



Results of Survey Monkey September 2010

Background

This survey was set up following a Workshop held in Aberdeen in April which focused on **Workforce Planning, Data and the Administration Role**. The event highlighted other areas of interest to administrative staff, whilst also identifying that administrative staff in social services feel they have few opportunities for training or identified career pathways. The consultants who facilitated the session also concluded that there was little scope for Continuous Professional Development for administrative staff across the social services sector.

A core function of the Learning Network North (LNN) is to work with organisations and individuals to improve knowledge, skills and competencies across all sectors in the area. As administrative staff are essential to the effective working of all social services organisations, the need to obtain their views on possible training and network opportunities which would meet their needs was considered to be a logical first step.

Scope

The consultation included social service organisations in the statutory, voluntary and independent sector. The focus was very narrow and sought only to establish whether there was interest in such a network, identify who might be interested in

getting involved; whether or not individuals would be allowed to attend meetings and what the priorities for training, development might be.

Objectives

To identify the interest in such a development and consult with interested parties

To consider what such a network might offer and invite suggestions on topics and priorities

To engage with staff who have an administrative role and find out more about their learning/development needs

To identify geographical areas where there is interest in an administrative support network

To identify potential barriers to participation in such a network

There were 75 responses to the on line questionnaire in the 7 week period the survey was open. This represents one of the best responses for any previously conducted survey monkey thus far.

Who responded to the survey?

The survey asked respondents what their job title was within the organisation; there were 24 different administrative titles identified from this question. A selection of the people who responded were as follows; administrative assistant, clerical assistant, team secretary, administrative officer, personal assistant, receptionist, office manager, training coordinator, contracts administrator, project administrator and business support manager.

Many of the tasks and jobs identified were of a similar scope with variations depending on where staff were based. In smaller organisations, administrative

staff perform a wide range of duties from across the administrative spectrum. The staff who responded came from local authorities, voluntary organisations and the independent sector as well as housing support agencies.

Geographical Area

The respondents came from the following areas

Moray	25
Aberdeen City	20
Orkney Isles	10
Aberdeenshire	8
Shetland Isles	7
Highland	5
Other	1

**As can be seen from the figures, there was a high proportion of responses from Moray, Orkney and Shetlands. In the island communities, staff experience greater isolation and the opportunity to network may be limited due to geography.

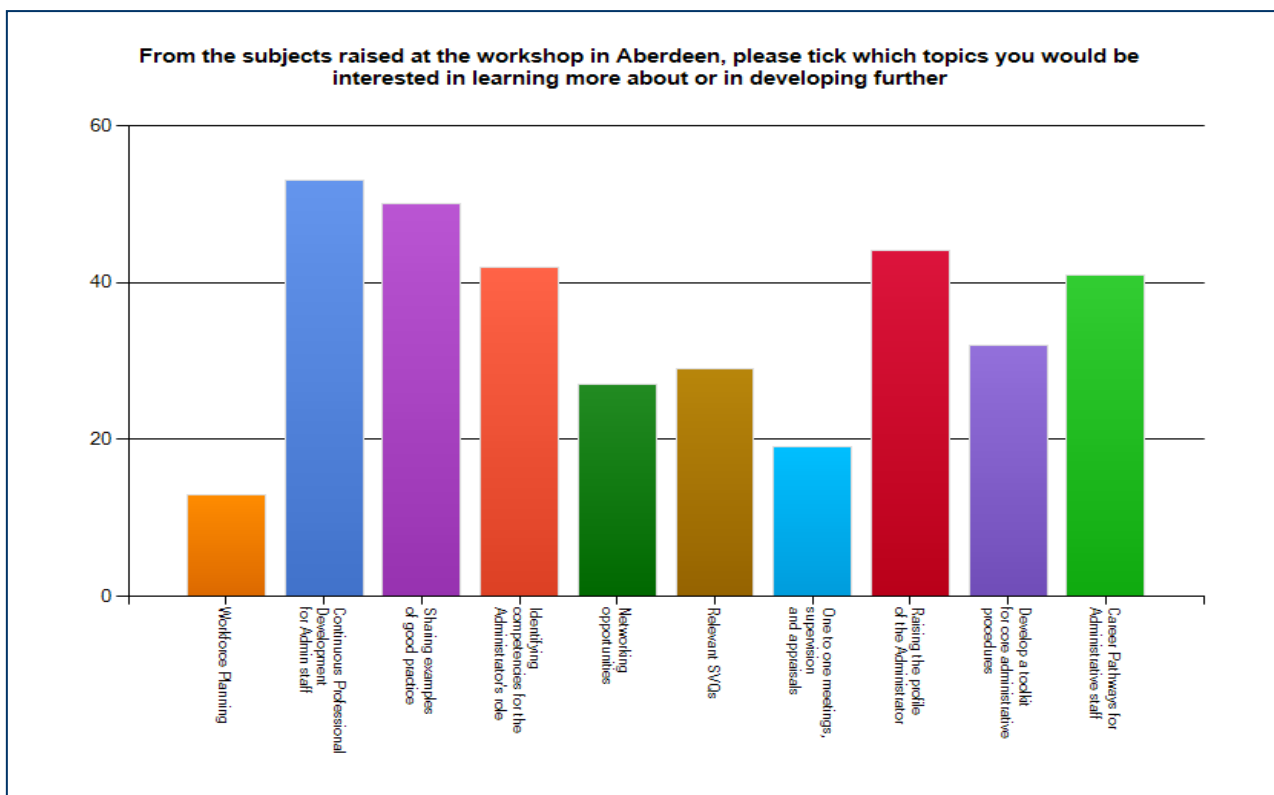
Workforce Planning and Data and the Administrator's Role Workshop

The survey then asked respondents if they had attended the workshop in Aberdeen. The resulting response was that almost 60% of those who took part in the survey did not know about it. 41% did know about it but did not attend. The reasons for this included distance and costs involved, some people didn't think it was relevant to their job, others were unable to attend due to lack of administrative cover or knowledge about the topic (workforce planning). Only 9 of the people who responded to the survey had actually attended the workshop.

The survey asked individuals if they would be interested in attending meetings of an Administrators network in the future. 42% said they would, whilst 36% said they might be, 8% said they would not be interested in this.

We then asked if admin staff if they thought their managers would support staff wishing to attend meetings every 4-6 months; 35% thought this might be possible, 48% said maybe, 16% said no. We asked if they would be more likely to come to meetings if they were locally based. 59% said yes, 36% said maybe. 4% said no.

Respondents were then asked to indicate which of the subjects raised at the Aberdeen workshop would be of most interest to them;



The results of the survey show interest in CPD for administrative staff and in sharing examples of good practice as being the top two subjects individuals would welcome input on; closely followed by career pathways and raising the profile of the administrator and identifying competencies for the administrator's role.

Participants were also asked why some of these topics were more important than others, over half of those who responded had a comment to make in support of their area of interest.

CPD would be useful as it would enable me to keep a track of my learning and acknowledge that I had gained competencies. This would give me confidence to apply for jobs and I would feel I then have some prospect of career development.

I would like to be very competent as an administrative assistant, to participate with others would give me more confidence in my role, I work in isolation and am constantly under a lot of pressure with many deadlines to meet.

Admin staff do not have the same development opportunities as operational staff and there are limitations to progress through the organisation; given the current financial constraints, we need to be more efficient in what we do so sharing good practice is crucial.

It is vitally important that colleagues share good practice with each other as this increases efficiency and productivity.

Administrators often work in isolation with no one to give guidance. The role of the administrator is often under valued. Managers and councillors do not appreciate the role of the administrator and what it involves.

It would be good to keep up to date with new technology, equipment, IT packages, etc. Networking would enable us to pick up good ideas.

“Clerical” staff

It is interesting to note, that after the on line survey had closed, it came to the attention of the network that a number of staff had not completed the

questionnaire; they had assumed or had been led to believe, that as the title of the survey referred to “administrative” staff that excluded them (their job titles are clerical assistants). Although a number of clerical staff did respond, it is disappointing that others did not because of this confusion. The writer did talk with one of the members of staff concerned and her views have been incorporated in the report. Whilst she would be very keen to attend future events, she did not feel that anyone at her level would be released, but that she would wish to attend in her own time, such was her motivation to improve her opportunities for herself. She said that there was nothing available in terms of training for staff at her level and consequently could see herself with very little prospects of moving in the future despite being with a large local authority.

Summary and recommendations

The role of the administrator is often one of multi-tasking with a complexity of roles and responsibilities which may all be placing demands on the individual at the same time and in different directions. Whilst most professionals are answerable to one manager, administrative staff are often accountable to a whole team of others as well.

The workshop and survey identified feelings of being undervalued amongst administrative staff; few saw themselves as partners in service delivery. Many said they felt their role was seen as being less important as other members of the team. The need to raise the profile of this essential sector of the workforce is evident throughout the responses in the questionnaire and the summary of the workshop. If people feel valued and equal in the workplace, it follows that their confidence and job satisfaction will improve; a happier, positive workforce generally means a more motivated, efficient team which can only improve service delivery. Access to appropriate training, an awareness of what exists to help staff develop and the opportunity to learn from others could go some way towards meeting their needs.

For organisations, succession planning and workforce development should extend to administrative staff and to be able to retain experienced and efficient employees is crucial. In recognising and supporting the potential benefits of staff development, this becomes a more realistic aim and goes some way towards the inclusion of admin staff in workforce planning.

Staff also expressed feelings of frustration that they have limited career pathways with little possibility of continuous professional development in the majority of organisations. The lack of agreed competencies for the administrator role was something which people felt was achievable and perhaps something worth working towards as a group. Clearly there is enthusiasm within the admin sector to broaden their knowledge base and define their common responsibilities. In assisting administrative staff in developing their skills and knowledge we are demonstrating organisational support for the work which they do.

As an initial step, there may be value in setting up local area administrative/clerical networks, meeting for two hours perhaps 2-3 times over the course of a year. The focus would be on the topics already identified within this paper and should focus on aspects of professional development. Crucially the subject matter needs to be of benefit to both staff and their organisations. It goes without saying that in the current economic climate, the theme of carrying out all activities at all levels of organisations as efficiently as possible becomes even more important. There is undoubtedly a wealth of knowledge within social services admin support and by encouraging the sharing of experience and skills the capacity to recognise and build on this becomes greater. It is never good to stand still and this is true of all aspects of social services delivery.

It seems likely that the majority of managers understand and support the need for staff at all levels to have some career pathway and recognition for the role they play, it is hoped therefore that administrative staff will have support to enable them to attend the network sessions should they wish to do so.

Final comments from individuals who responded to the survey.....

“Thank you for providing the opportunity to admin staff. We are the unappreciated and neglected service providers!”

And

“It is nice to be asked about working practice, admin staff are essential but managers forget we need to learn new skills and develop our careers too!”

And

“Thank you for giving me this opportunity to be heard.”

Carolle Smith