



Reach Advocacy Scotland and SQA – Recovery Through Innovative Qualifications



Through the Scottish Qualifications Authority's Customised Awards service, organisations can design their own qualifications. SQA Customised Awards are unique qualifications developed in partnership with, and owned by, the partner organisation to meet its own business needs, and demonstrate quality and industry compliance.

Reach Advocacy Scotland has been working with SQA since 2014 to develop its unique advocacy qualification to support those who have been affected by Dual Diagnosis – co-existing mental health illness coupled with alcohol and/or drug misuse problems.

Many of the difficulties facing people pursuing recovery from Dual Diagnosis occur while people are facing difficulties with housing, health, social security, justice services and debt. Without a strong support network, family, carers or friends to speak up for them, they are at risk of not receiving the treatment or support they need.

To help navigate these systems, Reach developed the **Advocacy Practice Award at SCQF Level 7** through SQA's Customised Awards service.

Through rights-based advocacy, everyone matters, and everyone is heard. It empowers people, including those affected by Dual Diagnosis, to have a stronger voice by encouraging them to express their own needs and make their own decisions. The role of advocacy for individuals and families/carers and communities was included in NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence), Scottish Government and DWP guidelines on Dual Diagnosis.

Derek McCabe, Head of Centre at Reach, explains the background to the Customised Award in Advocacy Practice:

'We developed the award with SQA to fulfil two distinct goals.'

Firstly, at the time of development there was no formal quality assured advocacy training in Scotland that covered all the protected characteristics of the Equality Act (2010). So, we wanted to fill this gap.'

The second goal was to build meaningful activities for those working through their recovery. By creating this award, we were creating further education opportunities for these marginalised individuals.'

The Lanarkshire-based charity secured funding from the Big Lottery Scotland Improving Lives Fund. This gave them the opportunity to start this unique project with SQA.

Working with SQA has brought a wide variety of benefits for Reach, as Derek continues:

'The development of the Advocacy Practice Award with SQA has given us the advantage of rigorous and robust quality assurance processes, coupled with a high quality management system. This maintains the integrity of the award and its related delivery systems, ensuring candidate and customer confidence across all aspects of the qualification.'

The Scottish Government recently passed the Social Security (Scotland) Bill in June 2018. This bill states that any advocacy worker will require nationally recognised quality assured training to work with individuals regarding social security. The Advocacy Practice Award is well placed to meet the needs of this bill.'

Ongoing quality assurance visits from SQA provide support and guidance to ensure the qualification meets the same standards as other qualifications in the care sector. This is crucial when the qualification is being promoted in a heavily-regulated sector.

Reach were also able to have the Advocacy Practice Award positioned and levelled on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) at SCQF level 7 — bringing national recognition.

Jed Brady, Development Officer at Reach explains the benefits for candidates:

'Candidates who have completed the advocacy award are enthusiastic about taking the qualifications, they are able to evidence their knowledge of human rights in everyday settings and are proud of their achievements. This enhances their confidence in personal performance and is noticeable when working with universal services like the NHS, DWP, housing, social work, GPs, and Job Centre.'

The Advocacy Practice Award has received a great deal of interest and positive feedback. Reach were invited to the Scottish Parliament in June 2018. Successful candidates received their certificates from Government Ministers and Members of the Scottish Parliament. The Advocacy Practice Award has received support and commendation from Scottish Care — a representative body for independent social care services in Scotland.

Derek, Jed and the Reach team have bright plans for the future:

'We envisage the existing and future development of the advocacy awards being adopted in all sectors of Health and Social care. The young people of today could benefit from doing the award to learn how to apply their rights and receive accreditation whilst doing so.'

'Looking to the future, we hope to roll out an e-learning platform so that interested organisations from all over the UK can have access to the qualification.'

Sharlene McKay, Regional Manager at SQA has been working with Reach since 2014 and is delighted with how the award has been received:

'This partnership can be replicated in all sectors across Scotland and the rest of the UK. SQA Customised Awards give our customers the flexibility to design their own qualifications and meet their training needs. Our dedicated Business Development and Customised Awards teams can support public, private and third sectors in providing high quality qualifications for their staff, learners, and customers.'

Reach Advocacy Scotland supports recovery for individuals, families, carers and communities affected by dual diagnosis (co-existing mental health illness coupled with alcohol and/or drug misuse problems). They support recovery through advocacy, training, education, research and campaigning, and are the only dedicated advocacy service for dual diagnosis in Scotland.