

Defining information and advice

In considering advice it is important to stress that when people visit an advice centre the product they seek is not the service but the outcome. For example, if they go to an advice centre with a homelessness enquiry the product they want is not advice but a home. If they go for welfare benefits advice the product they want is the benefit. It is important to be able to manage these expectations and to be clear about the broader outcomes from receiving advice which are a better understanding of the options, rights and responsibilities and assistance taking action to resolve a problem.

Advice is likely to comprise some or all of the following components:

- Listening to clients.
- Diagnosing the problem.
- Giving information.
- Advising on the options available.
- Taking action on behalf of clients.
- Negotiating on their behalf.
- Representing clients' cases at tribunals and courts.
- Referral where appropriate.
- Enabling or empowering the individual to take informed action on their own behalf.

We have broken these activities down into three principal categories or Types of intervention:

Type I – Active information, sign-posting and explanation

This work refers to activities such as providing information either orally or in writing, sign-posting or referring the user to other available resources or services, and the explanation of technical terms or clarification of an official document, such as a tenancy agreement or a possession order.

We make a distinction between the passive provision of information through the availability of leaflets, for example, in public places, libraries and so on, and active provision of information through providing assistance to the individual seeking assistance. These Standards are aimed at 'active' providers.

Type II – Casework

Initially this work will include:

- A diagnostic interview where the problem and all relevant issues are identified and
- Making a judgement as to whether the individual has a case that can be pursued

Once it has been established that the individual has a case that can be pursued, activities may include:

- Setting out an individual's options or courses of action.
- Encouraging the user to take action on their own behalf.
- Providing practical aid with letters or forms.
- Negotiating with third parties on the user's behalf.
- Introducing the enquirer by referral to another source of help.
- Support to users in making their own case.

Type III - Advocacy, representation and mediation at tribunal or court action level

This work includes a range of further actions arising from the casework undertaken above. This may have been undertaken by the adviser preparing the tertiary work or may have come to the adviser by referral from another organisation or adviser.

The principal activities may include:

- Advocacy and representation – where the adviser may prepare a case for the user and represent or speak on their behalf at a tribunal or court.
- Mediation – where the adviser may act on behalf of the user by seeking to mediate between the user and a third party.

Type III work includes some activities that can only be undertaken by lawyers.