



Association of Democratic
Services Officers

A GUIDE TO THE DEMOCRATIC SERVICES QUALIFICATIONS

Foreword

This is a guide to the democratic services qualifications which were launched on 14th October 2009, at the inaugural conference of the Association of Democratic Services Officers.

Since the Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators stopped offering a Local Government stream as part of its qualification in the mid 1990's, there has been a void in an appropriate professional qualification for the democratic support function.

The Local Government Act 2000, saw a new era for modern local government and gave a new focus for the support service with executive arrangements and the overview and scrutiny function. On the back of this, the Open University offered an NVQ qualification in Democratic Services at levels 3 and 4. However, over recent years the numbers undertaking this have dwindled and research has been undertaken into what would be an appropriate qualification for the sector. This research has been in the form of two questionnaires, (one in 2007 and one in 2008) and a number of consultation events around the country predominantly in the North West, North East, South West and London.

The feedback can be summarised as follows:

- Democratic Services staff want qualifications but not NVQs
- Some assessment in the workplace was seen as a good way of understanding how individuals perform, but there had to be less bureaucracy
- More testing of knowledge and understanding was required
- Any alternatives had to be recognised as a professional qualification

The national Democratic Services Standards and Qualifications Group (the co-ordinating group set up to oversee and advise on the national occupational standards for Democratic Services and monitor current and future qualifications for the sector) analysed this feedback. Together with the Open University and representatives from the Association of Democratic Services Officers, two new qualifications were launched on 14th October 2009 (the Award in Understanding Democratic Services and the Certificate in Democratic Services Practice) and another to be launched in early 2011 (The Diploma).

This Guide sets out a detailed summary of the two qualifications and the final page of the guide sets out how potential candidates and potential Regional Advisers can get involved.

We are very excited about these new qualifications and hopefully they are what the sector is missing. We hope you find the guide useful.



Mark Towers

Chairman of the Democratic Standards and Qualifications Group



John Austin

Chairman of the Association of Democratic Services Officers

Award in Understanding Democratic Services

This is a knowledge and understanding qualification. Learners must complete all six modules (listed overleaf) and will be 'tested' on their knowledge and understanding in each.

Target Audience:

- Democratic Services Officers who wish to gain an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the work they currently undertake / plan to undertake (includes all democratic functions such as meetings support, scrutiny, members' support and civic support)
- Learners who do not yet work in the Democratic Services function but have a desire to follow a career in that area.

Planning for the Award

Learners will plan with a workplace mentor (usually their line manager or designated senior person in their Democratic Services Unit) and the assigned Regional Adviser (a qualified assessor appointed by the Association of Democratic Services Officers). The plan will set out how the learner will obtain the required knowledge and understanding to be able to complete each of the seven modules.

Obtaining the knowledge and understanding for the Award

Learners could gain the required knowledge and understanding in various ways including:

- Attending specific courses run by the Association of Democratic Services Officers (ADSO) either nationally or regionally
- Attending appropriate externally facilitated courses from learning providers
- Undertaking in-house workshops using the ADSO Award 'Question Bank'
- On the job experience and peer/ manager support.

Gaining the Award

When the learner is ready, he/she will be given a written assignment for each of the six modules. On completion, the assignments will be submitted to their Regional Adviser who will 'mark' these and will then arrange for a professional discussion to be undertaken with the learner on these assignments. The professional discussion will test the understanding of the knowledge gained.

On successful completion of both these two stages, the Regional Adviser will then be able to confirm certification of the Award. The learner will be able to advance to undertake the Certificate in Democratic Services Practice if he/she wishes to continue.

Timescales

It is anticipated that on average a learner, with the necessary support, will be able to complete the award in a six month period.

Cost

£1,100 for an ADSO member (£1,300 for a non ADSO member).

The six modules which form the Award are listed below:

Module 1 - The structure and functions of local government

The learner will be asked to demonstrate an understanding of local government and its relationship with central government. They will also need to demonstrate an understanding of the different types of local authorities, the relationships between them and knowledge of areas such as election cycles, the role of political parties and the rules of proportionality.

Module 2 – The law and practice of decision making

The learner will be asked to show an understanding of the basic legal requirements for local government in England as well as knowledge of the common law and other recognised legal practices.

Module 3 - Elected members and officers in local government

The learner will be asked to understand the roles and responsibilities of elected members in local government in England, including the electoral processes for being elected, the different roles members can play within the Council and on outside bodies. They will also need to demonstrate an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of officers, including the importance of delegation and political independence, as well as an understanding of the various codes and protocols used.

Module 4 – Role of Council and its governance arrangements

This module requires the learner to explain the different options for governance in local government in the UK. It will look at the features of executive arrangements including the key features of the strong leader model and the elected mayor model and non executive governance such as the committee system model. The learner will also have to demonstrate an understanding of the role of Council and the powers reserved to it.

Module 5 – Overview and Scrutiny in public life

The learner will need to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the powers and responsibilities of scrutiny and the role it plays in influencing decision making. The module will also ask the learner to explore the new requirements of scrutiny and its role in influencing key partner organisations.

Module 6 - Understanding your own working environment

The learner will be asked to show an understanding of the key features of their own organisation, including its demographic, geographic, environmental, economic, social and political makeup. They will also be asked to demonstrate an understanding of the governance arrangements in their own organisation, including the decision making structures, processes and its political context.

Certificate in Democratic Services Practice

There are two elements to the Certificate - the six knowledge and understanding elements (set out on page 4) as well as workplace or 'practice' modules.

Target Audience

- Learners who already work in the Democratic Services area, including all Democratic functions such as meetings support, scrutiny, members support and civic support*.

Planning for the Certificate

Learners will plan with a workplace mentor (usually their line manager or designated senior person in their Democratic Services Unit) and the assigned Regional Adviser (a qualified assessor appointed by the Association of Democratic Services Officers). The plan will set out how the learner will obtain the required knowledge, understanding and evidence for all of the modules.

Obtaining the evidence for the workplace or 'practice' elements of the Certificate

Learners could gain the required evidence to show competence in the job, in various ways including:

- Being observed undertaking the activity by the workplace mentor, with relevant questioning after the event
- Compiling a written statement after the activity to show how they have reflected on the work undertaken and identified lessons learnt
- Producing products of work (these could include e-mails, reports, minutes, projects or assignments)
- Oral presentation of work activities

(see also page 3 for examples of working towards the knowledge and understanding modules which form part of the certificate).

Gaining the Certificate

The learner, workplace mentor and Regional Adviser will meet periodically to monitor and plan the compilation of evidence for the modules. The workplace mentor and the learner will also meet regularly to carry out the agreed plan and collect the required evidence.

The final submission will be in the form of a portfolio (this could be an e-portfolio through the ADSO website). The Regional Adviser will then formally 'sign-off' the portfolio before passing to a Regional Co-ordinator who will submit it for certification.

Timescales

It is anticipated that on average a learner, with the necessary support will be able to complete the certificate (including Modules 1 to 7 which would otherwise form the award), in a 12 month period.

Cost

£1,475 for an ADSO member and £1,650 for a non ADSO member.

*The Certificate is not particularly relevant for learners who do not work in the Democratic Services area, as evidence needs to be obtained to show how work is undertaken. However, there could be occasions where special arrangements could be made for learners to be given opportunities for gaining experience and evidence.

To gain the Certificate, learners MUST complete:

- The six modules which form the Award in Understanding Democratic Services
- At least four practice modules (modules 8 and 9 which are compulsory, plus a selection of other optional modules).

The **two compulsory modules** are:

Module 8 – Behaving and working professionally in a Democratic Environment – (credit value 5)

The learner will be asked to show evidence of demonstrating a number of 'democratic' behaviours including adaptability and innovation, communication, customer focus, political awareness and working effectively with others. Evidence will need to be provided to show professional behaviour within the work environment including adhering to codes and protocols and maintaining and developing relationships. Skills such as political sensitivity and adaptability will need to be demonstrated by the learner.

Module 9 – Managing and supporting events – (credit value 4)

Evidence would need to be provided demonstrating how venues are selected, resources are identified and booked, how attendance is encouraged and how the event has been supported. Events could include civic events, partnership meetings, member training events or scrutiny visits/ events.

A credit value has been applied to all the 'Practice' Modules, in order to show the approximate 'size/ length' of the module. The higher the credit value the larger the Module and longer it will take to complete. A credit value of 1 equates to approximately 10 hours.

As well as the compulsory modules listed above, the learner must then complete a selection of the **optional modules** listed below, to a total credit value of at least **8**:

Module 10a – Managing and effectively supporting meetings - (credit value 5)

The learner will need to provide evidence of preparing an agenda, supporting the running of the meeting, advising at the meeting and producing clear and accurate minutes, together with recording and notifying agreed actions. Meetings could be formal committee meetings, informal working/ task groups or partnership meetings.

Module 10b – Presenting and advising effectively in a democratic environment- (credit value 2)

The learner would need to provide evidence that they have pro-actively advised elected members with clarity and accuracy in a public environment. This could include presenting reports at a committee meeting, delivering a presentation to members, or facilitating a training and development session. Learners would also need to provide evidence of situations where they had given clear and succinct advice in a reactive manner.

Module 10c – Undertaking effective overview and scrutiny- (credit value 6)

The learner would be asked to provide evidence to show assistance in the scoping of a scrutiny activity, demonstrating an agreed plan with timescales and methodology identified. They would also need to show assistance in the identification of witnesses and types of research, how these are evaluated and the production of a final report in an agreed format and 'signed off' by agreed stakeholders.

Module 10d - Researching, analysing and reporting information- (credit value 2)

The learner will be asked to show evidence of research undertaken including how this has been collected (e.g. from similar authorities, by electronic information sources etc), analysed and presented for report in an appropriate format.

Module 10e – Supporting elected members casework- (credit value 2)

The learner will need to show evidence of how assistance has been provided to elected members in managing and supporting their casework. This could include dealing with complaints about services, failure to meet agreed standards and requests for information about services and service providers. A learner would need to demonstrate appropriate response times and relevant delivery of responses.

Module 10f – Supporting member development- (credit value 3)

The learner would need to demonstrate evidence of how assistance has been provided in supporting the development of elected members. This could include helping to identify individual development needs, supporting members in training and development events and helping produce a development programme.

Module 10g – Managing and publishing information- (credit value 2)

The learner would need to demonstrate evidence of storing information in the relevant location. The learner would also need to show the type of information available to the public, its correct form for presentation (e.g. website/ printed means) and adherence to the requirements of freedom of information and data protection.

Module 10h – Supporting the Civic role - (credit value 3)

The learner would be asked to provide evidence to show how support has been given to the work of the Civic/ Chairman's Office. Evidence would need to demonstrate how office diaries have been organised and prioritised, how arrangements for events have been communicated to Civic/ Chairman representatives and other support staff and how major Civic/ Chairman occasions are planned for. In undertaking this module evidence would need to demonstrate how relevant protocols have been followed.

Diploma in Democratic Services

A Diploma in Democratic Services is planned to be available from early 2011. Further details are still to be finalised, but a brief summary is given below.

Target Audience

Learners will be experienced Democratic Services Officers who possess an in-depth knowledge of the main democratic functions, but wish to expand that knowledge and understanding and also undertake a substantive piece of work in a specialist area (e.g. meetings support, overview and scrutiny, member services, civic etc).

Undertaking the Qualification

Learners will work with workplace mentors and Regional Advisers in studying for this Diploma. The substantive piece of work will be a project/ dissertation on the chosen specialist area.

Timescales

It is anticipated that an average learner, with the necessary support will be able to complete the Diploma in a 12 month period.

Cost

There are no costs yet agreed for this qualification

Expressions of Interest

If on reading this booklet, you require further information regarding undertaking the qualification as a candidate or becoming a Regional Adviser, please complete the attached expression of interest form and return to Laura Latham via email laura.latham@richmond.gov.uk or Democratic Services, LB of Richmond upon Thames, Civic Centre, 44 York Street, Twickenham, TW1 3BZ

Further more detailed information regarding the role of a Regional Adviser can be obtained by contacting Mark Towers on 01253 477127 or via email mark.towers@blackpool.gov.uk. The Regional Adviser role will be paid for the work undertaken with the candidate. This will provide an additional income for either the employing Council, or the individual undertaking the advising role.

Information is also available on the Association of Democratic Services website www.adso.co.uk

Expression of Interest Form

Name		
Job Title		
Authority Address		
Postcode		
Email Address		
Telephone Number		
I would like to make an expression of interest as a potential: (please tick as appropriate)	(a) Candidate	(b) Regional Adviser
Signature		