check did not impose 'answers', but left it to users to discuss, allowing different interpretations according to the users' context.

Overall informants felt SISCo could help direct employers better understand themselves as employers.

Informants made a number of practical suggestions as to how SISCo might be presented for direct employers, including, for example, grouping resources under the heading 'support for awkward issues'. They stressed the importance of involving direct employers and personal assistants in any further development of SISCo for direct employers.

2.4 Existing web resources

While there are many web resources relating to personalisation and self-directed support, the majority have a policy orientation and/or are aimed at local authorities. We found relatively few offering practical skills support for either the direct employer or the PA. The majority are services run by and for disabled people. (This review focuses on websites that are open to public access and either have no registration or open registration. There may be other web-based resources offered by local authorities or others that provide this support but are not publicly accessible.)

The local service listed was referenced by the IB team at Essex County Council. Similar types of services are likely to exist in other local authority regions.

Essex coalition for Disabled People

<http://www.ecdp.org.uk>

This organisation runs a number of subsidiary/partner services related to DPs:

- Essex PASS: direct employer support services including payroll support, telephone support, banking service, quarterly returns, job advertising, CRB disclosures

- Training for direct employers: free 4-day employer training course (includes session with ACAS on being a good employer) PA training day (includes role of PA, models of disability), Moving and Handling, First Aid, Food Safety
- PA Register: database of people who wish to seek employment on a permanent or temporary basis as a Personal Assistant
- Direct Payment Support Service: telephone and face-to-face support for direct employers in conjunction with Essex ILA

None of these services is web-based; training offered is face-to-face, and support offered is telephone and face to face.

In Control

<http://in-control.org.uk/home.php>

In Control developed a system of self-directed support with people with learning disabilities. The model they developed is influential across the personalisation agenda for people with all forms of support need. Their model has '7 steps':

1. Self-assessment
2. Plan support
3. Agree the plan
4. Manage individual budget
5. Organise support
6. Live life
7. Review and learn.

The materials provided on the In Control website are mainly in the form of downloadable pdf documents, with some video material¹¹. The documents provide plain English and in some cases 'easy-read' guidance to each of the seven steps, with some additional templates and forms, 'top tips' etc. The guidance on organising support includes a short introduction to developing a person spec and a job description, guidance on recruiting and budgeting. Some of the guidance appears to be aimed at representatives or supporters/family/advocates of the person with learning disability, some seems to be aimed directly at the person themselves.

SDS4me

<http://www.sds4me.org.uk/>

"sds4me provides a wealth of information in a single website and in an accessible format for people who want to make the best of their personal budget and gain control over their lives. sds4me is a user led resource. It facilitates peer support and offers forums enabling people to share expertise, thoughts and advice." [quoted from home page 11/08/08]

The exact provenance of this web service is hard to discern, although it is described as being a partnership with In Control. It is free for individuals with support needs; local authorities and other organizations subscribe (£950 annual subscription). Sds4me offers the following:

- online support planning tools (mainly In Control materials)
- downloadable (Word-based) templates for direct employers for contracts of employment, conditions of service, disciplinary procedures, electronic timesheets, rotas and a 'Good Employer Starter Kit'; templates can be amended and personalised electronically before being printed and used

¹¹ not functioning on the two visits to the site made w/c 11 Aug 08

- other services: online discussion forum (not overly well supported), support plan videos, video guides, carers advice; housing advice; ILF advice; In-Control stories; Easy Guide video; support planning help; useful links; advice on technology; blogs, wikis

This site contains a large volume of practical content. There is also guidance material in a range of languages. The technical, design and editorial standards are of a variable standard. In the majority of instances there are no publication dates, author or copyright attributions. Some resources are direct from organisations such as NCIL or the Rowan Organisation.

NCIL

<http://www.ncil.org.uk>

“National Centre for Independent Living is a national support, advice and consultancy organisation that aims to enable disabled people to be equal citizens with choice, control, rights and full economic, social and cultural lives. This website is designed to be a resource on independent living, direct payments and individual budgets for disabled people and others working in the field who may find it useful.” [quoted from home page 12/08/08]

There are a number of web-based services offered:

- directory of local support services searchable by area and support type
- frequently asked questions section including advice on ‘money and finance’, ‘rights and legal issues’, ‘managing your direct payment and workers’
- discussion forum used by local centres for independent living, individual disabled people and their supporters (open access)
- ‘Employer support kit’ providing quite detailed, text-based guidance under the headings ‘employer and PA relationships’, ‘health and safety, insurance and police checks’, tax office information’, ‘when things do not work out’, ‘recruitment information’ (this section includes downloadable templates: checklists, JDs, application form, rota etc.).

3. Conclusions

Over 200,000 people are already involved in this aspect of the personalisation agenda, either as recipients of direct payments or as personal assistants.¹² With the extension of direct payment, this number will expand considerably.¹³ Given what is known about skills levels in both the general population and the current care workforce, it is reasonable to assume that a significant proportion (perhaps one in five) of direct employers and personal assistants will lack functional communication and/or number skills.¹⁴ We consider the implications for each below.

3.1 Support needs of direct employers

Our research has identified a range of areas where communication and/or number skills are relevant to the support needs of direct employers. These include:

- understanding different funding systems
- negotiating with local authorities and other bodies to tailor appropriate support packages
- understanding their rights and responsibilities as employers
- recruiting and selecting personal assistants
- managing their responsibilities as an employer, including risk management, training and performance management; also planning, decision-making, time management, book-keeping and payroll, arranging holiday cover etc.
- establishing and maintaining an appropriate relationship with a personal assistant, including setting ground rules, dealing with conflict
- selecting and purchasing services from providers.

The direct employers that we consulted stressed the bureaucratic complexities they faced and the need for effective self-advocacy. These informants were confident communicators with experience of the system. Clearly, those with less confidence, communicative ability and experience are likely to find these demands correspondingly more challenging.

There is general agreement that support is needed even for confident direct employers in all the above areas, and general concern that current support arrangements are inadequate.

There is no evidence of any consideration of how a direct employer's literacy or numeracy skills might impact on their effectiveness, though some multi-lingual guidance is available.

The NIACE-led Direct Payments project offers evidence that a significant proportion of people who use services may welcome support for direct payments that factors in issues arising from limited communication and number skills.

3.2 Support needs of PA-employees and micro-providers

¹² Assuming 73,500 recipients of DPs (as at March 2008) and an average of two or more PAs per direct employer

¹³ There is some indication that individual budgets may account for 60% of adult social services budgets by 2011.

¹⁴ Functional levels for basic skills were defined by Leitch as Literacy at Level 1 and numeracy at Entry 3. Depending on circumstances an individual may need higher level literacy and/or numeracy. They are unlikely to be able to function effectively with lower level skills.

Currently, PAs are likely to be white females aged over 25, working part-time, from low income households. Many have prior experience of work in the care sector and a significant minority have experience of working in hospitals; however, two thirds lack relevant qualifications.

Skills for Life research suggests that part-time, female workers in low-skilled, low-paid roles are particularly likely to have literacy and numeracy skills needs.

There is no indication that wages are set to rise for PAs and no indication that applicants for PA posts will be required by regulation to demonstrate functional literacy or numeracy. Indeed, as this workforce grows, it is likely to include more people who lack the skills to secure better-paid employment, including significant numbers of people who speak English as an additional language.

There is, therefore, reason to think that a significant and growing proportion of the PA workforce may lack the communication and number skills their roles require. This poses a number of risks to the personalisation agenda.

Appendix 6 looks at typical job descriptions for PAs from a recruitment website run by people who use services, and analyses the communication and number skills implicit in the tasks outlined.

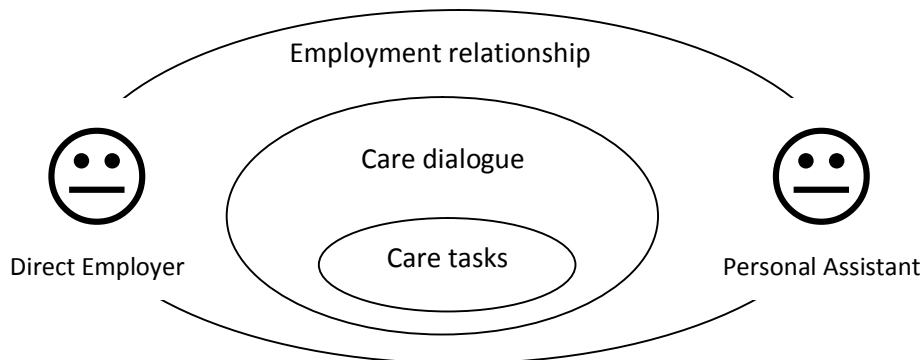
Among the most common activities undertaken by PAs, a number clearly require the application of communication and/or number skills. These include:

- giving medicine and other medical tasks
- cooking and preparing food
- shopping
- banking/paying bills/collecting pensions/benefits
- assisting with work or education.

Limited communication and number skills pose a risk to safety and quality of care in all these areas.

A personal assistant's communication and number skills are likely to impact on the quality of care they provide in other ways, beyond the delivery of specific care tasks. Personal assistants must be able to develop an effective dialogue with their employer, both in relation to the care they provide and in relation to the employment relationship. Figure 1 below illustrates the demand for communication skills.

Figure 1: Demand for communication skills in the direct employment relationship



The fact that this is a one-to-one relationship situated in the employer's home intensifies its communicative demands.

Regarding micro-providers, issues are similar, though micro-providers may be providing a wider range of services, including specialist services. Perhaps the most important distinction between personal assistants and micro-providers, in relation to skills, is that – as small businesses – micro-providers are responsible for their own skills.

It is not clear who is responsible for the skills of the personal assistant directly employed by an individual budget holder or person in receipt of direct payments.

3.3 Access to skills development for direct employers, PAs and micro-providers

Currently, there is limited support to enable those in receipt of direct payments to function as direct employers or purchasers of services. Our research suggests that this support does not address issues of literacy and numeracy skills. The only exception to this is the NIACE-led Direct Payments project. This is a time-limited pilot (due to end in March 2009), but it is making the learning materials it has developed for its target audience (i.e. people who use mental health services) available online.

As providers of care services, micro-providers probably have access to a wider range of training, including Skills for Life training. But, in common with any small business, must both recognise their own need for it and be able to afford it.

The least-well supported role within personalisation appears to be that of the personal assistant who is directly employed by someone receiving Direct Payments.

Despite evidence that personal assistants are eager to develop their skills, both to perform better in their current role and to progress their careers, their options seem limited. Working part-time on low wages, personal assistants are likely to lack the resources to fund their own training. Direct employers typically discount qualifications and previous experience in favour of personality traits and, beyond local induction, are reluctant to train PAs, either due to lack of resources or an unwillingness to accept responsibility for their PA's skills and development. Even where an employer is supportive of training,

there are likely to be practical problems. We know how difficult even large care providers find it to release staff for training; those difficulties are likely to be magnified for direct employers.

The Care Skills Academy, currently in its early development stages, includes personalised care programmes within its planned products and services. In particular, it plans a “new small employer programme for employers of personal assistants and small employers, including those controlled by users, wanting to offer innovative solutions and models of delivery to meet individual requirements. It will include the business skills required to be a responsible employer.”¹⁵

3.4 Communication and number skills issues

Particularly in relation to communication and number skills, issues arise around safety and quality, and around employee development.

In the context of residential/domiciliary/day care provided by an employer-organisation, the risk posed to safety and quality by the limited skills of an individual employee can to some extent be mitigated by careful management on the part of the provider-organisation. Individual employees can be reallocated, supported, supervised and developed, often by professionally qualified managers and training officers.

This is unlikely to be the case with a direct employer whose personal assistant lacks the necessary skills. Moreover, there is the added problem of identifying the skills need in the first place. Factors to consider here include the following.

- Direct employers may have little awareness of literacy and numeracy skills.
- Direct employers are likely to lack expertise in identifying literacy and numeracy needs; even if they identify them, they may not know how to respond to such needs; they also may feel it is not their responsibility to respond.
- Direct employers may have limited literacy and numeracy skills themselves and so not expect strong skills in others.
- Individuals typically over-estimate their literacy and numeracy skills; neither employer nor personal assistant may recognise low skills.
- Individuals who consider their own skills are poor often seek to disguise this out of fear of stigma; such individuals are often found in low-paid, unregulated occupations; personal assistants may consciously hide limited literacy, English language and numeracy skills.

The NIACE-led project suggests that, at least in the arena of mental health, care commissioners and care co-ordinators have little or no awareness of communication and number skills and the issues that typically arise for individuals related to the skills.

We know that poor literacy, English language and numeracy skills pose a risk to safety and quality in SISCO’s present context: regulated care services provided by employer-organisations. To the extent that the personalisation agenda moves care services beyond current quality assurance mechanisms, limited literacy, English language and number skills are likely to pose a still greater risk.

¹⁵ <http://www.skillsacademyforsocialcare.org.uk/products.asp>. Accessed 6 October 2008

3.5 Relevance of SISCO/Care Skillsbase to direct employers, PAs and micro-providers

SISCO highlights the importance of communication and number skills and helps those involved in the delivery of care services identify, assess and manage the issues that arise from limited communication and number skills in the context of care.

SISCO currently addresses itself to care providers who employ staff to deliver services. However, the sectoral experts, direct employers and PAs consulted for this piece of research felt SISCO's support for communication and number skills was of relevance and value to direct employers, personal assistants and micro-providers.

It is worth noting that this perception of SISCO's potential utility comes notwithstanding the lack of workforce standards for personalisation and the tendency of direct employers to recruit for personality rather than skill.

Whether or not personalisation standards are developed, some articulation of good practice (which is what standards set out to provide) is likely to be helpful to PAs and direct employers. Likewise with skills checks: though they are presented as assessment material on the current SISCO website, their core function is to enable constructive dialogue about skills between care workers and their employers. This is likely to be helpful to PAs and direct employers.

The other aspect of SISCO, in particular its skills checks, that appears to be attractive to direct employers is its emphasis on empowering, rather than directing, the user. Due to the diversity of the sector and the stated responsibility of local managers for the skills of their staff, SISCO has sought to enable its users to make their own, informed decisions about skills needs in relation to their local circumstances. The direct employers consulted were particularly positive about this open-ended, user-centred approach, seeing it as being consistent with the essential aims of personalisation.

This flexibility in the SISCO approach appears to be equally attractive to micro-providers.

Finally, the NIACE-led project suggests that many direct employers are likely to possess adequate web skills to benefit from an online resource.

In summary: at the moment, despite evidence of need, there is very little support for the communication and number skills of direct employers or PAs. SISCO is currently the sector's main support for communication and number skills. It may offer a cost-effective way of reaching the very large number of widely distributed employers individual budgets are intended to create. Building on SISCO would also enable the sector to deliver a consistent message to different types of employers. The likelihood that many personal assistants will move between direct employers and care provider organisations will only increase the value of such consistency.

4. Discussion and recommendations

4.1 Discussion

This research suggests that SISCO/Care Skillsbase and its resources are potentially of value for direct employers, personal assistants, micro-providers and others involved in personalisation. But how would a dedicated 'personalisation version' of SISCO/Care Skillsbase differ from the current version?

- What issues would it seek to address?
- Who would its principal users be?
- What functions would it seek to fulfil for those users?
- What tools and resources would it use to fulfil those functions?

In considering these questions, it is helpful to review the SISCO tools and resources as they currently stand. Its intended users are managers with responsibility for the staff skills needed for safety and quality. It supports these target users with three integrated tools. One of these tools, the Compare Standards tool is IT-based; the other two, Manage Skills and Skills Checks, use web and pdf-technology to deliver paper-based resources. Figure 2 below shows the current functions of SISCO/Care Skillsbase, and the tools used to deliver those functions.

Figure 2. Current functions and tools of SISCO/Care Skillsbase

SISCO/Care Skillsbase functions	SISCO/Care Skillsbase tools
Identify C&N skills work activity requires	→ Manage Skills, Compare Standards
Check staff have C&N skills required	→ Check Skills, Compare Standards
Discuss issues constructively with staff	→ Check Skills, Manage Skills
Manage risk to safety and quality	→ Manage Skills, Compare Standards
Facilitate staff development	→ Check Skills, Compare Standards, Manage Skills

How would the format of a dedicated personalisation version of SISCO/Care Skillsbase differ from the current version?

SISCO/Care Skillsbase currently uses web technology to deliver paper-based resources. Our research suggests that this remains a viable and efficient approach to supporting direct employers and PAs, but that it may be necessary to develop paper-based versions in parallel.

What issues would a personalisation version of SISCO/Care Skillsbase seek to address?

SISCO/Care Skillsbase currently seeks to address two main issues: the risk to safety and quality of care services posed by poor communication and number skills; and the related need to develop the communication and number skills of significant numbers of the care workforce. There is every indication that these issues will characterise the delivery of care through direct employment. In some respects, particularly in the short term, these issues may even intensify due to the lack of quality assurance and workforce development mechanisms.

Who would the principal users of a personalisation version of SISCO/Care Skillsbase be?

SISCO/Care Skillsbase is addressed to social care managers and these make up the largest group of its registered users. There are also numbers of learning providers and skills intermediaries registered. At the moment, the most obvious users of a 'personalisation version' are direct employers, individually and via peer support organisations. They, their personal assistants, the local authority (as funding body) and micro-providers are among the few visible figures in what remains a misted landscape.

However, personalisation is at a very early stage. There are no dedicated quality assurance mechanisms for the care services delivered to direct employers by PAs. The PA workforce is similarly unregulated and unorganised. Given the scale of transformation envisaged (i.e. the numbers of people and the sums of money involved), this may change.

The emergence of quality frameworks, workforce development mechanisms and regulatory bodies would introduce a range of organisations and individuals with a stake in skills.

Another significant development would be the emergence of organisations, such as PA provider agencies, that take direct responsibility for PA skills. PA membership of trade unions may also become a factor.

As well as direct employers, their peer support organisations and micro-providers, future potential users of a personalisation version of SISCO/Care Skillsbase might therefore include PA provider agencies, local authorities, trade unions, learning providers and skills intermediaries.

What functions would a personalisation version of SISCO/Care Skillsbase seek to fulfil for those users?

The five functions outlined in Figure 2 above are clearly important in any setting. However, the research suggests that ‘discussing issues constructively with staff’ and ‘managing any risks to safety and quality’ may be the most productive primary foci for a personalisation version.

What tools and resources would a personalisation version of SISCO/Care Skillsbase use to fulfil those functions?

The Skills Checks clearly have high utility, but probably re-purposed as aids to the care dialogue between direct employer and PA, rather than explicit assessment material. This may offer an opportunity to realise more fully the potential of the Skills Checks as learning activities. It might also open a pathway to the development of PAs currently seen as absent from the direct employment relationship.

Additional guidance to help direct employers manage skills issues would clearly also be of use – i.e. a fully revised ‘Manage Skills’ section.

The Compare Standards tool may have some utility for direct employers who are aware of sector standards or have an explicit interest in the skills development of staff. The tool would not require any re-purposing for this audience.

Who might the project stakeholders of a personalisation version of SISCO/CareSkillsbase be?

The personalisation version is potentially of interest to business support agencies such as Businesslink, to trade unions with a remit in the care sector, to adult skills organisations such as the LSC, colleges of further education and agencies such as NIACE. Its remit and target users also fit within the broader remit and target users of the planned Care Skills Academy, currently hosted by SCIE, and may fit with other initiatives specific to personalisation.

4.2 Recommendations

SISCO can offer a cost-effective way of reaching the very large number of widely distributed employers that individual budgets are intended to create. As discussed, building on SISCO would also enable the sector to deliver a consistent message to different types of employers.

The recommendations below outline a possible shape and approach for a repurposed product to address the communication and number skills issues posed by personalisation.

a. The target users should be direct employers

- To reflect current circumstances in the sector and the stage personalisation has reached, target the service to direct employers.
- However, given the fast-pace of change in the sector, keep in play the possibility of targeting the service to those who may become responsible for PAs skills, including PAs themselves

b. Development methodology should be user-centred

- Adopt a rigorously user-centred development methodology. In the case of direct employers being end-users, this should include people who are experienced direct employers and also people who are very new to the role, as well as people with a representative range of support needs (older people, people with physical disabilities, people with learning difficulties, people with mental health problems).
- Adopt a proof-of-concept approach that can be sensitive to the fast-changing nature of the personalisation landscape, prior to any full-scale implementation.

c. Delivery format should be web and print-based

- Take account of the lower levels of web access amongst direct employers by developing a parallel print and web-based service.
- Ensure that the support is offered using content at an appropriate level for target users with skills below level 2.

d. Core functions should be more narrowly focused

- Narrow the focus to two of the five functions currently supported by SISCO/CareSkillsbase to:
 - discuss issues constructively with staff
 - manage risk to safety and quality.

e. Tools: re-purpose Skills Checks, revise Manage Skills resources, retain Compare Standards

- Focus on re-purposing the Skills Checks element of the existing tools to support constructive discussion of skills issues (rather than any 'assessment' or 'checking')
- Revise the Manage Skills tools to support the repurposed Skills Checks.
- The Compare Standards tool would not require re-purposing to support any potential utility it may have for direct employers or PAs
- Consider explicitly identifying the communication and number skills involved in the key tasks undertaken by a PA (rather than asking the end user to work through this task themselves, as the current SISCO site does)
- Retain the focus on constructive dialogue, and on empowering rather than instructing, which characterises the SISCO concept.

f. Project structure: identify potential partners from full range of stakeholders

- Investigate fit with existing and planned skills initiatives in the sector, including the Care Skills Academy
- Give active consideration to finding delivery and/or funding partners for this service. Stakeholders include a range of care sector organisations, but also organisations involved in the wider skills agenda, organisations that support businesses, trade unions (including unionlearn).
- Investigate the potential fit of a version of SISCO/Care Skillsbase for direct employers with the aims and objectives of the proposed care sector Skills Academy, particularly in relation to the Academy's programmes around personalisation. Ensure the developments surrounding possible registration for PAs are taken account of in any strategic planning.

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Appendix 1: Script for expert interviews

Topic 1. Issues of particular concern to interviewee

Q1. What issues are you particularly concerned with regarding the personalisation agenda?

[Designed as open Q to help us understand interviewee's perspective on personalisation and evaluate whatever they may have to say about SISCO and its relevance.]

Topic 2. Key roles and relationships in personalisation agenda

Q1. Who do you see as typical direct employers and employees?

Q2. Who do you see as significant intermediaries (especially in the area of quality assurance)?

[Designed to identify who the potential users of any SISCO services could be.]

Topic 3. Skills needs and skill development in personalisation agenda

Q1. What knowledge/information will employers (IBHs), employees and significant intermediaries need to make a success of personalisation and Individual Budget Holder-based services?

Q2. Where is that knowledge/information available currently?

Q3. What skills will employers (IBHs), employees and significant intermediaries need to make a success of personalisation and Individual Budget Holder-based services?

Q4. What is known about levels of knowledge and skills among employers (IBHs), employees and significant intermediaries at present?

[Designed to identify what sort of services might be in demand.]

Topic 4. Relevance of SISCO to Personalisation

Q1. Do you see any particular ways that SISCO's approach (web delivery of resources to support knowledge and skills) could support the personalisation agenda?

[Designed to elicit any ideas from the interviewee.]

Appendix 2: Script for focus group sessions

Topic 1: Interviewee background

Q1. Could you tell us briefly about your experience with purchasing your own care services as a direct employer (e.g. how long been doing it. What kind of services PA/employee provides)

Topic 2: Knowledge and skills of the direct employer

Q2. What knowledge and skills does somebody employing a PA need?

Q3. Are there any organisations that help with these issues?

Q4. Are you aware of the various quality standards and training qualifications in care? (for example the Common Induction Standards, the GSCC Code of Practice, National Vocational Qualifications; also health and safety standards etc). Do you feel they are relevant for you?

Topic 3. Communication and number skills

Q5. For the employer

5.1 When does someone employing a PA need good communication skills?

5.2 When are number skills most important to someone employing a PA?

5.3 What support (if any) is available for someone employing a PA who is not confident of their communication and/or number skills?

Q6. For the PA

6.1 When are communication skills important for a PA?

6.2 Are there additional issues for PAs for whom English is not their first language?

6.3 When are number skills important for a PA?

6.4 Do you try to judge if a person has the communication and number skills they need before you employ them? If so, how and how easy it to judge accurately?

Topic 4: Training and development

Q7. Do you look for particular experience and/or qualifications when selecting a PA? If so what?

Q8. If you employed a PA who needed help with their communication and number skills, what would you do?

Topic 5: Relevance of SISCo

Q9. Do you see any particular ways that SISCo's existing resources could help you as an employer and/or help your PA?

Q10. Do you think that some amended versions of these resources could help you? How would you imagine the resources should be amended? This might include language issues, as well as more fundamental changes of content or approach.