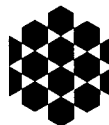


**PRIMARY & COMMUNITY CARE  
DIRECTORATE**  
**Elderly & Community Care Unit**  
Room D.2.18  
Castle Buildings  
Stormont Estate  
BELFAST  
BT4 3SQ



Department of  
**Health, Social Services  
and Public Safety**

An Roinn

**Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta  
agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí**

[www.dhsspsni.gov.uk](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk)

Chief Executives, HSC Trusts  
Chief Executives, HSS Boards

Tel: 028 90522013  
Fax: 028 90522500  
email:[ray.martin@dhsspsni.gov.uk](mailto:ray.martin@dhsspsni.gov.uk)

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## **DIRECT PAYMENTS – TRAINING OF PERSONAL ASSISTANTS**

1. The HPSS Regional Direct Payments Development Group has written to the Department about the need to provide training for personal assistants employed by clients under the Direct Payment Scheme. It is recognised that there is a variety of professional views across organisations and disciplines. This circular provides additional clarification based on the existing guidance.
2. Trusts have a duty to offer Direct Payments as a service option and to support people in the discharge of their responsibilities under the scheme. The formal assessment of continuing care needs will have helped to identify the skills and competences required by a personal assistant and/or carer to support the service user to live safely at home.
3. At the heart of any assessment and review process for care needs there will also be an evaluation of the risk to independent living if a service is not provided. The quality of the service provided will be a key factor in the mitigation of that risk. This applies equally in statutory provision, independent sector provision or in Direct Payment cases. In determining the appropriateness of Direct Payments in individual cases, the human rights of the service user must also be given due weight in the balance of risks.
4. The empowerment of service users to enable and support them to achieve their potential is one of the values underpinning the Quality Standards for Health and Social Care. Under the Safe and Effective Care Theme:
  - criteria 5.3.1(a) states that the organisation should have “effective person-centred assessment, care planning and review systems in place, which include risk assessment and risk management processes and appropriate interagency approaches”; and



- criteria 5.3.3(b) states that the organisation should “promote a person-centred approach and actively involve service users and carers in the development, implementation, audit and review of care plans and care pathways”.
5. As in all services supporting people to live independent lives, risk management is about achieving a balance between risk mitigation and informed risk taking. Direct Payments are about making informed decisions to ensure that we are meeting people’s legitimate aspirations about choice, independence and care arrangements that suit the individual and their lifestyle. Training for personal assistants should therefore be seen as an important contribution towards ensuring a quality service and managing risks to the health and safety of service users and personal assistants alike.
  6. It is important therefore that Trusts ensure that personal assistants have access to relevant supports, including requisite training, which will help them care for the person being cared for safely and appropriately. This is analogous to the support already provided by many Trusts to informal carers, foster parents and adult placement carers to ensure sustainable safe, high quality care.
  7. The PSS Development and Training Strategy 2006-2016 sets out the strategic aspiration for all those employed in delivering personal social services, over time, to access appropriate education and training and to achieve relevant part or whole qualifications linked to job role. This will support employers to discharge their responsibility for assuring the provision of safe and high quality services and at the same time support individual workers to keep their knowledge and skills up-to-date and to be eligible for registration with NISCC, where appropriate.
  8. In supporting service users to directly arrange their own care provision, the Trust has a responsibility to ensure the service user is aware of
    - The skills, competence and standards of care required to support service user’s assessed needs;
    - Recommended minimum training and/or qualifications to assure safe and appropriate care to meet assessed needs;;
    - Information on access to relevant training for directly employed personal assistants to assist them to develop the required skills and competence; and
    - Implications for health and safety of service user and personal assistant if relevant requirements and standards of care are not met.

9. If you have any queries about the content of this circular please contact your Reference Group representative or alternatively Sandra O'Hare at the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on 028 9052 2205 or by email at: [sandra.o'hare@dhsspsni.gov.uk](mailto:sandra.o'hare@dhsspsni.gov.uk). The circular is also available on the Department's website at [www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/publications](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/publications).



**RAY MARTIN**  
Elderly & Community Care Unit