

Chief Executive Report to the 2011 OPAAL AGM.

Introduction.

Last year I ended my report with the recognition that all in the advocacy community is facing a less certain future, and sadly to a significant degree this is still the case for many colleagues today. Here at OPAAL we have spent the year consolidating work with our two main national projects, laying the groundwork for a less certain future by reviewing our policies, structure, marketing and media work and developing new ways of working with members, individuals and partner organisations. Together we have made real progress on several fronts.

This is thanks in no small part to our Development Officer Marie McWilliams. Despite significant setbacks in both of our main national projects throughout much of last autumn and winter she has remained cheerful, optimistic and gone the extra mile to ensure project work was completed in a timely and effective manner. I should like to take this opportunity to extend my warm thanks to her for her diligence and support which has enabled me to continue once again to further our strategic role particularly in influencing and partnership work.

The Trustees report contains information concerned with the work we undertook during 2010 which I do not intend to replicate in my report. I wish to focus my report on work that has taken place since March 2011.

OPAAL into the future.

Like many voluntary and community organisations, OPAAL is facing a radically changing external environment and the cessation of most of its grant funding. As a result during this last twelve months OPAAL staff and Trustees have considered whether we should be managing a planned closure of OPAAL? We decided that this would be premature.

We have spoken to a range of stakeholders recently including member organisations, members of project groups and partner organisations and came to the conclusion that if OPAAL were to close it would leave a hole for stakeholders in terms of:

- A lead national agency on advocacy with older people.
- Succinct and relevant information about issues and government policy affecting them.
- A coordinating body to respond to government consultations and to influence new decision making structures.
- A facilitating body to bring together different organisations both within the voluntary and community sector and across sectors.
- Opportunities to engage with others in national projects.
- Opportunities to engage with colleagues in training experiences directly relating to advocacy with older people.

We know OPAAL cannot exist as it has done in the past. To remain valuable, and financially sustainable, we have to alter the kind of organisation we are. OPAAL's core purpose will remain: **to provide the strategic lead on advocacy with older people and ensuring that older people have access to independent advocacy.** But the way we deliver that purpose must change. OPAAL trustees and staff do believe there is a future for OPAAL, provided it can meet the evolving needs of members, partners and other stakeholders.

The needs we aim to meet

From conversations with members and partners, we think there is a number of clear needs for support, which a re-directed OPAAL is in a position to meet:

Demonstrating value

Members need to improve their ability to demonstrate their value (in the services they deliver, but also in the knowledge and contacts they bring). This is becoming increasingly important to frontline organisations seeking to secure grant funding or contract income.

Building new partnerships

We will all need to embrace the possibilities for partnerships, not only with the "usual suspects" but also with new partners, and, importantly, in other sectors. We will need to find a way to speak the language of other sectors, to develop mutually beneficial relationships. To survive and thrive we need to seek out new partnerships and not batten down the hatches.

Finding new ways to influence

To make our voices heard and to exercise influence in the changing environment we need to tap into new spheres of influence and perhaps be more political in the way we operate. A host of new public sector structures are being set up, others disbanded, and this process will yield new ways to exert influence.

Being organisationally smart We are all strapped for cash and for time, and so we need to eke out our resources like never before, share information, learning and expertise and play to our respective strengths. Third sector organisations will have to become more entrepreneurial and some will have to make sure they have in place stronger structures (governance, finance, quality, etc.) in order to secure income. All of these demands apply as much to OPAAL as they do to others in the voluntary and community sector.

How OPAAL will meet these needs

Taking these needs as a foundation, OPAAL's trustees have charged the chief executive with developing plans for OPAAL's services in the future. We are currently in what might be thought of as an R&D phase, in which we develop ideas, test them with our partners, and determine their suitability and feasibility. This will need to happen fairly rapidly, as OPAAL needs to be self-financing by the end of 2012. At the same time, we need to continue to provide the support valued by members and partners alike.

To give you an indication of how we intend to meet the needs defined above, we have identified the following potential services, for further exploration. Each of these service areas will need to generate income for OPAAL to be sustainable. These are not listed in order of priority, or difficulty, or impact but start with what we are starting to do some of already:

A package of support aimed at members and partners:

- Interpretation of policy and practice affecting the sector, including our dissemination role, and policy consultation work
- Advocating and influencing policy and practice, ensuring the specific circumstances of older people's advocacy are heard where they need to be heard.

OPAAL's national advocacy role could be to national government, to its various "outreach" functions (DWP, DoH, OCS Local intelligence Team) or to sub-regional bodies such as LEPs, GP Consortia, and older people's forums. OPAAL's aim in its advocacy work would be to better arm individual organisations to represent their own interests acting as a gateway to specialist expertise, providing a "bank of experts" so members can access specialist practice advice, for example, on advocacy policy and practices, and older people with life threatening conditions.

For the next 12 – 18 months there could be a specific role for OPAAL to support the contribution of member organisations to the development and establishment of new structures within the health and social care field, which will affect such a large proportion of our sector.

- OPAAL wants to ensure new Health and Wellbeing Boards, GP Consortia and public health functions in local authorities make the most of the contributions of member organisations. We will share experience and promote good practice.

Providing research and an evidence base to support the contribution of member organisations:

- helping you to argue your own case through projects such as "Making it Personal"
- taking on other commissioned action research to demonstrate impact and capability. This might involve working with other research partners and seeking out research and evidence gathering opportunities from central government, the higher education sector or elsewhere.

Facilitating new collaborations, partnerships and consortia, in particular to assist member organisations access new funding:

- OPAAL wants to develop its 'partnership hub' capacity, putting organisations in touch with each other (potentially across sectors) to enable a new collaborations to form to develop national projects

- OPAAL could extend this role if appropriate to one of creating and managing an advocacy professional development consortium (including recruiting and training partners and monitoring and evaluation)
- we would be likely to begin through a pilot, working with a national partner with whom we already have a good/developing relationship, In brokering new collaborations OPAAL would seek to work with members and through existing networks where possible.

Developing a new model of working with private sector businesses, taking the relationship beyond one based on corporate social responsibility:

- we are interested in finding a long term relationship that benefit both the business involved (so that it can see a direct effect on the bottom line) and the charity (in achieving its charitable aims)
- this could work where a business has a customer interest in developing its market with a sector also served by a charity (e.g. health and independence, or outdoor leisure provision and mental health support, etc.). what business/voluntary partnerships might be built for mutual benefit.

Delivering an element of the contract process for a public service contractor:

- facilitating communication, learning and resource efficiency across voluntary and community sector subcontractors to the primes delivering future public service contracts (e.g. in the health and social care field)
- extending that role to the recruitment, training or monitoring and evaluation of subcontractors.

We could also consider the potential to develop and deliver a project directly (or/and in a cross sector partnership), possibly with a health or social care theme.

Whilst OPAALs' focus will remain in the UK, we need not be constrained by this geographical boundary (particularly, for example, in our work to build partnerships with European organisations).

Our new portfolio may require some changes in our governance arrangements so we aim to revisit our constitution and the function of the Board to guide us.

OPAAL currently has a team of two staff, we know that we will not be able to do everything on the list above. Some ideas will develop and others wither; some will pay for themselves and others will not. What we want to do over the next few months is to test the ideas so that we know whether, in the longer term, new OPAAL is a viable proposition.

Below is a list of some of the exploratory work that has begun under this new portfolio:-

1. Embracing Partnerships.

OPAAL has long been a partnership initiator seeing this aspect of our work as central to our role in promoting advocacy with older people and influencing others, in particular key decision makers.

Over the last six months we have been engaged with partners as far afield as Milan in Italy and Lublin in Poland and closer to home Dublin Ireland and of course within the UK, in particular Wales.

1. We are invited to participate with Macmillan on a new project to develop an advocacy cancer pathway for older people.
2. We are invited by the Older People's Commissioner in Wales to sit on a small Board advising on their work with older people in care homes.
3. We are supporting Coventry University on a piece of action research considering the provision of dementia advocacy across five areas of the UK. This research is keen to learn how external factors shape and influence service provision.
4. Ongoing talks are being held with new partners to develop new collaborations in the UK and abroad.
5. The development of a national project bank is underway, to enable us to have projects available for speedy preparation to respond to new funding opportunities.
6. Influencing opportunities are presenting themselves in addition to those above and as a direct result of our Making it Personal Project and by developing closer links with the Department of Work and Pensions OPAAL have been invited to sit on the Age Action Alliance workgroup: "Improving the lives of excluded groups"

2. Member support

We took a financial risk in 2008 increasing our membership fees, however you have continued to be supportive and for this we are deeply grateful. I hope you continue to feel you have received value for money from OPAAL.

We have no intention of increasing fees for the foreseeable future, however we do wish to implement a new payments system. We will be asking members to join OPAAL on an annual regular January to December cycle, replacing the current renewell on the anniversary of first joining OPAAL. The rational for this is two fold.

Firstly as we collect annual information on our memberships at the same time as collecting subscriptions it will enable us to maximize our information resource giving us a date at which we can collect yearly statistics on advocacy services for older people and thus develop an information resource allowing us to capture and use data to spot trends, provide evidence and identify service gaps.

3. New OPAAL Partnership Development Hub.

OPAAL has a Partnership Development Hub. 14 organisations from around the English Regions, made up of 12 Service delivery organisations; one national network and one local network comprise the hub.

The main aim of this national partnership is to develop a bank of national advocacy projects ready to be submitted for appropriate funding opportunities and to foster collaborative partnership development this includes potential responses to tenders/requests for service specifications.

4. New OPAAL web site

Marie and I have done a good deal of work on the new web site. We have a sharp new design and some new material for the site in the form of some web based film clips and new photographs. We are also writing new material in order to make the site more informative to the casual visitor, attract more of our partners/members to the site and include more links to our partners work particularly where we have a direct involvement in this. We expect the site to go live by the end of September, meanwhile clips of the new site are available for viewing over the lunch break.

5. New Internship Programme.

We have developed an internship programme for OPAAL and have currently six internship roles to which we hope to recruit over the next twelve months: _

Member Research
OPAAL Publications
OPAAL Fundraising
Communications and Marketing
New Media
Policy and Research.

Our first Intern has been recruited to the Policy and Research brief and is currently proving a very useful addition to our team.

Some of this work is exploratory however real gains have been achieved.

This year despite a challenging and changing environment I believe we continue to achieve our core mission and achieved the priorities we set ourselves last year. The fact that we are still here is testament to that statement.

The impact we are now able to demonstrate is due to the hard work and dedication of the staff team; the commitment of OPAAL Board of Trustees, the support of our intern, partners and funders and the engagement of our members to whom we owe a real debt for their continued support and without whom we simply would not exist.

Kath Parson Chief Executive 16 September 2011