



Rights of Women

Athena Project

Final evaluation report



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SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

1. The Athena Project and Evaluation

- 1.1 Rights of Women (RoW)'s Athena Project ran from July 2014 – June 2017. It had three strands of provision: a telephone advice line accessible by vulnerable migrant women; hosting the Women's Migration and Asylum Network (WoMAN) online for professionals to exchange information and; delivering a training and capacity building programme to enable partner organisations to give accredited immigration advice at OISC Level 1 and 2.
- 1.2 The evaluation of the Athena project was largely formative with ongoing learning throughout. The final summative report was delivered after the end of the project in 2017.
- 1.3 This is a summary of the key learning generated by trialling the Athena model over three years. It should also be noted that over the course of the three years there were also a range of positive outcomes and benefits from this work both for vulnerable migrant women through the advice line and for partner organisations which developed their skills and capacity to help vulnerable migrant women through the WoMAN and OISC Capacity Building programme. These outcomes and impact are detailed in the full evaluation report.

2. Key Findings on Advice Line

- 2.1 **Advice Line in high demand and filling critical gap in services.** The Advice Line is in high demand and could only meet potential demand with considerably more resources. Demand for the service is increasing as a result of the closure of other advice services and the erosion in good quality legal advice, and the service is now a critical part of voluntary sector provision. In particular, it enables advice to be accessed by women outside London, where there is a dearth of services.
- 2.2 **Achieving outcomes for both clients and referral agencies.** Referral agencies and direct callers value the Advice Line very highly and report positive – and in some cases life-changing - outcomes from their contact with the service.
- 2.3 **High quality delivery despite less than perfect internal systems.** Despite some frustrations, mainly at not being able to do more and at unwieldy administrative systems, staff believe the Advice Line is a high quality service and feel satisfied with what it is delivering.
- 2.4 **Triage system does not deliver any particular advantage for clients or RoW.** Evidence from the evaluation shows that the triage model does not make a significant difference to the service, and on balance it is better to retain the direct advice model.
- 2.5 **Cost-effective given outcomes achieved.** The service may seem relatively expensive per call compared to non-legal helplines, but is cost-effective when compared against other high quality immigration legal services.
- 2.6 **Monitoring systems need overhaul.** There is an urgent need to review and improve monitoring systems to make the service more efficient and to support the development of policy positions.

3. Key Findings on Women's Migration and Asylum Network (WoMAN)

- 3.1 **Active membership is relatively small.** There are 543 members of the network, but the active membership is much smaller, as can be seen from the relatively few number of members posting and responding to the network.
- 3.2 **Network could be better promoted.** The existence of the network is not as widely known as its potential usefulness, and active recruitment has been very limited.
- 3.3. **Range of benefits and positive outcomes reported by those who use it.** The surveys and monitoring showed that those who do use the network find it useful. The network has enabled positive outcomes for organisations and their clients, and survey respondents were able to give specific examples of these.
- 3.4 **Better clarity on 'niche' of WoMAN may be desirable.** RoW staff may need to be clearer about how they differentiate WoMAN from other on-line groups relating to immigration and legal issues.
- 3.5 **Network requires legal input though lawyers not primary beneficiaries.** It was felt that WoMAN is primarily a resource for the women's sector organisations which come up against immigration issues in the course of their work and need advice on what to do. However, it was noted that experienced lawyers also need to be active members of the network to be able to give advice and information to these groups.

4. Key Findings on OISC Capacity Building Programme

- 4.1 **Model takes time to deliver on client outcomes.** There is a lengthy run up time on getting client outcomes, particularly if a cohort model is adopted and/or organisations which are not currently registered for OISC are being encouraged to participate. It has taken two and a half years before clients get to feel the benefits in some organisations (and in some there have been no client benefits as yet).
- 4.2 **Participating organisations have gained multiple benefits, some of them unexpected.** Whilst client outcomes have taken time to appear, other benefits, such as building staff confidence and helping organisations clarify their internal strategies as regards immigration advice giving, have appeared more quickly.
- 4.3 **Length of project means organisational plans might change.** The fact that the training has extended - and been taken up - over a longer time period than originally envisaged means that in some instances original plans and intentions to 'capacity build' staff have changed. This has worked both in the project's favour (some projects came on board during the project) and disfavour (some projects realised that they did not want to go down the capacity building route during the project). This is an inherent risk in this version of the model which has been often about organisations learning and understanding about OISC and its requirements as the project has progressed.
- 4.4. **A 'one size fits all' approach to capacity building may not be the most effective use of resources.** Though some organisations actively need and welcome training to enhance their capacity, others have participated either because they were curious or felt they had to, with varying degrees of success.

- 4.5 Different starting points and commitment produce different results.** The difference in approach and commitment between ‘migrant or advice’ organisations and VAW organisations has been apparent in the success of this model. For VAW organisations, more limited training (DDVC only) may be more appropriate and/or other ways of providing immigration advice ‘in house’. Future models need to take account of the cultural shift necessary to become an immigration advice provider.
- 4.6 A better understanding of the complexity and commitment involved is needed before committing to such a capacity building programme.** The value of becoming OISC registered as well as what is involved in doing so needs to be better understood prior to partners being recruited to any future capacity building programme. Although RoW developed an MOU which set out roles and responsibilities, in reality organisations did not internalise what this would entail in practice. Face to face meetings and discussions are needed to embed a full understanding of the limitations and expectations of OISC registration.
- 4.7 Creating a tailored support package for individual partners is important.** This takes time to build sufficient trust and knowledge and understand the partner’s needs.
- 4.8 Strategic consideration of immigration advice giving is desirable for ‘new’ immigration advice providers.** Partners who have previously not been OISC regulated need to consider at senior staff and board level whether they are committed to pursuing a model of provision which includes immigration advice, and if so how that will be taken forward by them, or by others.
- 4.9 RoW has gained considerable knowledge and reputation with OISC during the Athena programme.** To a large extent, RoW was learning on the job in terms of OISC regulation and developing its capacity to advise partner organisations around this. Having established relationships with OISC and gained developed knowledge of both the rules and how to navigate the regulatory system, it would be reasonable to assume that future projects could proceed more smoothly and quickly in this regard at least.
- 4.10 Partners could be helped to consider other models of providing immigration advice.** It may be that partners can consider how they are going to meet their clients’ known and anticipated needs for immigration advice into the future, and this may not involve training existing staff. The three models which partner organisations appear to be pursuing in are: i) Training up staff and volunteers internally to enhance the immigration advice offer (the Athena model) ii) Holding sessions on site delivered by others on a regular basis where clients get advice and potentially their cases taken on or referred iii) Recruiting/employing an immigration lawyer or OISC qualified adviser to field immigration enquiries and undertake the necessary advice and casework, with perhaps light triage from OISC L1 advisers or support workers

Introduction

The Athena Project: background and overview

Rights of Women's (RoW) Athena project has run from July 2014 to June 2017, funded by Comic Relief and Trust for London, with a contribution to some elements from Unbound Philanthropy. It aimed to test new ways to support vulnerable migrant women and those working on their behalf at a time of severe cutbacks in the immigration advice sector. It did this by:

- a. Providing a telephone advice line accessible by vulnerable migrant women and their workers. Notably, it trialled a new approach of 'triage' following a remodelling to see if this enabled benefits for clients and efficiencies for RoW
- b. Hosting the Women's Migration and Asylum Network (WoMAN) as an interactive online forum for professionals working in the women and migration field
- c. Setting up and running a training programme for partner organisations working in the migration and/or VAW field to enable them to build their own immigration advice capacity

The Athena Project was conceived and launched as one response to a yawning gap, post the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO), in the provision of free, good quality immigration advice, which has resulted in voluntary agencies coming under unprecedented pressure to find new ways to meet demand. During 2013, with funding from the Future Advice Providers Fund, RoW undertook a thorough strategic review of its immigration and asylum law services including undertaking an analysis of the legal and political environment in which its services operated as well as an analysis of data collected from its existing services for vulnerable migrant women. This process enabled RoW to develop the Athena project, with three inter-locking elements which responded both to the need to use its resources efficiently and to the need to use its specialism and expertise to boost capacity elsewhere in the sector.

The Athena Project's objectives were to:

- Improve and increase the provision of legal advice and representation to meet the needs of vulnerable migrant women, and
- Develop a new model of advice provision in partnership with other specialist organisations that works with, but is not dependent on, legal aid.

The Athena Project has two groups of outcomes. It both sought to achieve outcomes directly for vulnerable women (through its advice line, and indirectly through the work done by those working with vulnerable women who it supported), and also outcomes for other organisations and professionals working to support vulnerable migrant women. It also hoped to boost its own knowledge and organisational capacity through the work. Desired outcomes from the Athena Project were articulated at the start of the project as:

- Rights of Women will have increased capacity and resources to meet the needs of vulnerable migrant women

- Specialist organisations will have an increased understanding of the needs of vulnerable migrant women who are at risk of, or experiencing, gender-based violence.
- Specialist organisations will have increased skills and ability to meet the immigration advice needs of vulnerable migrant women.
- Women with an insecure immigration status will have an increased ability to make informed decisions based on their rights in the UK.
- Women with an insecure immigration status will have an increased ability to access financial and other sources of support, therefore reducing destitution/poverty and the risk of re-victimisation.
- Women with an insecure immigration status will have an increased ability to secure safety and justice in the UK

There was particular interest amongst funders and other stakeholders in the training element, which was viewed as a pilot project from which RoW, their partner organisations and funders could derive lessons for the future. The RoW pilot is one of several different models being tested by voluntary agencies; all of these models have a common aim to build the capacity of the not for profit advice sector to give appropriate advice to those who need it. The fact that they are doing this in different ways presents an opportunity for learning about what works, for whom and in what context.

Funders were clear that this project would be a success provided there was learning. They have appreciated the information supplied and the full and frank discussions which RoW has had with them. The bottom line for them is that they are trying to find creative ways of responding to ‘the gap’, and so being as rigorous, honest and comparative as possible is welcomed.

Evaluation role and overview

Rights of Women (RoW) commissioned On the Tin (Ceri Hutton and Jane Harris) to undertake a two-year evaluation of the Athena Project. The evaluation was designed to be both formative and summative. RoW, the funders and evaluators hoped that learning from implementing the model could be identified and used to make changes to the project as it progressed. To enable this to happen the evaluation needed to be flexible and to adjust to changing circumstances and emerging issues. For example, at key points in the project, when RoW needed to make decisions about how best to proceed next, the evaluators met with the RoW staff team to talk through findings, set them in context and discuss how best to act upon what had been learnt. When the RoW team needed to know more about an issue they thought was important, the evaluators worked with the team to design ways to capture more information through the evaluation; for example, Ceri Hutton chaired a meeting between RoW and other agencies in the field to discuss responses to the difficulties providers faced and agree a collaborative approach to addressing these, as well as supporting RoW to bring specific issues to the attention of OISC. The evaluation team also worked with RoW to find ways to follow up with women who had telephoned the Advice Line and find out what the outcomes of RoW’s advice had been.

The summative elements of the evaluation comprised an interim report, delivered in February 2016, and a summary of emerging findings, delivered in January 2017. RoW used both outputs to help shape its work - the interim report resulted in some changes to the project (for example the triage element of the Advice Line) and the summary of findings helped shape a proposal to Trust for London for further funding.

Appendix A contains a full description of the evaluation methodology. In addition, each section includes a brief description of the methods used to evaluate the element of the project discussed in that section. In summary, evaluation activities comprised:

- Interviews with all key RoW staff and volunteers at key stages in the project on their view of progress and lessons being learnt
- Regular meetings with RoW staff to review progress and plan evaluation work (5 meetings held, regular contact maintained throughout)
- Review of advice line data and detailed examination of monitoring and outcome recording systems
- Interviews with sample of agencies referring to the Advice Line at three points during the project
- Follow up interviews with clients phoning the Advice Line (undertaken by RoW staff under supervision in November/December 2016)
- Two online surveys of the WoMAN to gather feedback from members (December 2015 and 2016)
- Observation (through membership) of the WoMAN activity and a review of a sample of a month's activities to see how these are used
- Observation of OISC Level 1 training session July 2015 and review of training materials
- Participation in meetings with OISC, including a meeting between OISC and partner organisations
- Interviews and face to face meetings with partner agencies participating in the training programme at various stages in the project
- Interviews with external stakeholders to gather views on the model, issues arising around regulation and emerging needs and trends
- Convening of a small group of other NGOs to consider strategic issues around how best to support clients and the sector in September 2016

Report overview

This report contains five sections, dealing with each element of the Athena Project and with the model as a whole:

- Section 1 focuses on the Advice Line
- Section 2 contains findings on the WoMAN
- Section 3 deals with the OISC training element
- Section 4 discusses the model as a whole
- Section 5 contains conclusions and recommendations from the evaluation

1. The Advice Line

Key Findings

1. **Advice Line in high demand and filling critical gap in services.** The Advice Line is in high demand and could only meet potential demand with considerably more resources. Demand for the service is increasing as a result of the closure of other advice services and the erosion in good quality legal advice, and the service is now a critical part of voluntary sector provision. In particular, it enables advice to be accessed by women outside London, where there is a dearth of services.
2. **Achieving outcomes for both clients and referral agencies.** Referral agencies and direct callers value the Advice Line very highly and report positive – and in some cases life-changing - outcomes from their contact with the service.
3. **High quality delivery despite less than perfect internal systems.** Despite some frustrations, mainly at not being able to do more and at unwieldy administrative systems, staff believe the Advice Line is a high quality service and feel satisfied with what it is delivering.
4. **Triage system does not deliver any particular advantage for clients or RoW.** Evidence from the evaluation shows that the triage model does not make a significant difference to the service, and on balance it is better to retain the direct advice model.
5. **Cost-effective given outcomes achieved.** The service may seem relatively expensive per call compared to non-legal helplines, but is cost-effective when compared against other high quality immigration legal services.
6. **Monitoring systems need overhaul.** There is an urgent need to review and improve monitoring systems to make the service more efficient and to support the development of policy positions.

1.1. Evaluation approach

As part of our on-going formative evaluation of the Athena Project, we produced brief ‘emerging findings’ in May 2015 to inform a funding application, and then a detailed report on the Immigration and Asylum Law Advice Line (‘the Advice Line’) in January 2016. The evaluation particularly focussed on the triage model at this point and its (dis)benefits given the departure of the Gateway Assistant in early 2016. This gave RoW an unforeseen need and opportunity to review the effectiveness and efficiency of the triage model. The evaluation resulted in RoW making a decision to take calls directly rather than continue with the triage model and it subsequently employed a part-time adviser.

Since we produced the 2016 interim report we have focused on evaluating how the service is working post-triage and supporting the project to collect information on outcomes for callers.

Over the whole period of the evaluation we used a variety of methods to support RoW staff in thinking through particular elements of the Advice Line and to evaluate its impact overall, which were:

- Semi-structured interviews with staff members working on the Advice Line and regular users of the Advice Line from other agencies. 20 interviews were conducted, eight with current and former members of RoW staff and 12 with advice and support workers from a range of organisations, including women’s support groups and domestic violence service providers. Interviews took place between April and June 2015, in December 2015 and again in January 2017.
- A review of a sample of 185 call records spanning the period January 2013 to July 2016.
- A review of call monitoring data which included both equalities data, information gathered on immigration status and notes taken during the calls¹. To inform our detailed interim report we compared the data collected by advisers between 1 April 2011 and 31 January 2014 (before the triage system was introduced) and 1 February 2014 and 14 December 2015 (‘post-triage’).
- We asked staff working on the Advice Line to complete time records for the period July to August 2016 to establish how much time was being spent on calls and how much on follow up and administration. In particular, we wanted to make sure that funding was sufficient to cover the cost of resources allocated to the Advice Line.
- To understand more about outcomes for users of the service, we supported RoW staff to undertake an outcome tracking exercise for 16 clients to find out what had happened to them. It was more feasible and ethical for staff to do the calls because of issues of client confidentiality and consent. We selected a sample of 16 women who had called the line from the schedule of files reviewed; the intention was that the list of women to call would include those who were likely still to be in the country and who had called because they had an issue that might take some time to resolve. We provided questions and an introduction for RoW staff to use during the call, and then collected and analysed the results. Staff called back because of issues of client confidentiality and consent. Calls were made during November and December 2016.

1.2. Overview of Advice Line

RoW’s Immigration and Asylum Law Advice Line has been running since 2011. The service was originally established with a grant from Unbound Philanthropy, although RoW has been running legal helplines since 1975. The line seeks to assist individual women with insecure immigration status who have experienced violence and the professionals who support them. RoW can only advise in English on the law as it applies in England and Wales.

From 2014, RoW operated a triage system for the Advice Line. This was a change introduced to try and ensure a more even call volume and enable more callers to be able to access the Advice Line during the allocated opening times. Under this system, the caller will speak to a triage assistant who takes some personal details and information about the legal issue. A specialist adviser, who is a qualified solicitor, will then call back to give advice within five working days. The Gateway Assistant left in January 2016, and since then the triage system has been replaced by advisers taking calls and giving advice ‘on the spot’.

¹ Attendance notes as they are known internally

When the Advice Line first opened it was only available to callers for 4 hours per week. With funding from Unbound in 2014, the line was able to open for 6 hours per week, with staff and volunteers spending a further 22 hours per week, on average, on call-backs. Opening hours for the Advice Line were extended in May 2016 to 10 am to 4pm on Monday and Thursday. Funding for the Gateway Assistant post was used to employ a part-time adviser who works 14 hours per week. The full time RoW Legal Officer spends on average 14 hours per week on advising callers and administration of the line, while the Senior Legal Officer spends approximately one day per month taking calls and contributes to management and administration. There are no Advice Line volunteers at present. Currently staff spend a total of 29 hours per week on resourcing the Advice Line, including taking calls, writing up cases and doing research.

The total annual cost of providing the Advice Line is approximately £40,000 (excluding organisational overheads). In the period from January 2015 to December 2016 the service took 642 calls, advising an average of 27 women per month. In July and August 2016, immediately following the Brexit vote, there was a spike in calls from EU nationals or women married to EU nationals, increasing the total number of calls to 44 and 40 per month respectively.

From the time sheet exercise, we found that advisers dealt with an average of 25 calls per month from January to July 2016. This is the same number as the Advice Line was able to deal with under the triage system. However, the average length of calls was longer. In the two month period during which advisers' time was monitored, the average length of time per call was 45 minutes, with an average of 16 minutes' follow up, additional research and/or administration per call. Under the triage system the average length of time spent by advisers on calls was 29 minutes per call.

1.3. Findings on outcomes and impact of Advice Line

Outcomes are difficult to track for a service like the Advice Line, as many interventions are single, short and delivered to people who are often in states of transition – and sometimes at risk - and therefore difficult to follow up with afterwards. To get as much information as we could about outcomes for callers we spoke to referring agencies and supported RoW staff to carry out a call-back exercise. We also reviewed 185 individual attendance notes and noted any signposting at the time of the call, as well as callers' own assessments of how helpful the call had been.

Outcomes for clients

Type and level of support provided

Callers phone the Advice Line about a wide range of issues, some of which are extremely complex. It is difficult to summarise the reasons for calls into succinct categories, but we have attempted to organise the 185 cases we reviewed in detail into broad reasons for the call (see Figure 1 below). The types of issues the Advice Line is helping women with include:

- Claiming asylum
- The rights of Europeans and their families in the UK (there was predictably a spike in calls on this following the Brexit vote and advice providers are noticing increasing requests for advice from EU nationals)
- Trafficking
- Immigration law including domestic violence, long residence and family life
- Financial support options including for women with no recourse to public funds (NRPF)

Of the sample of 185 cases reviewed by the evaluators, the categories of primary reason for call were:

Figure 1: Reasons for call recorded by RoW (sample of 185 cases reviewed)

Summary of primary reason for call	Number	%
Relationship breakdown due to domestic violence, and impact on immigration status	77	42%
Seeking advice on status of children born in UK	26	14%
Relationship breakdown not due to DV, but caller is on a dependent or spousal visa	26	14%
Other immigration law (including access to public funds)	25	13%
Seeking information about claiming asylum	13	7%
Overstaying visa ²	7	4%
Other (including trafficking)	11	6%
TOTAL	185	100%

The proportion of calls in the case review sample coming directly from women was 80%, with 20% coming from other agencies on behalf of a woman they were supporting.

In addition to more straightforward legal queries about immigration status, Advice Line staff noted that an increasing number of callers were also grappling with issues relating to benefits and money. As one adviser explained:

“Benefits are an issue particularly for EEA citizens – we advise them that they are entitled to benefits after a DV situation and they say ‘oh yeah but the refuge or social services or the DWP or the homeless unit have turned us away so would you mind putting it in writing so we can show it to them’ - which exposes the limits of an advice line in a way. We are not representing people. But I suppose if they could take an email to an authority it kind of gives them some back up documentation. I send them an email and say ‘this is what you should say to Social Services’. Because benefits and housing all depend increasingly on immigration status you are not just advising people, but we are not really funded to do anything else.”

How the advice line has helped clients

Wherever possible, callers are asked questions about the impact of the advice they were given at the end of the call. However, sometimes it is not appropriate to ask these questions (because the caller is upset, or under pressure for instance).

The interim report of January 2016 includes a summary of responses to these questions up to and including December 2015. We reviewed responses from January to July 2016, which are summarised in Figure 2 below. Overall, a large majority of callers continue to be more confident about their legal problems after the call.

Figure 2: Responses to caller survey January to July 2016

Answered questions	156	70%	% of all callers
Did not answer questions	70	30%	% of all callers

² It is noted that many more clients than this were likely to be overstaying their visas as well as one of the other categories applying, but only one reason was recorded thus making this number far lower. This issue would be addressed with better database and recording systems.

Confident or very confident about legal problem before call	12	8%	% of responders
Confident or very confident about legal problem after call	136	87%	% of responders
Not at all or not particularly confident before call	144	92%	% of responders
Not at all or not particularly confident after call	20	13%	% of responders

The call-back exercise carried out in November and December 2016 was designed to find out in more depth about outcomes from the Advice Line. This was the first time the team had carried out such an exercise and, although it is possible that the sample is skewed towards women who were easier to re-contact and whose cases were of a type that meant they were still likely to be in the country, it proved both useful and affirming. The findings from the 16 call-backs were extremely positive. Every one of the 16 women said that the call with the Advice Line had been helpful. Interviewees mentioned in particular that the advice had been clear, detailed and realistic, that it had helped them orientate and gain confidence, and that the advisers had treated them well on the call.

Most had followed up the advice and done what was suggested. Positive outcomes included feeling more confident in dealing with solicitors and clearer about what questions to ask and what information they needed to supply. Several of the women had cases still ongoing, and three had gone on to receive indefinite leave to remain under the domestic violence rule.

These quotes from call-back interview notes illustrate how the advice from RoW had helped them:

"I remember you explained to me my options, I wrote them down. You told me different options, the DDVC and also if I didn't want to go with that. You also gave me options about dealing with lawyer. You even said what would happen after ILR and what are risks of losing ILR. You said stay inside England, important not to break law and have no criminal record. These things no-one else explained to me. Gave me a bit of confidence, that there is still chance for me."

"[Client] was very positive about the person that she spoke to from RoW. She remembered that the explanation she was given was very clear and that after speaking to her she felt more confident and understood what she needed to do to resolve her immigration matter. She also felt more confident about instructing a solicitor after speaking to the RoW adviser."

"[Client] said the advice was very helpful, in particular the information that she was entitled to continue working. She had thought that she could not work and once she received advice from RoW obtained assistance to get a letter confirming her right to work. [Client] said this was of immense help to herself and her three children who had been living in a refuge at the time. Following the call [client] was helped by the refuge where she was staying to find a law centre who have assisted her with making an application and shortly after speaking to RoW and getting this help she was able to start working again."

Outcomes for other organisations

The Advice Line interim report highlighted a number of outcomes for other organisations, including:

- The Advice Line helps to fill a gap in the provision of good quality advice for vulnerable refugee and migrant women. For a range of reasons, the supply of good quality, affordable immigration advice for such women has reduced substantially in recent years and the number of voluntary sector providers of such advice has reduced at a time when pressure on such

services has increased. This situation has only got worse since the interim report was written in January 2016.

- There is an overlap between immigration and domestic abuse issues for many women using the services of RoW's partner organisations. However the staff and volunteers of many of these partner organisations are often not qualified to give advice on immigration issues given strict OISC accreditation requirements. RoW provides a reliable service for these agencies to refer their clients to.
- There is a particular shortage of immigration advice services outside London. Accessing telephone advice is therefore very important for women who live outside London, potentially saving them time and money as well as giving them the advice they need.
- The service helps women's organisations understand their clients' needs better (although RoW has had to balance giving information to other agencies with ensuring they are not being encouraged to give advice directly, in contravention of the prohibition on providing unregulated immigration advice).
- The Advice Line is a 'last port of call' for cases which are often too complicated to be dealt with by other agencies. For example, callers and agencies reported that they had tried to get advice from elsewhere and had found that advice unsatisfactory or other advisers had not been able to help.

Other professionals continue to value the Advice Line highly and wish they had access to it at all hours and were always able to get through. There appears to be continuing and growing demand for access to this type of support for professionals, and though one referral agency said that since the extension of Advice Line hours they felt it had got slightly easier to get through, overall the message from referring agencies is still that it is a real challenge to access as it is always busy: *"We tell our clients that they should start phoning right before 10 and keep phoning constantly if they want to stand a chance of getting through."*

1.4. Lessons around delivery and performance

Input needed

It is clear that if the Advice Line had the resources to extend its opening hours there would be demand for an expanded service. An updated IT system to support the Advice Line service is also urgently needed; a better system would cut down on the time staff currently spend on administration and enable more sophisticated recording and monitoring, helping RoW to build a better evidence base for policy influencing purposes.

Triage model and conclusions

This evaluation has been timely in that it has taken place over a period when RoW trialled and then reviewed a triage system. The evaluation has been able to capture learning about the model as it has emerged, and has been able to feed this back into the development of the service.

As we concluded in the interim report, the lesson from the evaluation is that the triage model is not a substantially better way of delivering the service than the original system of advisers taking calls directly. It seems that the triage system resulted in shorter calls for advisers, on average, than the

system of direct advice giving. However, stopping triage did not result in fewer calls being taken, as the triage post was replaced by a part-time adviser thus enabling an extension of the Advice Line opening hours. Staff themselves felt that losing the triage post had not made a great deal of difference to the time they were spending on advice work, and thought that, on balance, there was less duplication of effort if they took calls directly. There is also evidence that clients prefer being able to get through directly, particularly those in crisis, and tell their story to one person who then goes on to advise them.

Accessibility

Feedback from referral agencies shows that callers have consistently found it difficult to get through to the line, which is often engaged due to the volume of calls and limited opening hours. Indeed, several of the trainees interviewed in connection with the training element of the Athena Project said that one of the advantages of having been a trainee was that they could circumvent the Advice Line and get advice by calling one of the RoW staff directly.

These comments from referral agencies sum up the difficulties they have experienced in accessing the service:

“I do use the Advice Line but annoyingly it’s not often available; every time I want to use it it’s the wrong day. But we try... “

“We haven’t used the Advice Line very much I must say. I think the problem with it is the delay in getting through to be honest – our clients tend to wait until they are in a crisis situation and they need a response now. It’s impossible to guarantee that we would get through.”

“We use the line but it’s very difficult to get through though. It’s useful therefore to be able to drop RoW staff a line and say ‘Any chance of picking your brain when it suits you outside Advice Line hours?’ “

Monitoring and data collection

The interim evaluation report (January 2016) made a series of recommendations about improving the Advice Line recording and monitoring forms. As yet these have not been implemented, partly because they will be linked to a new IT system and the team felt it would be better not to make any changes before the system was in place. It seems clear that having the new system and streamlining the monitoring forms to purposeful and non-intrusive questions only will cut down on administrative time, make it easier to monitor outcomes and make it possible for advisers to take more calls.

It is worth noting that some members of the team said that they found the monitoring forms frustrating, and raised particular concerns about the equal opportunities questions. As one person said: *“Some of the monitoring it is the kind of monitoring which is really an intrusion of privacy – you spend as long trying to explain what bisexual means as you do collecting the information. Some of the questions on the EOPs form seem pointless and they really need to be reviewed in relation to how useful this information is and whether it is being used.”*

On the basis of these and similar comments from others, and of our own observations about the monitoring information and the way it is collected, we summarise in Figure 3 below an outline set of monitoring questions, with a rationale for each – a list of ‘what do we really want to know and why?’ This information would obviously be additional to the detail that advisers record about the nature of

the issue the woman is calling about. This framework could be used to help scope out a new monitoring system once the new IT system is more advanced.

Figure 3: Information to be monitored and rationale

Questions to ask/information to collect	Rationale
Who is taking the call?	Necessary in case of need for follow up or query
Primary reason for the caller's enquiry	Although it is difficult to put some cases into categories, it would be useful to come up with some revised, consistent and up to date categories, for example those relating to issues RoW would like to lobby about, funders wish to know about or are affected by recent or proposed policy changes.
Caller's immigration status	Similarly, it would be useful to have consistent and up to date categories so that the information can be collated and used in publicity and policy influencing.
Domestic violence rule?	Important to monitor numbers affected in case of policy change.
Is the caller likely to be eligible for legal aid?	Would be useful to follow up and find out whether women did get legal aid. Also useful to monitor signposting of eligible women, as well as change in numbers over time.
Would the caller have been eligible for legal aid before April 2013?	Monitoring the impact of the changes brought in by LASPO.
Is the caller (a) phoning for herself or (b) an agency phoning on behalf of a woman	Particularly important to monitor access to the service and to ensure RoW is not encouraging others to give advice.
Duration of call	Will help to assess the resources needed and lobby where necessary.
How did the caller find out about the Advice Line?	Important information on which to base marketing and publicity efforts in the future.
Signposting to other services	Will provide information on other services that complement RoW, as well as giving information for follow up, e.g. did the woman approach the suggested service and what was the outcome?
Satisfaction with and impact of the call	Critical for development of the service and for making the case for funding.
Equalities questions	Keep simple and only ask what is absolutely necessary for funders and policy influencing.
Would the caller mind if RoW called her back in a few months' time to find out how she has got on?	Will enable RoW to carry out regular follow up calls without having to go through a time consuming case file review.

Limitations of reach and impact

The Advice Line may be difficult for the most vulnerable to access, for example:

- Calls can only be taken in English so women who access the line either have to speak English or have a friend/professional who does.

- A relatively high proportion say they found the Advice Line via an internet search, which means that having access to the internet makes it easier for women to access the service and many women who might need to call the line do not.
- The line can be difficult to reach by women who are detained in prison. We understand prisoners generally have to have the telephone number cleared on their PIN phone before being able to access that service, but there is a limit to the cleared numbers they can have on their phone.³

Given the complicated nature of the calls and the fact that the advisers who answer them are experienced immigration lawyers capable of taking on cases, the fact that the advice line is only set up to advise people in 30-45 minute slots has its limitations. Lawyers who see clients face to face ask for documents and spend considerable time reading through them to get a proper understanding of the client and the chronology which has got them to where they are. However on the Advice Line RoW advisers have to rely on instructions from clients and there is quite a high risk of being given inaccurate information, and therefore giving the wrong advice. This is not because callers set out to mislead but because they often know very little about their immigration status.

Not being able to see documents is therefore a challenge for RoW. Sometimes it can mean that calls take much longer than they should because the adviser has to ask the caller to read out documents word for word. Staff are not suggesting that advisers should ask for documents, as that would take the service into different territory, but do believe that it would sometimes be helpful to see documentation. It was also noted that advisers tend to qualify their advice by telling the client 'This is what I advise based on what you have told me'.

Costing issues

It is difficult to assess cost effectiveness because there are very few closely comparable services against which to benchmark the RoW Advice Line. In addition the service is growing and evolving and RoW acknowledges has not yet reached peak efficiency in terms of the time spent on recording and monitoring systems. RoW would hope for example over time to have sufficient resources to invest in a volunteer adviser base, as it does with its family law team where the unit cost of giving advice is around £16 per call.

The current modelling of the Advice Line raises a number of costing issues, including:

- Calls to the Advice Line are on average quite lengthy. We did not have a direct comparator to a legal line such as JCWI, but it is interesting to note that a legal helpline such as the one provided by RoW means that staff spend on average 4 times as long on each call as calls to the National Domestic Violence Helpline.
- The Advice Line is staff by lawyers and only open at specific hours. This 'limited supply' of specialist support results in it only being contacted by those who really need the service with comparatively complicated legal issues.
- The Advice Line is currently operating at fairly minimum resourcing levels which means that it does not achieve the economies of scale of larger helplines. Investing more in building up the volunteer database would result in increased call levels over time, for example.
- RoW's systems, which rely on manual recording and duplication of administration make operation of the service less efficient than it could be.

1.5. Suggestions for improvement

³ The situation in Immigration Removal Centres is different, where women are allowed to have non-smart mobile phones

The Advice Line is clearly needed, used and over-subscribed and could be expanded and better promoted. It could also be complemented in various ways to ensure better targeting and use of the specific and unique expertise RoW holds.

About the existing Advice Line service:

- a. The IT system is critical and will make a significant difference to the way the Advice Line operates. A more modern telephone system linked to the database will enable advisers to work remotely, offering the possibility of expanding the Advice Line using volunteers, and a new electronic call recording system will cut down considerably on administration and make it easier to report on activity and outcomes.
- b. Linked to this, the monitoring for the Advice Line still needs to be streamlined with the aim of reducing the time spent on this, particularly around equalities monitoring.
- c. Maintain the direct access to adviser system. The system of having advisers receive calls directly seems to be working well and does not mean fewer calls being taken provided current extended opening hours are maintained. In addition staff overall prefer it, as do clients. As a result there seems to be no compelling case for returning to the triage model.
- d. We suggest that RoW could continue with the practice of making follow up calls to a sample of women who have been advised to find out what has happened. Women could be asked at the time of the call whether they would mind someone calling back at a later time.

About developing RoW's primary advice services

- a. The Advice Line could usefully be extended in terms of hours, pending further resources. It could further be potentially better targeted with clearer eligibility criteria. Ideally, those consulted who expressed a view would like the Advice Line to be available on every week day.
- b. The current scope of the Advice Line could usefully be extended to include follow up in the form of drafting a letter confirming preliminary advice which clients can then use with future advisers.
- c. The Advice Line could be complemented by RoW undertaking Exceptional Case Funding Applications for women who are victims of DV but unable to access in-scope legal aid. Such women currently find it extremely difficult to find a lawyer who is prepared to make such an application. Clients could be identified through the Advice Line and then triaged to this service.
- d. The issue of 'Second Tier Advice' i.e. advice to workers in the field supporting vulnerable women with immigration issues has been considered at various points throughout this evaluation. Legal Services Agency (LSA) in Glasgow have a system where they provide advice sessions at specific times for workers only (which they call Second Tier Advice) so that case workers can phone and check their approach. An evaluation of this service showed it was well used and boosted capacity and quality in the field⁴. The regulatory and legal context is different in Scotland, however, and in England giving advice to non-qualified advisers could then result in them giving immigration advice to individuals, which is prohibited by the

⁴ *The Extra Mile: An evaluation of the model, achievements and success factors of the LSA's Women and Young Person's Department* by Hutton C. and Harris J., 2014

regulation of immigration advice. RoW has therefore understandably been extremely cautious of going down this route.

However, there is an appetite amongst some existing partner agencies for having 'back stop advice support' over the phone for workers who have recently trained and qualified, and this could be extended to include partners with named advisers operating at OISC Level 1 and Level 2 who may be operating in isolation and want support for individual client work. At present their options (with RoW) are to go through the WoMAN network, but this goes to a very wide group, and there may be reluctance amongst practitioners to admit to ignorance or check small details (it was particularly the advantage of being able to ask 'silly questions' which advisers appreciated about LSA's service). We note such practical support is currently given to some extent following training, but suggest this could be more formalised and extended to a wider group.

Proposals on setting up separate sessions would have to be thought through further but it is a potential way of sharing RoW's expertise in a tangible way which builds capacity without extensive lead up times (i.e. training workers). It might be possible, for example, for partner agencies to apply for funding for back up advice and support which then buys time from RoW they can draw on over a year.

- e. The Advice Line could be complemented by RoW identifying select cases for specialist casework and potentially strategic litigation and both RoW and some workers in the field feel this would be a good use of their skills, position and resources. Through this RoW could not only keep their specialism alive and at the cutting edge, but also potentially develop practice and the law in ways which would have a wider benefit to vulnerable women and those working in the sector. It would also be consistent with the ability of the Advice Line to identify trends in problems being faced by women and take this further, but in house. One example of the kind of issue which might be raised was in relation to the Home Office's treatment of evidence in relation to DV.

Clearly the development of some or all of those functions would require additional resources.

2. The Women's Migration and Asylum Network (WoMAN)

Key Findings

1. **Active membership is relatively small.** There are 543 members of the network, but the active membership is much smaller, as can be seen from the relatively few number of members posting and responding to the network.
2. **Network could be better promoted.** The existence of the network is not as widely known as its potential usefulness, and active recruitment has been very limited.
3. **Range of benefits and positive outcomes reported by those who use it.** The surveys and monitoring showed that those who do use the network find it useful. The network has enabled positive outcomes for organisations and their clients, and survey respondents were able to give specific examples of these.
4. **Better clarity on 'niche' of WoMAN may be desirable.** RoW staff may need to be clearer about how they differentiate WoMAN from other on-line groups relating to immigration and legal issues.
5. **Network requires legal input though lawyers not primary beneficiaries.** It was felt that WoMAN is primarily a resource for the women's sector organisations which come up against immigration issues in the course of their work and need advice on what to do. However, it was noted that experienced lawyers also need to be active members of the network to be able to give advice and information to these groups.

2.1 Evaluation approach

It was acknowledged during scoping discussions that WoMAN was 'light touch' in delivery and our evaluation approach reflected this. Our fieldwork involved:

- Joining the network so that we could see what was being posted
- Sending out a survey to all members of the network asking for views on its use and possible areas for improvement (December 2015, repeated with additional questions in December 2016)
- Interviews with RoW staff at various points during the evaluation
- Asking training partners about WoMAN in the course of their interviews
- Monitoring activity (number and nature of posts) over the period of the evaluation
- Reviewing activity in more detail for three months, selected at random

2.2. Overview of WoMAN

The Women’s Migration and Asylum Network (WoMAN) is an interactive forum for sharing information, disseminating research and seeking legal advice and representation for clients. Its objectives, set out in terms of reference, are to:

- Facilitate communication between and strengthen the understanding of network members on legal and policy issues that affect migrant and asylum-seeking women;
- Improve the participation of network members in the legal and policy formation process;
- Positively influence law and policy that affects migrant and asylum-seeking women;
- Promote gender equality and work towards the elimination of discrimination on the grounds of gender, as well as discrimination against women where it intersects with age, disability, gender identity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation or any combination thereof; and,
- To promote the human rights of all women in the UK.

Prospective members apply to join by sending an email to the group. If the person is not known to RoW and there is insufficient information to check they meet the criteria for membership, one of the group moderators (there are three members of RoW staff who have done this, one at any given time) will email the person to find out more about them. The moderators have found little need to moderate anything that has been posted to the group, although they do have the ability to put a filter on individuals if they post anything inappropriate.

There are 543 current members of the network, although the RoW team suspects that many of these have not used it for a long time. Around two thirds of the members who responded to the survey use the network once a month or more. There have been recent efforts to ‘grow’ the network by publicising it through training sessions which has seen some growth in membership but it was felt that this could be done more systematically.

The current membership lists have not enabled recording of membership ‘type’, though since December 2015 the Legal Officer has recorded details of all new members in an excel spreadsheet which gives some sense of who is joining. The main category joining over this last year has been women support workers in the field, with very few legal advisers now signing up.

RoW posts at least one case summary to the group per month. The work of producing these is supervised by the Legal Officer and done by volunteers. The general approach is to identify precedents, concerning not only immigration law, but also benefits issues, for example women retaining rights whilst on maternity leave. Cases are framed to convey messages for a non-legal audience; as one member of staff noted: ‘we try to keep them general, not esoteric’.

RoW staff also respond to posts as they come in. If there is a post which requires a response, RoW will wait to see who else joins in but then always makes sure that a response has been given. Rather than responding to queries from professionals over the telephone, staff try to encourage other professionals to join WoMAN and ask questions there.

To inform our interim report, we reviewed postings to WoMAN over the six months from July 2015 to January 2016. We updated this with a review of postings up to and including February 2017. There were 308 separate discussion threads over the whole period. The number per month ranges from eight to 29. Figure 4 shows a summary of the subject matter of postings:

Figure 4: Subject matter of postings to WoMAN

Topic	Number July 15 to Jan 16	No. Feb 16 to Feb 17
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Requests for information on a point of law (and responses)	20	80
Information about events and training	19	32
Administration	12	23
Case summaries	12	26
Job vacancies	10	17
Requests for representation or advice	10	15
Reports, briefings etc. posted by others	7	16
Information about campaigns	3	7
Interpreters needed	1	0
Total threads	94	214

2.3. Findings on outcomes and impact of WoMAN

To find out more about what types of issues were being raised, we reviewed activity for three months, selected at random. Figure 5 contains a summary of the posting topics. Requests for advice on legal issues were varied, and all those selected received more than one detailed response from RoW staff or group members, and in some cases both.

Figure 5: Summary of activity on WoMAN in 3 sample months

Topic	Month and number of posts		
	Sept 15	March 16	Nov 16
Requests for advice on a legal issue and responses:			
- Applying for NRPF lift	4		
- Pro bono legal assistance	1		
- Advice for chronically sick EU national	1		
- Undocumented women	1		
- Exceptional case funding / family reunion	1		
- Woman on a spouse visa		1	
- Clarification on 6 years leave to remain policy			7
Case law summaries	2	2	2
Relevant news (reversal of appeal fees)			1
Information about jobs and events	3	2	2
Group admin	3		1

We repeated the survey of WoMAN users in December 2016⁵ circulated twelve months previously. The survey received 32 responses, compared to 36 in 2015, and the findings from the survey revealed a similar picture of use of and satisfaction with the network. Figure 6 contains a profile of those who responded to the survey at each point in time. We do not know whether or not this is likely to be representative of the entire membership.

Figure 6: Profile of survey respondents

Role	Number Dec 2015	Number Dec 2016

⁵ With some additional questions agreed with RoW

Non-immigration (e.g. housing, debt, family) advice worker	10	10
Other	6	
Immigration lawyer (solicitor or barrister)	6	2
Refuge / VAWG worker	4	6
Academic	4	4
Immigration adviser (OISC accredited)	2	1
Community support worker	2	6
Health worker		3
Policy manager / analyst	2	
Total respondents	36	32

All 32 respondents in 2016 said that they found postings to the network useful or very useful. From a list of possible outcomes from using the network (where respondents could tick all that apply), the one most respondents chose was 'feeling supported' (59%). Roughly equal numbers selected their reasons for participating in the network as being to:

- Find solutions for individual clients I would otherwise not have found (48%)
- Check and give accurate advice (48%)
- Find other people who can help my clients (44%)
- Remain motivated and strong in my work (41%)

Some quotes from the survey (from the free text section) give a representative illustration of views from respondents:

"So many cases have particular, unusual circumstances. The WoMAN network significantly expands my knowledge and awareness of the experiences of asylum seekers and the problems they face in asylum hearings."

"I often find careful, thoughtful discussion of cases that are similar to those I'm addressing."

Respondents and RoW staff also noted that the network has been useful for sharing information about, for example, relevant training courses and events.

Interestingly, there were a small but significant number of comments which noted how some members were surprised (and worried) at the lack of knowledge and awareness of immigration law some of the questions posted implied.

In December 2016 the survey included new questions asking for examples of a) how the network has helped members or their clients and b) which key issues they are dealing with and whether they had any areas of particular concern. The following quotes illustrate how the network has helped:

"As a result of advice on an immigration issue I was able to work with Adult Social Care and to resolve the problem and prevent the client from becoming homeless and destitute."

"This is a brilliant network and has helped in the past when the woman we supported needed some advice in her own language and the network was able to provide a Punjabi speaker. This was a couple of years ago."

“I referred back to a couple of email threads to make an informed decision about the level of work involved with bringing a client into refuge/referring on/ and determining support needs due to complex immigration needs. I was able to quickly ascertain the nature of the client’s issues. I believe this enabled our organisation and the client a clearer overview, saved time and resources for us (and cost), time/ emotional/practical cost to the client was (possibly) reduced.”

“I mainly use the network for information relevant to women whose immigration status is not clear and who need to access refuge services. The briefings on case law have been particularly useful.”

And the following quotes summarise the key issues or concerns raised by respondents:

“I very rarely come across immigration issues but when I do the main issue is accessing legal advice and support as legal aid is not available and my clients cannot afford to pay for a qualified solicitor. This means a client experiences stress and worry for a significant period of time as I try to find the right advice using charitable or not for profit organisations. It also takes so much longer to resolve their problem than if legal advice was readily available.”

“Lesbian women face difficulty proving that they were persecuted and that they are lesbians.”

“Domestic violence - lots of issues around use of immigration status to abuse women. Lots of difficulties in supporting European women with access to refuge. Having very few options for signposting NRPF women”

“Women have no status and have no recourse to funds. Rely on handouts. Home Office are a nightmare to contact and for them to get back to the women we support. I have a letter going back to October 2015 which still they have not replied to despite my previous letters and phone calls chasing them.”

“Access to housing and financial support for asylum seeking women. The Immigration Act 2016 is going to leave many more women and children in perilous situations of destitution.”

“Immigration legal advice is a real issue, currently no matter starts in Suffolk, just outreach on one day a month. Increasing issue of women having suffered DA are not being accepted into refuge places as they are not able to evidence they meet tests to be eligible for housing benefit etc, or where they do not qualify finding others who can offer support.”

2.4. Lessons around delivery and performance

The main lessons around delivery of the network are about positioning and raising awareness of the network’s existence.

It was noteworthy that even some organisations who are partners with RoW in the training element of Athena were not aware of the existence and purpose of the network and some were surprised to learn of its existence: *“to my shame I am not aware of it”*. Another noted that: *“I use it and know it by a different acronym without the small ‘o’ so I think I entirely missed the point”*.

Several interviews mentioned potential duplication between WoMAN and the Refugee Legal Group (RLG) and Housing and Immigration Group (HIG). One interviewee observed, helpfully, that WoMAN is ideally set up to support organisations that are first and foremost gender-based and are dealing with immigration as it is an issue for many of their clients. One person said: *“This network is for the VAW orgs – they are trying to learn and get themselves accredited. For expert legal stuff it would be*

RLG and HIG. But for that reason it is brilliant that people like [names of specialist lawyers] keep an eye on the women's network and keep us 'on track'."

One member of staff added that the network would, in an ideal world, be a reliable resource for people to find a lawyer to represent their clients (this might work in the same way as the Housing and Immigration Network currently does). We noted a number of posts enquiring about this. A possible route to developing the capacity of the network to give legal advice might be to make links with particular firms and encourage them to contribute pro bono advice. However, this would require more effort and resources on RoW's part and its feasibility would depend on relationships with individual lawyers. There is a slight worry that the expert lawyers participating in the network will not gain sufficiently from participation for it to be useful and gradually drop out as their input is mainly altruistic. There was no evidence that this is currently happening though it is the case that new specialist lawyers do not seem to be coming 'on stream'. It is unclear whether or not this is a matter for concern.

2.5. Suggestions for improvement

Overall WoMAN is working well, but there is a sense that it could be put to better use. As already noted, there is a positioning issue for the network as more experienced lawyers and advisers in the field tend to be a member of at least one other group which is regularly updated. Suggestions for improvement are:

- a. Carry out a review of the membership and ensure the list of current members and their interests is up to date.
- b. Consider more dedicated and regular resources – either by staff or volunteers – to ensure that the network feels more 'live' and pertinent.
- c. Following the review and in consultation with members, consider whether to set up sub-groups within the network for people with particular areas of interest and specialism.
- d. Develop and make available more information sources for non-immigration specialists. This was suggested by those using the network, though it is acknowledged that simple guides are not always in the best interests of network users understanding the complexity and nuance of the issues which come up.
- e. Develop the ability to share more information about those who are available to undertake pro bono work.
- f. Undertake more regular and proactive promotion of the network, particularly amongst advisers.

3. The OISC capacity building programme

Key Findings

- 1. Model takes time to deliver on client outcomes.** There is a lengthy run up time on getting client outcomes, particularly if a cohort model is adopted and/or organisations which are not currently registered for OISC are being encouraged to participate. It has taken two and a half years before clients get to feel the benefits in some organisations (and in some there have been no client benefits as yet).
- 2. Participating organisations have gained multiple benefits, some of them unexpected.** Whilst client outcomes have taken time to appear, other benefits, such as building staff confidence and helping organisations clarify their internal strategies as regards immigration advice giving, have appeared more quickly.
- 3. Length of project means organisational plans might change.** The fact that the training has extended - and been taken up - over a longer time period than originally envisaged means that in some instances original plans and intentions to 'capacity build' staff have changed. This has worked both in the project's favour (some projects came on board during the project) and disfavour (some projects realised that they did not want to go down the capacity building route during the project). This is an inherent risk in this version of the model which has been often about organisations learning and understanding about OISC and its requirements as the project has progressed.
- 4. A 'one size fits all' approach to capacity building may not be the most effective use of resources.** Though some organisations actively need and welcome training to enhance their capacity, others have participated either because they were curious or felt they had to, with varying degrees of success.
- 5. Different starting points and commitment produce different results.** The difference in approach and commitment between 'migrant or advice' organisations and VAW organisations has been apparent in the success of this model. For VAW organisations, more limited training (DDVC only) may be more appropriate and/or other ways of providing immigration advice 'in house'. Future models need to take account of the cultural shift necessary to become an immigration advice provider.
- 6. A better understanding of the complexity and commitment involved is needed before committing to such a capacity building programme.** The value of becoming OISC registered as well as what is involved in doing so needs to be better understood prior to partners being recruited to any future capacity building programme. Although RoW developed an MOU which set out roles and responsibilities, in reality organisations did not internalise what this would entail in practice. Face to face meetings and discussions are needed to embed a full understanding of the limitations and expectations of OISC registration.
- 7. Creating a tailored support package for individual partners is important.** This takes time to build sufficient trust and knowledge and understand the partner's needs.
- 8. Strategic consideration of immigration advice giving is desirable for 'new' immigration advice providers.** Partners who have previously not been OISC regulated need to consider at senior staff and board level whether they are committed to pursuing a model of provision which includes immigration advice, and if so how that will be taken forward by them, or by others.

9. RoW has gained considerable knowledge and reputation with OISC during the Athena programme. To a large extent, RoW was learning on the job in terms of OISC regulation and developing its capacity to advise partner organisations around this. Having established relationships with OISC and gained developed knowledge of both the rules and how to navigate the regulatory system, it would be reasonable to assume that future projects could proceed more smoothly and quickly in this regard at least.

10. Partners could be helped to consider other models of providing immigration advice. It may be that partners can consider how they are going to meet their clients' known and anticipated needs for immigration advice into the future, and this may not involve training existing staff. At present the three models which partner organisations appear to be pursuing in order to meet the immigration needs of their clients are:

- i) Train up staff and volunteers internally to enhance the immigration advice offer (the Athena model) (Praxis; PAS; Paiwand)
- ii) Hold sessions on site delivered by others on a regular basis where clients get advice and potentially their cases taken on or referred (Aanchal Women's Aid; IKWRO expressed interest also)
- iii) Recruit and employ an immigration lawyer or OISC qualified adviser to field immigration enquiries and undertake the necessary advice and casework, with perhaps light triage from OISC L1 advisers or support workers (Ashiana; Kiran Support Services; Solace)

3.1 Evaluation approach

It became clear during scoping that the capacity building component of the Athena project was of particular interest to both RoW and funders. Its potential to build immigration advice capacity and spread immigration advice availability was felt to be quite high, as well as other possible benefits around enabling better regulation of advice and signposting already being given.

RoW's approach to providing the training and support to partner organisations evolved during the project. The evaluation approach was also flexible, paying attention to the changing realities and needs of the project. The formative nature of the evaluation was particularly welcomed in this area of work with the evaluators playing a supportive role by, for example, facilitating meetings which were about learning and development. Evaluation activities comprised:

- Interviews with RoW staff at regular stages to 'download' views on progress and lessons being learnt at that stage
- Regular meetings with RoW staff to review progress and plan further evaluation work
- Observation of OISC Level 1 training session July 2015 and review of training materials
- Participation in meetings with OISC. The evaluators helped prepare for and attended an initial meeting with OISC in December 2015 addressing particular challenges around regulation, as well as helped prepare for and facilitated a meeting between OISC and training partners in 2016.
- Interviews and face to face meetings with partner agencies participating in the training programme to help get initial views, to review progress and to gather views on the impact and benefits of the training model once staff and volunteers had been trained.
- Interviews with external stakeholders to gather views on the model, issues arising around regulation and emerging needs and trends
- Convening of a small group of NGOs with a wider, strategic remit (not Athena project partners) to consider strategic issues and lessons emerging about responding to gaps in immigration

advice provision. This meeting, in September 2016, had a particular focus on the OISC training programme but also looked more widely at how other ‘capacity building models’ were being pursued and lessons being learnt from these.

- Interviews with trainees who have been through the OISC Level 1 (and in a couple of cases OISC Level 2) training programme and are now beginning to deliver immigration advice. Trainee feedback was also reviewed.
- Secondary analysis of monitoring data and case studies collected by agencies participating in the training.

Details on those interviewed and consulted are to be found at Appendix B.

3.2 Overview of OISC training programme

Objectives and implementation of programme

The OISC capacity building programme set out to support community and voluntary organisations who were working with migrant women by offering them free training and support to OISC Level 1 and OISC Level 2. Its original intention was to seek partners from the VAW and migrant field and train workers from within those partner organisations first to OISC Level 1 and then, it was hoped with several, to OISC Level 2. Through this it was anticipated that various organisations would have either increased or new capacity to recognise, signpost and in some instances (when at the appropriate level) deal with immigration enquiries which vulnerable migrant women they were in contact with were raising. The project grew partly out of a desire to increase capacity, and partly out of a desire to convert uninformed and illegal (because unregulated) advice-giving into informed and legal advice-giving.

Programme partners

Over the course of the programme RoW worked with 12 partner organisations on this capacity building project. These were:

1. Aanchal Women’s Aid
2. Ashiana Network
3. Hibiscus Initiatives
4. IKWRO
5. IMECE
6. Kiran Support Services
7. KMEWO
8. Paiwand Afghan Association
9. Praxis
10. Prisoners’ Advice Service
11. Solace

The twelfth organisation RoW worked with was Eaves but unfortunately this organisation had to close in 2015. The only factor to record in relation to Eaves’ participation was that it sent two people on the first Level 1 training course in June-July 2015, one of whom then went on to join another partner organisation and become accredited.

Of these 12 partners, there were eight from the original cohort contacted in 2014 who agreed to participate in the programme. These were: Ashiana Network; Eaves; IKWRO; IMECE; KMEWO; Praxis; Prisoners’ Advice Service and Solace.

Partly because of the loss of Eaves and partly because it became clear that results (in terms of people studying and getting OISC qualifications) would take longer to filter through than originally anticipated, RoW started contacting other partner agencies during 2015 to expand the number of programme partners. RoW held face to face meetings with Hibiscus Initiatives in late 2015, and then subsequently Paiwand, Aanchal Women's Aid and Kiran Support Services all of whom became partners during 2016. The programme closed with the eleven partners listed above, though some had been much more participative than others.

Two partners received additional financial support from funders to enable them to participate in the programme: Prisoners' Advice Service and Solace. In addition, Solace started employing an immigration solicitor pretty well from the start of the Athena project which resulted in Solace's needs changing during the course of the project: this is explored in Section 3.4.

The rest of this section summarises inputs, courses held and individual as well as organisational progress.

Inputs and costs

The key elements of the work included:

- Preliminary awareness raising and finding partners for the scheme
- Liaison with partners around expectations
- Creation of training materials for OISC Level 1 course
- Updating of materials for each course iteration
- Running of OISC Level 1 course (three courses in all were run, each five days in duration in total, spread over a few weeks)
- Liaison and support to partners around OISC registration (ongoing from first course)
- Liaison with OISC around emerging anomalies or confusions, and increasingly about policy development (ongoing from first year)
- Ongoing liaison and chasing of existing partners (this has sometimes been extensive)
- Liaison and discussion with new partners who came 'on stream' during the programme
- Back up support to trainees once they had finished the course
- Support to some partner organisations around funding bids and strategic planning

The inputs required from both the Senior Legal Officer and the Legal Officer over the three year project were extensive. Both estimate they spent approximately 40% of their time on this project when taken overall. At some times they have been fully occupied, in particular in the time leading up to the first course when the course materials were being created, or before each subsequent course when the materials had to be comprehensively updated to reflect feedback and more importantly changes in rules and regulations, which have come thick and fast during the project's duration.

This puts the average annual cost at approximately £38,000 including National Insurance and project costs (such as training venues) but excluding overheads. However a year cannot really be considered in isolation as all three years were necessary in order to achieve the outcomes overall.

Courses held and numbers attending

Three five-day courses which trained participants to OISC Level 1 were prepared and delivered by RoW staff during June – July 2015, February – March 2016 and October – November 2016. In total 50 people attended those courses.

Preparations to deliver the first OISC Level 2 course started towards the end of 2016, late in the Athena project timetable. At this stage there was insufficient time for RoW to pull together a new course 'from scratch' and so they contracted out the training to an experienced trainer⁶ who delivered the course during January - February 2017. In total 11⁷ people attended this course.

Figure 7 shows attendance on each course, number of total attendees per organisation and numbers gaining accreditation at OISC Level 1 and 2 (with dates) per organisation.

Figure 7: Number of course attendants per course and per organisation and numbers gaining accreditation as at July 2017

ORGANISATION	OISC LEVEL 1			TOTAL L1 trained per org	OISC L1 passed (date)	OISC LEVEL 2	TOTAL L2 Trained per org	OISC L2 passed (date)
	June - July 2015	Feb - March 2016	Oct - Nov 2016			Jan - Feb 2017		
Aanchal Women's Aid	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Ashiana Network	1	1	2	4	0	0	0	0
Hibiscus Initiatives	0	3	4	7	2 (July 16) 1 (Jan 17) 1 (May 17)	3	3	1 (June 17)
IKWRO	1	2	1	4	0	0	0	0
IMECE	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
Kiran Support Services	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0
KMEWO	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
Paiwand Afghan Association	0	3	3	6	1 (Jan 17) 1 (April 17)	2 ⁸	2	1 (June 17)
Praxis	2	1 ⁹	2	5	1 (Nov 16) 2 (May 17)	2 ¹⁰	2	0
Prisoners' Advice Service	2	2	0	4	1 (March 16)	4	4	0
Solace	3 ¹¹	5	4	12 ¹²	1 (Jan 16) 2 (Oct 16) 1 (Mar 17)	0	0	0
Total	14¹³	17	19	50	14	11	11	2

In addition, RoW delivered:

⁶ Julian Bild, who delivers training inter alia for HJT, which is the main commercial provider of OISC accreditation training. <https://hjt-training.co.uk/>

⁷ 12 people started the course but one had to drop out for health reasons

⁸ One of these trainees did not attend the OISC Level 1 training as they were already qualified at this level

⁹ Trainee completed the course at one partner organisation and then left to join adviser team at another partner organisation

¹⁰ Three trainees from this partner organisation joined the course only one of whom at the time had passed their L1 accreditation, but the other two were going to be sitting this soon and indeed one has subsequently passed. One of these trainees (a volunteer and practicing barrister) who attended the L1 training in full was forced to drop out of the L2 course but it is envisaged they will soon be completing this training and qualification with ease.

¹¹ One of these trainees was employed by Eaves when they took this course, but subsequently joined Solace

¹² This figure is one more than those sent on training by this organisation as it includes one of the staff members trained whilst at Eaves who subsequently joined this partner organisation.

¹³ This figure is one more than the total of this column because it includes one participant from Eaves who did not go on to work in another partner organisation who attended the June-July 2015 training.

- A CPD session on ‘Domestic Violence and Immigration Law’ on the 30th November 2016 for trainees or OISC registered advisers from partner organisations. This was attended by 13 participants from Ashiana (2), Hibiscus Initiatives (2), IKWRO (1), PAS (1), Paiwand (2), Praxis (2), Solace (1), Imece (1) and KMEWO (1).
- A CPD training course regarding the ‘Immigration Act 2016’ on the 13th December 2016. This was a three hour course for trainees delivered by ILPA’s Legal Officer (who had authored a book on the Act) and was attended by 18 participants from Ashiana (1), Aanchal (1), Hibiscus (5), KMEWO (1), Paiwand (3), PAS (2), Praxis (3) and Solace (2).

Individual accreditation obtained during life of project

Out of the 50 individuals who attended the OISC Level 1 training during the Athena project, the following qualifications were gained at the time of writing (July 2017):

Fourteen people who participated in the training have passed OISC Level 1 examinations and are now able to deliver the full gamut of level 1 advice. In addition to these 14:

- Three participants have gained limited registration to do the DDVC concession from Ashiana
- Three lawyers from Prisoner’s Advice Service who were previously not competent to provide immigration advice were now able to do so
- A further eight people were preparing to take the Level 1 exam post-July
- One other organisation – Aanchal Women’s Aid - had applied for limited registration and once that was granted, an additional participant would be able to deliver limited advice on DDVC

This makes in summary 20 people in all who as at July 2017 were able to deliver immigration advice they previously could not, and a further 9 ‘in the pipeline’ (one with limited registration).

Out of the 11 individuals who attended the OISC Level 2 training course, two had passed the exam at July 2017 and a further 9 were potentially going to take this.

It is also worth noting that out of the total initial cohort, 18 people had not completed the programme which includes people who have attended and then either left the partner organisation or indicated that they did not want to take the exam for some reason.

Figure 8 overleaf gives an overview of progression of trainees in partner organisations overall during the Athena programme.

OISC registration as a result of the Athena project

Agencies that took part in the programme had differing needs as well as levels of awareness around becoming OISC accredited.

- Three were already OISC accredited (Praxis, IKWRO and Paiwand) though were varyingly active as immigration advice providers.
- Three became accredited to Level 1 during the course of the Athena programme (Solace, Hibiscus Initiatives and Ashiana Network) with one of these (Ashiana Network) gaining limited registration for DDVC work only. One of these, Hibiscus Initiatives, has made an application to raise levels and though this is still pending they are expected to go up to Level 2 soon.

- Another organisation became accredited first at Level 1 and then raised this to Level 3 on advice from RoW in early 2017, meaning that caseworkers qualifying at Level 1 for OISC only had to apply for their qualification to be raised to Level 2 when they were ready to do this. (Prisoners' Advice Service).
- Four have not become registered. One (Imece) is interested in exploring accreditation further during 2017 but needs to do all the work having not participated in the programme for various reasons following the first course. Kiran submitted its application to the OISC in April 2017 and it is still pending. Aanchal are, after July 2017, applying for limited registration for DDVC only following RoW advice and support. KMEWO's intentions are not known but nobody from there has as yet qualified.

Figure 9 overleaf contains details of each participating organisation's position vis-à-vis OISC accreditation before and after the programme, and also gives an overview of future plans. As can be seen from this, for some organisations the project proved helpful in clarifying a position that they did not wish to become OISC accredited, but instead pursue another means of ensuring that their clients had access to quality services. This is considered in the next (outcomes) section.

Figure 8: Progression of trainees in partner organisations (listed alphabetically)

Organisation	No. trained @OISC L1	No. on OISC L2 Training	Trainees gaining OISC L1 + L2 qualification as at May 2017	Trainees with outstanding L1 applications / plans to apply	Number of trainees dropping out or leaving
Aanchal Women's Aid	1	0	0	1 to submit application soon for DDVC only	0
Ashiana Network	4	0	3 L1 (all DDVC only)	0 (all applications submitted Dec 2016)	1 trainee left the organisation without application. Unknown if staying in field.
Hibiscus Initiatives	8 (1 volunteer)	3	4 L1 (includes 1 who trained when at Praxis)	2 pending (one recently failed but intends to reapply, one found it difficult to find time to apply but considering taking exam in August 2017)	1 dropped out citing work pressures and that role gave no time to attend/study. 1 (director) unlikely to take exam but did it for oversight of advice function
IKWRO	4	0 Though original interest by 2 workers in progressing to Level 2 training neither can at this stage as have not passed L1.	0	2 applied but failed the exam. Unknown whether they intend to re-apply.	2 in all. One left and may volunteer elsewhere in Yorkshire. One said doing exam in Feb 17 but then left March 17.
Imece	2	0 only interested in L1, DDVC only	0	0 currently applying after 'year out' but may reconsider with new workers if another course run	1 trainee went on maternity leave
Kiran Support Services	2	0	0	1 pending (awaiting results of re-sit)	1 trainee left (made redundant) KSS has gained TFL funding for part time immigration solicitor. ROW advising on OISC registration.
KMEWO	2	0	0	0	2 felt could not proceed as too time-consuming

Organisation	No. trained @OISC L1	No. on OISC L2 Training	Trainees gaining OISC L1 + L2 qualification as at May 2017	Trainees with outstanding L1 applications / plans to apply	Number of trainees dropping out or leaving
Paiwand Afghan Association	6 (4 volunteers)	2 (one already had OISC L1 before joining programme) (both volunteers)	2 passed L1. 1 passed L2 (not trained to L1 by project as already accredited). 1 of the L1 advisers progressed to L2.	2 pending: both failed their first attempts at the exam and will re-apply	2 in all. One volunteer left. It was stressed that this was unusual as Paiwand argued for volunteers to be included and their volunteers are usually committed long term. One PT staff dropped out because post made redundant
Praxis	4 (2 volunteers) (one other worker trained at Praxis but moved to Hibiscus and counted there)	2 ¹⁴	2 passed L1 and progressed to L2 1 passed L1 and would be keen to progress to L2 is ROW does further training	2 pending for L2 qualification	None (one worker left and went to Hibiscus where continued training and qualified. One volunteer's progress has been delayed for personal reasons).
Prisoners' Advice Service	4	4	1	0	PAS is a special case as only one caseworker was not qualified to give immigration advice as others are solicitors / barristers. This caseworker has passed L1 and now awaiting applying to register at Level 2.
Solace	12	0	4 3 passed but not doing immigration advice work (1 has left Solace)	1 may apply	2 unlikely to apply again after failing exam(s) 2 dropped out due to work pressure and immigration advice not being central to their work 3 have left Solace for various reasons, including contract termination

¹⁴ Three started the course but one had to drop out. Expected to take accreditation and pass easily soon.

Organisation	No. trained @OISC L1	No. on OISC L2 Training	Trainees gaining OISC L1 + L2 qualification as at May 2017	Trainees with outstanding L1 applications / plans to apply	Number of trainees dropping out or leaving
					Additionally, one L1 qualified left Solace to work outside field in US Embassy

Figure 9: Organisations' progress with OISC registration and plans for the future (listed alphabetically)

Organisation	OISC position at start of project	Joined project	OISC Registration	Plans for the future
Aanchal Women's Aid	Not OISC Registered	2016 (Aug)	No	Unclear though it now appears they are contemplating limiting to DDVC only. They have had a trustee volunteer solicitor working with them for one day a week since 2004. RoW assisted with preparation of application for OISC L1 in April 2017 but as at July 2017 looks more likely they will apply for limited L1.
Ashiana Network	Not OISC registered	2014	Registered at OISC Level 1 (DDVC only)	None of Ashiana's staff progressing to Level 2. However Ashiana also took the strategic decision to apply for a new immigration solicitor (or at least OISC Level 2 adviser) to join their team to take on some immigration caseload. The immigration solicitor started in May and RoW assisted Ashiana in submitting an application to raise the organisation to OISC Level 3.
Hibiscus Initiatives	Not OISC registered	2016 (Jan)	Registered at OISC Level 1 July 2016 (application to raise levels to Level 2 is pending)	3 staff members signed up to OISC level 2 course Jan – March 2017. There was a general strategic intention to embed immigration advice within the organisation which involved training a cohort of staff first to L1 and then L2, and developing links with individual lawyers. Plans are obviously to get staff to level 2, and to continue to develop links with individual lawyers and maybe organisations as well who work with them to provide free legal advice. Now has a 'hub' and is better placed to give advice with the dedicated space to do that. Client group is national – most of those who present are London based, but a couple come down from Birmingham and Peterborough.
IKWRO	OISC level 1 registered pre-Athena with one registered worker	2014	Already registered pre-Athena	Would like to discuss RoW running legal surgery on monthly basis. IKWRO could help with translation and preparation.
IMECE	Not OISC registered	2014	No but intends to try and pursue in 2017	2 original trainees lost interest in pursuing qualification. Now have new member of staff who may be interested. <i>"Immigration is a big issue. We want to do general advice here – we don't want to do just a DV application. I'd like to talk about working in partnership and refer to RoW."</i>
Kiran Support Services	Not OISC registered	2016 (Aug)	No (application to register is pending)	Want to embed the specialism internally and have obtained funding for a part time solicitor or OISC L3 adviser
KMEWO	Not OISC registered	2014	No	Originally encouraged to attend by funder but then realised that the investment needed for study was not possible. Have also had resource constraints. One new staff member interested in OISC Level 1 but unfortunately interest expressed after final course began.

Organisation	OISC position at start of project	Joined project	OISC Registration	Plans for the future
Paiwand Afghan Association	OISC Level 2 registered pre-Athena with 4 OISC level registered volunteers (including one Level 2 volunteer) and one Level 1 worker on maternity leave	2016 (Jan)	Already registered pre-Athena	See this as part of building their advice offer. Want to make sure 'niche' of advice is needed in the area they cover so assessing advice needs.
Praxis	OISC Level 2 registered pre-Athena	2014	Already registered pre-Athena	Praxis continues to provide immigration advice work and is building a volunteer base to help it with this in the light of cutbacks for funding and reduction in paid advice team.
Prisoners' Advice Service	Not OISC registered (but employed solicitors and one barrister regulated by the SRA and BSB respectively)	2014	OISC Level 1 - April 2016 OISC Level 3 – January 2017 (Registered at L3 on RoW's advice, meaning that caseworker only needs to complete raising levels form when ready to register at L2)	PAS is special case as it a) employs solicitors and a barrister and b) has a specific client group for whom OISC L2 minimum is needed to be helpful. Due to the client cohort there is little advice the current caseworker can give at Level 1 and PAS always needed a L2 course, which was delayed in this project until 2017. Caseworker attended this with a view to being able to provide advice on deportation and bail. Two workers (solicitor and caseworker) have volunteered at BID once a fortnight to develop experience in bail applications.
Solace	Not OISC Registered	2014	OISC Level 1 - April 2016	Solace's immigration development has been largely taken forward by the employment of an immigration solicitor who has been largely responsible for taking forwards all advice and casework. There has been little additional work undertaken by the 12 trained workers of whom only 3 who qualified are still at Solace, but are not undertaking immigration advice.

3.3 Findings on outcomes and impact of OISC training

Outcomes for clients

Limitations on achieving client outcomes

The original intention was for trainees to participate in the course, sit the exam and then be in a position to do work with clients they were not previously able to do. Both RoW and the evaluation team had therefore hoped to be able to track increased numbers of clients assisted through the project, and indeed the evaluation framework focused on achieving a range of outcomes for clients and initial discussions with partner agencies focused on getting ready to gather specific data on clients assisted post-accreditation to show how this had increased following RoW's intervention.

Several factors however limited the number of direct client outcomes which the evaluation could seek to gather. These included:

- The process took longer than expected in terms of individuals getting the time to study and sit exams.
- Some of the trainees, once trained and accredited by OISC, then did not deliver immigration advice
- For some of those trained, Level 1 advice was insufficient to respond to client needs and they were wanting to progress to Level 2 in order to really be able to assist clients. The Level 2 course happened too late in the project for people to have been delivering L2 advice within the project lifetime.

It was therefore not viable to gather meaningful statistics from organisations, or do interviews with clients assisted, as originally envisaged.

To illustrate this, from the original cohort of trainees in 2015, none had their application to deliver L1 advice approved by OISC until March 2016 and that trainee was unable to use the advice qualification as their clients did not need the type of advice which Level 1 qualified them to give. The qualification in that case was a compulsory accreditation 'stepping stone' to achieving the higher OISC L2 needed for their work, but in spite of attending the L2 training course in January/February 2017 they had not succeeded in passing the exam as at July 2017. The next person to be approved from that cohort, in April 2016, was unfortunately subsequently too tied up with her role as an IDVA¹⁵ to dedicate any time to giving immigration advice and it is reported that they have only managed to assist with one NRPF¹⁶ case since 'qualifying'.

The following was however highlighted during final interviewees with partners and trainees as being definite areas where new knowledge, skills and confidence are enabling advisers to deliver a better service to clients.

Clients able to access more information and advice which is accurate

¹⁵ Independent Domestic Violence Advocate

¹⁶ No Recourse to Public Funds

The OISC training element of the Athena Project has helped expand the provision of OISC regulated advice as well as ‘shape’ and improve what was already being provided under supervision. This is clearly having a knock on benefit to clients presenting to these agencies.

For example, two trained (but not yet qualified) staff members from Paiwand have been giving advice under supervision¹⁷ and reported that the majority of the cases they can now take on involves assisting with indefinite leave applications and domestic violence related cases. They also feel their advice is comprehensive, accurate and importantly also properly regulated as they are giving advice under accreditation.

“We are able to provide good advice and correct advice...the training really did assist us in finding the information; we have also been trained in how to use the immigration act and know our limits and what we can do and what we can’t do.”

Prisoners’ Advice Service (PAS) are obviously dealing with a specialist client group and the key area of interest for them is around how to advise those facing deportation. One caseworker (not SRA regulated) and three solicitors / barristers have been trained in immigration to both level 1 and 2. As a result of this PAS reports that they are assisting more clients with immigration issues, summarising their work thus far as:

More foreign national prisoners (FNPs) are now receiving free legal support concerning immigration law issues: PAS has written 63 letters to FNPs, answered a similar number of telephone enquiries from FNPs and seen 45 FNPs in person who have immigration law issues.

FNPs are more able to make informed decisions based on knowledge of their rights under immigration law.

More FNPs now receive free legal representation in cases involving immigration law issues: Under OISC rules, PAS legal caseworkers are restricted in the detailed case-specific immigration advice they may give until their OISC accreditation is complete. However, in the meantime, through partnership work with BID, PAS is providing service users with a path to free legal representation.

Prisoners and the general public have access to relevant information about immigration law issues: PAS’ two FNP specific information sheets have now been downloaded from the website 789 times.¹⁸

PAS notes that the main impact is on their ability to provide a more rounded service to their clients now they have increased their knowledge and skills around immigration. The benefits for clients are therefore that all aspects of a client’s case, including the immigration aspects, will be considered:

“For our advice the training has provided quite a big impact: though we might not provide immigration advice per se, sometimes a prisoner might come to us with a major prison law query but a side immigration issue which we couldn’t advise on before. Now we are able to give a more holistic service, around appealing or not appealing their deportation perhaps, or the prisoner might have a question which we would be more confident about.”

In some cases this will result in PAS referring on, having become aware of a particular specialist ‘angle’ to the case they may not have been aware of before. An example given was that of a prisoner trafficked into the country at the age of 12, now with three children. The prisoner’s insecure immigration status is proving a barrier to her being given Childcare Resettlement Leave (CRL) which would enable her to

¹⁷ One of these is now registered at Level 1

¹⁸ Extract from PAS’ Mid-Way Evaluation Report to Trust for London, February 2017

spend some time with her children on temporary leave. PAS have identified a possible route through to gaining a secure immigration status given her trafficked status, and have referred the client to JCWI, as specialists in trafficking. The awareness of this being both possible and desirable has grown through doing the course.

Praxis was already providing immigration advice, with advisers doing the course working previously under supervision of OISC accredited advisers. However, having done the course, advisers report that they are able to assist clients better giving some examples of what they are now able to do:

“My Level One work since the exam has included applying for EU/EEA residence permits, applying for a family permit for a non-EU/EEA family member, doing settlement and/or citizenship cases; registering children as British citizens and making requests to change a condition of leave. I have also assisted clients to apply for asylum support under section 95 and section 4 of the 1999 Act.”

Hibiscus Initiatives took a decision during the lifetime of the Athena Project to build their immigration advice capacity and so are perhaps the best example of providing advice where previously there was none, with three advisers sitting and passing the Level 1 exam in 2016 one of whom also passed the Level 2 exam in 2017. As a result, the work they are doing with clients is all work they would previously not have been able to do, and their service is further enhanced by having clinics with pro bono immigration solicitors who can take referrals.

Advisers report that they are much better able to assess clients and either help or signpost them to other services. They are helping clients gather evidence, advising clients of deadlines, preparing documents for deadline submissions, preparing fee waiver requests and also taking time to explain to clients the current situation and their (realistic) prospects. As one adviser noted: *“I am more aware and have consolidated my knowledge of immigration issues and procedures. I feel more confident to help my clients with regards to their immigration matters and also advocate more effectively in cases when I need to signpost them to other solicitors for representation.”*

Some case examples given were:

Client A is originally from Trinidad. She has a limited leave due to her British Child and is also a victim of domestic violence. I supported her to get her child’s first British passport without the father’s involvement. Her leave was about to expire and she had two weeks to make an extension. I found her a qualified immigration adviser level 2 but helped her gather all the documents needed for the application including all the financial evidence for the Fee waiver request. I explained about the hostile environment and made her understand how important is to keep up with the dates. She has also a new criminal record to include in the application [which made the application more complicated]. The application was accepted including the fee waiver request.

Client B is originally from Morocco. She is an asylum seeker and she is recognised under the NRM¹⁹. She has a competent immigration solicitor. However, she asked for some support in relation to her witness statement. I made sure she understood the definition of refugee and what was the most important information to include in her statement to present to her solicitor.

Client C originally from Jamaica and has discretionary leave under the old provision. 6 years have passed and she now wants to apply for ILR. When she approached me, she asked me just to check the application form that she filled in by herself because she has no money for a solicitor. However,

¹⁹ National Referral Mechanism. This is the framework set up by Government for identifying victims of human trafficking and ensuring they receive the appropriate protection and support.

I was aware about her prison sentence and told her she might need further assistance due to possible grounds of refusal. Client has subsequently been seen by our pro bono solicitor.

It is reasonable to anticipate that given the increasing numbers of those qualifying towards the end of the project as well as a number of advisers becoming qualified at Level 2, increased and more complex advice will become available at a number of agencies which will begin to benefit clients fairly soon. In addition, for those agencies which have used the process of the project to reassess their needs vis-à-vis immigration advice (Ashiana Network, for example) advisers will be able to deliver support for the particular needs of their clients around helping to access the DDVC²⁰, which similarly will benefit clients by preventing destitution amongst those fleeing domestic violence.

Outcomes for partner organisations

Varying expectations of partner agencies

As noted, partners joined the Athena training project with different starting points and their expectations reflected these in part. Factors which differentiated expectations included:

- Whether or not the organisation was already delivering immigration advice (some were already OISC registered, as noted)
- The level of need their clients were presenting with (frequency of immigration issues coming up)
- The type of case their clients were presenting with
- The degree to which the provision of immigration advice was part of a thought through strategy
- The availability of other means of ‘resolving’ immigration issues for their clients (for example, by running in house pro bono immigration advice sessions)

This range of quotes, all from different partner organisations, demonstrates the spectrum of different expectations.

“We wanted to get two workers a bit more confident in recognising immigration issues and then being able to refer properly.”

“We were hoping for staff to be better equipped to meet the gap in information and advice for our clients. Almost all of our clients have immigration issues.”

“We were struggling with women on a spousal visa either waiting for their legal aid to come, or finding out they weren’t qualified for legal aid. We wanted our own adviser with a certificate on level 1 who could fill in the DDVC form. Basically when they send that application to the HO, if the HO accepts that with the proof of DV they have access to public funds for 3 months, which then gets them access to safe accommodation and money - it’s a very big deal for our clients, though a small task we would have to complete for them.”

“We used to have OISC, and we wanted to register ourselves again. We sent two advisers to the course – one from VAWG team and another from the general advice team. Unfortunately during the project we couldn’t pursue it properly – we didn’t have enough resources to give advisers time to prepare themselves for the exam.”

²⁰ Destitute Domestic Violence Concession which can be accessed for those facing destitution who are going to apply under the domestic violence rule for ILR.

“We have an immigration advice service, but we only had advocates – the main service manager and volunteers. The main reason to get involved was to increase our capacity and train people without too much cost for us – it meant that we could train people who could become advisers and this would help.”

“We got funding to advise FNs on their immigration status. We have never done immigration advice before – as you know, you can’t do it unless you are OISC accredited. Because we are a charity and not a law firm we are individually regulated as a solicitor but the SRA doesn’t regulate the charity itself. Our advisers needed to be OISC accredited and we really needed the OISC accreditation.”

“It seemed an opportunity to get dedicated, high-quality, OISC accreditation training for our staff which with the best will in the world we would never have time to devise and deliver in house by our staff for free. It seemed like RoW’s thinking was specifically to address the big hole which LASPO cuts had left. We were trying to expand our in house capacity”

“An increasing number of our clients have immigration issues. A lot of women have insecure immigration status. In 2009 we had 5 people; in 2011 we had about 50 or 60 people. Now in a year we receive something like 120 – 130 cases of NRPF. We wanted to do this mainly so that we have members of staff who are better skilled and legally we know exactly what we are doing when we offer support to women and when we interact with solicitors. The spouse’s application is getting harder and harder because the numbers are rising. We want to be in a professional and knowledgeable place so that women receive the best advice.”

Ability to deal with new issues and processes

As already noted, as a result of the training, organisations are able to deal with new issues. Broadly these fall into two categories: issues which they knew about before, but could not undertake work on, and issues which they have come to recognise through the training.

In the former category, Ashiana Network is looking forward to being able to assist clients with their DDVC application and a Praxis adviser noted that: *“We are able to advise now on the whole level 1 syllabus – that includes a lot of areas where we don’t do a huge amount of work, but also for example quite a lot of EU issues which people tend not to focus on that much but actually we get quite a bit of work in that area. Stuff like entry clearance as well is now possible – especially for women, and spouse visas can come into that.”*

In the latter, organisations are finding that they are identifying issues which previously they were not aware of. PAS is in this category, as is Hibiscus where various advisers noted that they felt skilled to deal with new issues. One spelt out the level of detail which had now swum into focus for her clearly:

“I wasn’t able to explain things with regards to women’s applications before. I didn’t know if a decision was certified, I didn’t know what applications could be done prior to them coming into the country or about technicalities with the paperwork. I didn’t understand what the terminology means. I didn’t know what an admin review was. I didn’t know what the timeframes were for applications, or the difference between an FLR (O) or an FLR (M) form²¹. I didn’t know you couldn’t switch between categories and what the options were if you came as a visitor, or that there was no

²¹ Further Leave to Remain, for individuals who wish to extend their stay in the UK. There are various types of form which can be used for this including FLR (O) (since withdrawn) and FLR(M) and the right one must be used depending on the circumstances.

way of regularising your stay as a visitor, for example. So many things I used to see everyday and now I feel I understand: before all I could say to a client was 'you need to seek legal advice' but now I can say: 'See your legal representative but try asking these questions'."

Clarity about what OISC regulation means

Partners have in some cases been on a steep learning curve, from learning that giving immigration advice was illegal (some did not know this) through to understanding the sometimes complex systems of regulation and compliance which OISC requires. The project has enabled that understanding as one person noted: *"Everything is from an OISC point of view – we are liaising with OISC regularly in terms of making sure we are doing everything right. There's one lady there who has been quite helpful – it took a bit of time initially as getting the organisation accredited was time-consuming, but once done it has been quite positive and OISC are easy to liaise with."*

Others who had not previously had experience of OISC noted how helpful it had been to have clarified what you could and could not advise on.

"I would have been very lost without [the course]. And also I would have not understood a lot of the legal implications – I didn't know immigration advice was so regulated. So for me as a manager it was really important for me when training new immigration advisers being much clearer with them about the legal implications and what we can and can't do. That's been great. That has had a huge impact."

Increased clarity and confidence of both managers and advisers

Some workers who attended the training were noticeably more confident. Even workers who did not intend to take the exam quickly found attending the course useful to understand how better to communicate with and signpost clients. At a basic level, workers who took part now know enough to be able to signpost people appropriately; for example: *"[name of worker] is the first port of call when people call in – so even if [worker] just know the basics she can refer on to the appropriate agency. It is all about signposting at this stage."*

Both managers and individual trainees commented on the sense of increased confidence they felt both organisationally and individually when it comes to assessing and responding to clients' immigration issues. Managers observed that:

"The course has built [our trainees'] understanding and knowledge so that they are better able to understand the situations women are presenting with and then assign them more appropriately. They can now make sure they can get the right kind of help. Recently there were three clients whose immigration situation they could recognise; rather than going with a blank sheet of paper to a solicitor, they know the kind of firm to refer to."

"The main thing is that it has really enhanced [trainees'] knowledge but also developed their confidence. They previously knew at least some of the information, but now they really know. it builds your confidence and makes a difference to how you support women. If you are dithering it doesn't come across well to the client."

And individual trainees echoed this:

"The course was really useful - it increased my confidence in being able to give advice. It was very thorough and relevant to our work and the clients we deal with here."

“The course has been a game changer for me in developing my capacity as an immigration adviser. It has opened up a new area of experience for me and has increased my effectiveness in supporting vulnerable women.”

“I am more aware and have consolidated my knowledge of immigration issues and procedures. I feel more confident to help my clients with regards to their immigration matters and also advocate more effectively in cases when I need to signpost them to other solicitors for representation.”

Review of strategic direction

For some organisations, the project confirmed the strategic direction they had set themselves in terms of building capacity internally. This is true of Hibiscus Initiatives, PAS and Praxis in particular and also Paiwand where the process has reinforced a conviction that they needed to develop their work in this area.

“It was all so good and we feel very privileged that we have been able to be part of that training not only for our work in prisons but for the growth of the organisation, particularly the community element. We will be able to do more effective work with clients in the current situation. It’s most likely that immigration will become more and more of an issue for our clients with this hostile environment.”

Other partners have been prompted, at least partly as a result of their participation in the Athena Project, to think more deeply about what they want to deliver in terms of immigration advice and support to their clients and how to achieve this. In some instances this has led to them revising their original ‘plan’ of building the capacity of existing workers. Two partner organisations are in the process of obtaining funding for an immigration lawyer or OISC qualified adviser to complement their staff team. This has been the result of an internal process of reflection, and means for the moment their plans to get more people trained up and accredited are on hold:

“This pilot has been very beneficial and it has made us as an organisation think about what we do internally. It’s made us think about ‘where we go for the next few years’. The bigger picture is that we also thought ‘how we move on from this and develop this provision’. Our refuge service was retendered at the end of last year and we submitted another bid. Whilst going through this process with the OISC training we thought ‘this is an opportune time to review this function’. When we were thinking about all of this, my view was that maybe what we needed to do was bring some of this in house and look at having a solicitor or legal officer specialising in legal issues who already would have the relevant accreditation and experience. So the overall strategy for the organisation is to get ourselves registered and eventually think about the kind of posts we may need to have in the future - the kinds of staffing levels they will need and the levels of training those individuals will have. “

Solace has learnt through the process of participating in the project that their original intention of training up a number of advisers to complement provision by a specialist immigration solicitor was not as straightforward or indeed necessary as originally thought. This was partly although there are a range of ways in which Level One accredited advisers could assist clients, it is not possible to advise on either settlement applications based on domestic violence and on Article 8 issues which affect a significant proportion of their clients. It was also partly because they realised that the model they had with family law could not be transferred across.

“Our problem is that OISC has specialised all immigration advice – no other area of work specialises it as highly. All our staff are trained up with family law and of course they make referrals – but they

can also suggest routes to clients: 'Have you thought about an injunction' and so on. They can help the woman understand about the purpose of going to a solicitor and make a supported referral. And that's what we envisaged what we would do with immigration. But this doesn't work with immigration because of OISC's strict guidelines and the strict delineation between immigration and other types of advice and the nervousness about it [given that giving unregulated advice is illegal]. Now we have staff who have a bit of knowledge who are saying 'I'm not allowed to do this and not allowed to do that – before we might have been more laissez-faire. But now they know, ironically it has led to a more hands off approach. So I think for us training the staff in a basic level of understanding, not for OISC accreditation but as VAWG workers is helpful, and that is something we are now doing and RoW could do. But with a specialist worker, gaining the OISC accreditation for our staff does not feel the best use of resources going forwards."

Support and assistance with funding bids

RoW has supported partners in compiling and submitting funding bids for immigration workers. *"They helped me with the application to TFL for an immigration worker. I was able to speak to them and get help regarding a job description and so on...this time last year I was frantic – I feel much, much better now. I really do feel we are through the worst of it – trying to get the organisation on a firmer footing – we are capacity building, making sure we have a workable and up to date business plan, not just something on paper."*

Sense of being represented and having a voice with the regulator

Training participants felt that, as workers in small community organisations, their service delivery work could often exist very separately from policy making and regulation. They therefore greatly welcomed the involvement of RoW as an intermediary between them and the regulator: *"A great thing with Rights of Women is that it feels there is somebody listening to you and directly they will respond and speak to OISC. That's a huge thing – that's a big gap for me I think."*

During the project, trainees and managers had the opportunity to meet with OISC representatives as well as receive regular updates from RoW which clarified OISC's position on various issues. They welcomed the opportunity to explain their perspective to OISC, and appreciated being listened to: *"For me in this work I find it hard to be in the room with people who make changes as I am focused on service delivery. But it was helpful to be in the room [with OISC representatives] and know there is a pathway to OISC and express grievances and that there is a way of being able to work around these. Also because it all seems very complicated – but [OISC representative] was great – she was trying to see how she could help. She said 'we were here to help, and OISC want you to be qualified' – they made me realise that we can ask more questions."*

Volunteer reward and motivation

The fact that the courses accepted volunteers was great for those who had long-term supporters who they wanted in some way to 'reward' for their input, as the course could be offered as a benefit. This was true of Praxis, Paiwand and Hibiscus Initiatives.

"Now that pretty much all the staff have been trained, if not yet actually accredited, we have also been able to offer this to some of our more dedicated volunteers. That's brilliant, because it has been a source of regret and disappointment that we haven't been able to offer that to volunteers with a genuine interest in immigration as we haven't been able to afford to send them on ILPA or HJT trainings. It's just fantastic to be able to offer that to volunteers; it's hugely appreciated that they have been recognised for their commitment and get a qualification."

Stronger partnerships of trust

The project has clearly resulted in organisations getting to know each other much better, and feeling able to pick up the phone and discuss issues and problems as they arise, as participants noted:

“From a partnership point of view it’s useful for the individual advisers to meet project workers and caseworkers from other organisations who they then have a face for and they can phone up, and exchange information about the kinds of work they are doing. That’s been helpful. And for us to have a closer relationship with RoW has been helpful too.”

“Over the last few months I have really found that the advice from RoW has been great. It has been advice that I can do something with. So I see us taking more advice from them and seeing where it takes me. The need isn’t going to go away in a hurry, and especially organisations like ours, we need somebody we can go to for the right kind of advice, and they are the right people to approach.”

“I found the course great for getting to know people. I met a lot of people who I had referred people to – I knew Ashiana well for instance, and doing the course brought me close to them. That was great.”

Policy outcomes and influence

RoW started a correspondence with OISC in 2014, prompted by a need to clarify what they saw as either unclear or anomalous guidance for both them and their partner agencies. This then grew into a far bigger conversation, to which the Athena Project has contributed considerably. RoW has, through the project, forged strong relationships with OISC, communicated some of the concerns of small voluntary sector providers and gained clarity and improvements for partner organisations. RoW has met with OISC several times, has facilitated a meeting between OISC and partner organisations (July 2016) and has been at the forefront of advising OISC about ways in which it could enable more not-for-profit providers to join the field.

The associated policy outcomes of this include:

- Reconsidering the ‘level’ of DDVC (it was lowered from OISC 2 to OISC 1)
- Setting up a Voluntary Sector Support Group which will invite the voluntary sector to come forward with issues
- Looking at exemptions to the code for organisations only wanting to provide advice in narrow areas which may open up further possibilities for limited registration
- Reconsidering the support offered at pre-application stage for not-for-profit applicants
- Revising the way that supervisions would happen, enabling workers in voluntary organisations to be supervised by somebody from outside their organisation.

OISC describes RoW as one of the few voluntary sector providers with whom they are in regular consultation, and as a trusted and specialist interlocutor from whom they can learn. They describe the relationship as two-way: *“As helpful for us as it has hopefully been for them”*.

Some of the ways in which RoW has helped OISC learn has been around the ways in which the regulation system impacts on voluntary sector providers. As OISC notes, these are providers who essentially it wishes to encourage to join the field, and so learning how the current forms and systems either help or hinder this is helpful. OISC notes that the vast majority of its experience is in relation to the commercial sector when it comes to auditing and checking processes, and that it is normally not

called in to investigate complaints in the areas covered by the voluntary sector (asylum, settlement and so on) which might help it get a better sense of how the system is working in those areas. Consequently their knowledge of how their regulation system ‘plays’ in reality in the voluntary sector has been quite limited:

“Some of the forms I have never [examined closely], to be honest with you. So when an organisation like RoW points out how they do or do not work well, it’s eye-opening. Having practitioners on the ground who show us how the forms we create work in practice is really useful. We are not practitioners ourselves, obviously, and our tendency will naturally be to set the bar high. But when you look at the system in context you think ‘oh, maybe there is some room for discretion and flexibility here’ which can be helpful for both us and the providers.”

In addition to OISC benefitting from the relationship, other partners have also benefitted and as noted above several reported seeing RoW as an essential bridge between them and ‘the regulator’ which they now feel is much more approachable and flexible as a result.

3.4 Learning about the model

Strengths of the approach

There were a number of key strengths or ‘critical success factors’ which underpinned the eventual outcomes of the model.

Interactive, involving and expert nature of the training

Virtually all of the participants, even if they did not progress to do the exam, found the training excellent. The preparation put in by RoW was considerable, but participants really appreciated:

- The detailed and reliable nature of the written materials
- The involvement of interactive sessions during the training
- Expert speakers and contributors
- The training approach adopted by RoW which was felt to be upbeat, supportive and to respond to the individual circumstances of participants.
- The care taken with venues (for some courses)

“The quality of the actual training was superb – the administration of sending the stuff out in advance, the venue was fantastic at Garden Court. It was all really good.”

“The course was rigorous and comprehensive. It was very well presented and effectively set theoretical information in a real-life context.”

“Oh my goodness – the training. Well first of all, I would define the trainer honestly as being the God-ness of immigration law training. She could make you understand really complex information in a very easy way. It was like a lecture at the university – really good. That was what I really liked. And the proper programme – it was just perfect. And she gave us a lot of practical case studies which were really, really helpful – she would provide every time a lot of mock tests for us every time. Honestly, it was superb.”

“I think we were not quite sure whether this was going to be useful for us at first after the initial meeting.... but when it actually started we were all very pleasantly surprised. We thought the trainer was amazing – sessions were very clear and very well structured and very impressive.”

Support to individual trainees around courses

RoW offered extensive support to applicants, both in initially trying to encourage them to come on the course but then importantly after and around each course. Their support included:

- Finding trainees suitable work placement opportunities so that they could develop experience under supervision in legal environments (for example, at Wesley Gryk Solicitors)
- Responding to individual queries following training
- Organising revision sessions
- Chasing and encouraging individual trainees to study and do the course

“I was amazed that I could ask for support. Because I hadn’t clocked that they would do that – [RoW trainer] would give amazing responses and wonderful emails – it was amazing. I didn’t realise that was all part of it – I could probably have used it more, and [RoW trainer] would very happily have helped as much as possible.”

“We have found them very supportive. They have been around for a long time and their reputation is very good. I wouldn’t hesitate to contact them.”

“[RoW trainer] has been excellent – absolutely excellent. Very, very helpful whenever we have had any issue at all. We had an OISC level 2 volunteer ourselves and so we discussed the training issues a lot but if we hadn’t had him I would have used [RoW trainer] more. But she has been very responsive when I have gone to her.”

“We never would have got through without ROW. They really explained how it all worked. And clarified any issues we had. They also organised some training placements for a couple of our participants.”

Support to organisations around OISC registration

As well as supporting individuals, it was necessary to help some participating organisations unravel what was implied by and needed for OISC registration. RoW took pains to investigate every anomaly, and it was from this that an extended relationship with OISC developed in order to help partners better understand how to approach OISC.

Organisations generally felt that the registration process was quite onerous and without support from RoW several acknowledged that they would not have succeeded. In addition, even with those organisations with legal staff in situ, RoW was able to advise on the most tactical way forward with OISC by for example advising PAS to apply for Level 3 status instead of proceeding to Level 2, or by following up on individual applications and sorting out errors which organisations had made during this process.

“We weren’t initially clear about OISC and how the process would work. To be honest, we found that really confusing even though we had done investigatory stuff beforehand. We never would have got through without ROW. They really explained how it all worked. And clarified any issues we had. And if couldn’t answer immediately they went off to try and find answers.”

“The process of registration was OK but very time-consuming and we had a lot of support from RoW. And of course what really convinced us that it was worth proceeding with all that work was that RoW had managed to get OISC to recognise DDVC at Level 1. That was really key for us, and meant we felt it was worth continuing.”

Flexibility of approach

RoW has shown considerable flexibility during the programme by shaping the progression to fit with the progress of trainees (slower than originally anticipated), by answering questions and responding to the individual needs of organisations and by setting up learning sessions if needed. This was key.

Challenges of the approach for RoW

Difficulty of synchronising start up of project with partner interest

RoW needed to gauge interest in the idea of the model before applying for funds, but in turn this led to initial discussions with some partners which did not bear training fruit for nearly a year. During that time various circumstances had changed with some partner agencies who had become busier, or lost staff, or had embarked in one case on a new model which altered their need for capacity building. It also raised expectations only to leave those hanging.

Partners starting from different places with different needs

Partners had different commitments to becoming immigration advice providing organisations. Some were already providing such advice and viewed the project as a welcome boost to existing capacity, whereas others were ‘dipping their toe in’ and had little idea what to expect. As a result, training courses had to accommodate a range of abilities (though some trainees commented that RoW very successfully pitched the material and tried to individualise the content to each organisation to some extent, which was appreciated).

Partners did not necessarily field workers they wanted to do immigration advice

The selection of trainees made a difference to drop out rates and thus ‘success’ for the model. For those organisations where there had been a strategic decision to build capacity around immigration advice, course attenders have been supported by their organisation, seen their participation as part of a wider strategy and largely stayed the course. Where this has been less clear, or where organisations have been more equivocal, participants have been fielded who seem in some cases not to have had any particular intention of doing the exam. In some instances this may not matter as the individuals have gained information and awareness around issues.

Lack of assessment of future role of trained workers by partner organisations

Linked to this, one of the most critical issues which undermined the capacity of trained staff to then proceed to deliver immigration advice was that their role ‘post-training’ had not been given sufficient and sometimes any consideration. This was particularly true of some VAW organisations which seemed to feel initially that workers could undertake immigration work after being OISC registered on top of the work they were already doing. In fact, unless internal resources were found and their role reviewed internally it proved not possible for such staff members to progress to giving any advice at all which proved frustrating both for RoW and sometimes the staff members concerned.

Cohort slightly skewed by funder encouragement

Some partners who had indicated their interest in participating in Athena had been encouraged to participate as it would potentially benefit their organisation into meeting more of their client's needs'. However such organisations found that for different reasons the training did not yield the results they had originally expected. For one organisation their workload and capacity meant that they simply did not have time to attend and underestimated what 'attending' meant in terms of follow up study and exam sitting. For the other, the employment of an immigration solicitor and the realisation that gaining Level 1 qualification would not enable them to deliver as much as they had expected to clients influenced their effective engagement with the project as they described:

"To be really honest about why we sent people on the course - we knew they were having a course, the funder was recommending that we work with an organisation and I was identifying what seemed to be a free resource and trying to grab it without thinking it through. So that's where I was."

Cohort model meant that progression not rapid enough for some

Organisations wanted to proceed at different speeds and in some instances it became clear that they had not really thought through how the training could complement their strategic offer. RoW's job therefore became in part to help organisations think this through, and to support them in reviewing what they wanted to do (for instance, Ashiana decided once they had started to do the course that they wished to limit their qualification to DDVC only, which RoW went on to negotiate with OISC).

This meant that the 'cohort model' of moving a range of trainees through from Level 1 to Level 2 together was impossible as some trainees were immediately progressing to sit their exam, while others returned to work and put their studies on hold for a range of reasons, including uncertainty about whether or not they wanted to proceed. The biggest effect of this was to delay the running of an OISC 2 course until 2017, towards the end of the project, as there were not enough identified participants from partner organisations at the beginning to merit running it.

"We hoped more staff would progress to OISC level 2...I think we were the first one to become accredited out of the ones which did the training – so then we had to wait for the others."

Need for full disclosure of requirements and limitations of the model

For some organisations the limitations of what they could do at OISC Level 1 came as a surprise and resulted in them reviewing what they wanted to do and whether they wanted to proceed with the full qualification given that, in several cases, their motivation had largely been to enable the completion of the DDVC (this is particularly true of the VAW organisations for obvious reasons). RoW's pursuit of a limited registration for DDVC purposes only was welcomed by some partners for this reason.

Timescale of intervention meant that circumstances changed

Over the course of three years, inevitably circumstances changed for both organisations and individuals which affected their ability to participate. RoW needed to be flexible to this. Notably, for instance, an original partner organisations (Eaves) closed down, circumstances changed in other organisations meaning they were no longer as keen on participating as they originally thought, and for individual trainees a variety of factors intervened, including leaving their post (though in two cases they went to join other partner organisations so were not 'lost' to the project overall), being made redundant, or starting roles within their organisation which no longer allowed them time to attend the course, study or do immigration advice. One illustrative example from a trainee who was keen to

continue but was unable to as a change of funder required her to focus on other areas of work which did not include advising and supporting around immigration issues, as she explained:

“As I am a contract member of staff and had an extension with another pending, upon funding, it was agreed I could attend the course. Sadly, the funding we were reliant on changed..... Regrettably, we were not made aware of this change prior to me booking onto the OISC and once it became clear that funding was now unlikely, I wanted to inform you straight away. However, if a position becomes available in the near future, I would love to complete my qualification.”

RoW did produce a Memorandum of Understanding for partners in which they were encouraged to think through the commitment and what they would need to think about. However with the benefit of hindsight, talking through what was involved with partners could have been done earlier and more comprehensively and this may have avoided some, if not all, of the drop out.

All that said, changing circumstances did also mean that some organisations came ‘on stream’ during the timescale of the project as they had identified a desire or need to get involved. RoW responded flexibly to this and welcomed four new partners during the course of the programme, but this inevitably resulted in more work, and a more systematic approach to assessing organisational readiness would be useful in the future.

Volunteer reliance of some organisations

The training of volunteers was discussed with organisations and though initially reluctant to accept them, in the end RoW decided to do so in organisations where volunteers formed an intrinsic part of the advice ‘offer’. Volunteers were thus strictly assessed and this appears to have worked well and with the exception of one volunteer who (very apologetically) left, they have progressed to take the exam and then in some instances to OISC L2. This is an example of a challenge which RoW responded flexibly to, assessed thoroughly and made a judgement call which proved to be right.

Challenges of the approach for partner organisations

Lengthy and somewhat confusing start up period

The lead up time needed to set up and plan the project was underestimated. The first year of the project was taken up almost entirely in getting to grips with regulatory issues and trying to reconcile inconsistent messages from OISC about various requirements to do with required work experience, for example. RoW was also during this period navigating changes in staff which affected its internal capacity. The result of this was that nearly a year elapsed between the initial partner contact to the delivery of the first course. For some partners this proved difficult in terms of planning their engagement and their work. It was felt that communication during the early stages in 2014 could have been clearer and the timescales set out more realistically.

“We were possibly the first to sign up. They were talking at that time about the project being both level 1 and 2. But at that point they hadn’t recruited to the project I don’t think at RoW. Then time went on and it became clear that there was a long way to go before the project starting – they had to write all the materials and think about how they did it. It was then another year before the first course happened. So I had gone back to the team very excited saying ‘there’s this fantastic training resource and partnership we must get in on’ and then it was hurry up and wait.”

Being unclear about the commitment

Though RoW did discuss the amount of time which would be needed to ensure partners got the most out of the project, it was only really through participation that the penny dropped for some partner organisations about how much time and effort this would mean. This was partly because there was some delay between initial set up conversations and starting the training, and partly also because RoW did not undertake a robust enough needs assessment of each partner organisation. This meant that although RoW did, for example, advise that organisations would need to release participants for study leave it did not systematically assess whether or not organisations would find it possible to do this, particularly initially. A Memorandum of Understanding was drawn up at the early stages of the evaluation and circulated spelling out such commitments, but though organisations signed it, few could remember it in any detail when returned to later in the evaluation.

As a result some partner organisations were taken aback at how much time and effort participation required, though as the programme progressed RoW felt that they were more prepared with each new trainee to let them know what it involved and to support them better. With the benefit of hindsight RoW recognises that it might have been useful, particularly initially, to remind partners more frequently of the commitment involved, and undertake more detailed needs assessments.

“My slight frustration is that I think RoW could have been clearer and more organised about pulling together the issues. Maybe it’s because they only emerged gradually, but it feels like it has been a bit confusing for partners at times.”

“I encouraged the people doing the course in November to do the exam as soon as possible. When I started everything was new – I was new, the paid advocate was also new – it was so much, so soon – it was a bit too intense. So I couldn’t move so quickly to take the exam. But with the new people I have very much encouraged them to do the assessment – one passed, wonderful, one failed but only by couple of marks. Through working with RoW it has become much clearer the importance of doing it sooner.”

Not being in sync with overall project expectations for progress

Whilst for RoW the model and associated outcomes depended on people progressing at a fairly rapid rate through to deliver advice and then gain higher level OISC accreditation, for others this was not so much a priority. Some partners did not have the same sense of urgency about getting trainees qualified because, for example, their clients’ advice needs were being met in other ways. Some individuals also joined the programme without being properly briefed by their organisations that there was an expectation that they would go on to take an exam quite quickly:

“I think I didn’t realise what was expected of us. We didn’t do the exam straight after the course - we were doing information and advice-giving under supervision– and I think RoW would have preferred us to have done the exam earlier. So I unfortunately didn’t understand I don’t think what RoW wanted out of it in terms of our progression.”

Finding resources to support people to get trained and study

For partner organisations, finding cover for staff to attend training and do the necessary work experience was challenging. Those organisations with back up support provided by funders to participate (Solace and PAS) were able to send people earlier and throughout because of this but small community organisations such as IKWRO or KMEWO were challenged by not having cover.

This seems particularly to have been an issue for VAW organisations rather than immigration organisations, but this may be also partly a reflection of them fielding workers who had a longer road to travel to ‘OISC readiness’ than the migrant or advice agencies. The situation was also not helped by shifting goal posts on this for partner agencies: initially the requirements were thought to be much more rigorous but with OISC clarification the need to undertake work experience was considerably reduced in length, which was a relief for partners.

“The first round we had to release staff for the training and they had to have the one day a week placement because at that point OISC was saying ‘you need to have training working with somebody who is accredited’ – so we had to release not only for the training but also for the work experience. But for us as a small organisation it means we haven’t got any cover. The main people attending were the senior advice worker and the housing support workers and as these were senior people, we had to find cover. We couldn’t afford to get cover in – and anyway doing so would not be practicable.”

“I think the challenges for us are – as for many in the NGO sector – finding the time to do the study whilst keeping my day job going. For example I am being trained as immigration adviser, but I’m also a service manager, and also managing two projects. So on top of everything it’s an extra role.”

Finding time to study and then take the exam

In addition, finding time to study and sit the exam proved difficult for some partner organisations and RoW had to spend a lot of time encouraging and chasing to try and make sure individuals progressed in spite of not having time set aside to study.

“The plan was to do it early this year, however due to large number of high risk cases we got, I didn’t have time to look at the registration and need to prepare for the exam. The office agreed to give me few days to prepare for the test, however it doesn’t look till March that’s going to happen.”

“We struggled for time out to attend course. And we also struggled to find the time then to study. First round one person decided not to proceed with the exam – disappointed for ROW and for us, but couldn’t force her as she just did not have time.”

“I think in the first round we were quite shocked by the amount we had to learn. In the next round we were much clearer about what was required, and the difficulty and the demands of the exam.”

Engaging with an academic examination process

Difficulties in finding time to study and sit the exam were exacerbated for some trainees by the fact that the training was necessarily quite academic, and for some of them taking an exam was a somewhat daunting prospect as they had not done so for many decades. Interestingly one organisation noted that the workers who had done best in terms of progression had been the graduates who were used to organised study and exam-taking.

“I’d been giving immigration information and advice for years under supervision and I basically knew the content, but the exam freaked me out. I had no exam experience, no understanding how to revise, did not know how to be systematic in revision and stuff like that. So it took me two years to gear up to sitting it. The course was wonderful, and what helped me in the end was that other volunteers here did it, and I took their revised course book and just ran through that and spent 50 hours working through it all doing the exam test questions. That absolutely got me through the exam.”

Course not long enough for some to let the information 'sink in'

The breadth of topics to cover for OISC Level 1 (many of which will not be relevant when individuals go on and deliver advice) meant that there was a lot for people to get their head round. Some felt that the course was therefore too short and would have appreciated the information in more 'bite-sized chunks' – suggesting, in a couple of instances, that it could have been spread out over 10 days. This has to be balanced against the other observations that it was difficult to find time off to attend and study, and also against the fact that other courses (such as that offered by HJT) are even shorter. Notably it was the VAW organisations in particular where trainees expressed a view that the course needed to be longer, perhaps reinforcing the point that having a cohort of 'OISC-aware' and 'OISC-unaware' participants was a challenge for RoW in terms of pitching the course.

Form filling and more registration support on site

Although there was a considerable amount of advice and support provided around OISC registration, partners still found the multiplicity of forms confusing and continued to make basic errors in, for instance, submitting applications throughout the projects. Some partners felt that they would have liked more input into this administrative element – either by actually filling out the forms, or by having practical workshops for those responsible for overseeing the OISC administration in each partner organisations and taking them through how to complete forms, step by step.

"I think an application for registration is quite complex, and I would be very happy if somebody else completed it together with me rather than doing it on my own as it is doing it and going backwards and forwards. I had to do three drafts to change things around. It takes so much time to do."

"Staff need support about how to complete the application form for OISC adviser. That was why it was a bit delayed – I had to wait more than a month and then one of them said she was not going to do it. Possibly that was an issue about competence of filling out the form."

3.5 Suggestions for improvement

If another capacity building programme is to be taken forwards, the following might be useful ways of improving on delivery and results for both RoW and partner agencies.

- a. Strategic discussions with partners beforehand. If partners are to join, they could usefully be helped to think through their strategic approach to immigration advice giving before committing to a capacity building programme such as this. It may be, as some found, that their advice needs could be better met in other ways.
- b. Set out a clearer exposition of what OISC accreditation requires and allows in terms of study and advice giving. For some partners, had they known that the accreditation process would only allow them to give very limited advice and information they may not have embarked on the course. It is clear for some that gaining Level 2 is essential for the OISC 'route' to be useful, but that was not apparent when they started. Setting out a pathway clarifying this would be useful.
- c. Thorough setting out of the requirements and commitments of being a partner. Though RoW did do this it was clearly not enough for some, and the MOU was not really 'taken on board' even though it did spell out commitments. There would seem to be no substitute for having a

detailed meeting with managers and partners using evidence from this evaluation to demonstrate what types of commitment is needed at both trainee and organisational level. This should be easier now some of the basic OISC requirements have been clarified through the project.

- d. Encouraging funders to provide support for back up cover. This would need thought in how it is done, however, as for some organisations finding cover for specialist posts will be impossible, and also the funding would need to be made available in a way which does not influence the organisation's desire to participate (because they want to 'please' the funder).
- e. Pursuing exemptions for other issues to gain more tailored OISC accreditation. RoW has already achieved this for DDVC, and some informants felt it might be useful if other topics – notably detention – could also be explored for limited registration. There are pros and cons to this, one major 'con' being that clients may present with multiple issues which would not be spotted by advisers with narrow areas of expertise. However, the suggestion was made and it may be worthwhile looking at this or other areas.
- f. Extending the course. Some felt that this would be desirable, notably those in VAW organisations and without academic backgrounds. It might be that it would be useful to have longer courses for those who are not already versed to some extent in migration/legal issues.
- g. Post training support sessions. Revision groups were arranged, but having these more frequently would also be appreciated.
- h. Practical workshops to help with OISC administration. Having sessions where the workers charged with taking forward the registration and submitting applications are taken through forms would be useful for some organisations.

4. The Athena model overall

This section looks at the over-arching lessons of the Athena programme and asks not only whether the programme performed well in its own terms, but whether it could be more usefully configured in the future.

4.1 Context for future work

The Athena model has been taken forward at a time of ongoing and profound change both in terms of the challenges presented by the external context, and the responses shaping within the voluntary sector and the funders supporting them.

External context

A wide range of issues are converging to mean that those seeking to support vulnerable migrants, including women, are under ever more intensive pressure than before. Issues raised by interviewees included:

- The stated and intentional policy of creating a 'hostile environment' towards migrants by the current Government
- The impact of Brexit which is already being felt amongst agencies as worried EU nationals seek immigration support.
- The uncertainty posed by Brexit where potentially new issues may emerge to which the sector will have to respond. *"It feels like a time bomb, essentially."*
- Ongoing migration towards Europe from conflict and war torn areas of the world
- A range of measures introduced under the Immigration Act 2014 and Immigration Act 2016 which are beginning to bite in a range of ways around housing (landlord checks), the potential freezing of assets such as bank accounts and employer checks.
- The 'deport first, appeal later' principle whereby migrants can be deported or removed prior to their appeal (though the Supreme Court has just ruled the current system to be not compliant with human rights standards)
- The chronic lack of housing options for destitute and vulnerable people generally, and migrants in particular which means that local authorities, particularly in London, are increasingly acting as gatekeepers to resources which could help keep women safe
- The strain placed on the dwindling number of immigration lawyers as a result of more and more needing their support
- The ongoing issue of quality in the immigration and asylum advice system, which results in clients who have accessed poor advice effectively placing more burden on quality (often NGO) providers as they have to unscramble the harm done before being able to proceed with a case.

NGO and Funder responses

A range of funders have been interested in investigating how best to support the sector and its vulnerable clients at this critical time. The learning network at the Association of Charitable Foundations, for example, has held sessions for funders interested in funding work with asylum seekers, refugees and migrants and looked at different models of supporting those giving advice in the sector. The NGO sector is similarly thinking through ways in which it can better work together, use limited resources effectively and continue to reach those who are increasingly marginalised and 'under

the radar' in the current climate. These particularly include vulnerable migrant women with insecure immigration status who can so easily fall through the net.

A range of NGO and funder responses were either known or highlighted to us:

- Organisations are employing or thinking of employing in house immigration lawyers (e.g. Solace, Ashiana Network)
- Pro bono legal advice is being offered on site or at outreach sessions (e.g. Hibiscus Initiatives) and various projects are continuing to explore and develop models which lever pro bono interest and resource to meet gaps in clients' legal needs, such as the newly formed Kids in Need of Defence partnership being hosted by Coventry Law Centre and by GMIAU with its Family Reunion Project
- Digital means (e.g. Skype and online forum) of offering advice being explored (South West Law Centres, funded through Future Advice Fund)
- London law centres being funded to provide second tier input to frontline homelessness agencies (funded by London Housing Foundation)
- Refugee Action is delivering its Frontline Immigration Advice Project which offers a rolling programme of support for OISC accreditation to charities and community organisations through live online training
- JCWI has for some time been delivering open access OISC training which organisations pay for to help those in voluntary and community organisations gain skills and accreditation
- Cardinal Hume Centre is developing an Immigration Advice Capacity Network across London to seek to establish a core effective system for immigration casework referrals, to get complex cases to access specialist advice
- Using volunteers and some paid workers to support specialist lawyers is being done through for example the Refugee Action (Manchester) Increasing Access to Justice project which seeks to support failed asylum seekers with potential fresh claims by assisting in 'front-loading' and preparing their case so it can be taken on by the specialists, or by GMIAU's Volunteer Family Reunion Support model.
- Street Legal project is bringing together a partnership of Praxis, St. Mungo's and Refugee Action in order to try and engage and support destitute migrants towards regularising their status or taking up voluntary return by offering advice and housing options
- Families Together initiative which is a grants fund which will be administered by the Red Cross and strategically fund organisations to take forward family reunion work done to date by the Red Cross. Some of the contributing funders are interested in seeking to extend this provision beyond refugees and asylum seekers to all vulnerable migrants.

There have also been useful pieces of research done to help assist funder and NGO thinking in this area, for example the research by Gina Clayton funded by the Future Advice Fund in 2015: *Models of Immigration Advice, Advocacy and Representation for destitute migrants, focusing on refused asylum seekers*. Overall the picture is one of interest and trialling new models, but it is worth noting that all are being formulated against a moving backdrop (in policy and service terms) and that it is still to be seen which of these models proves the most effective in building sustainable and cohesive capacity in the sector.

During the strategic review meeting held with external stakeholders of the Athena Project, organisations noted that there were some areas which they are concerned about, most strikingly the need to ensure that the availability of higher level advice and representation (OISC Level 3 and Judicial Review work) is able to keep pace with initiatives supporting migrants into advice provision, and that more specialist immigration advisers and lawyers are not lost to the field through legal aid cuts.

4.2. Key issues highlighted about the model design

The model was designed to try and both provide access to the specialist advice which RoW has on immigration (through the advice line for clients and the WoMAN network for professionals) and to increase supply ‘down the chain’ in order that pressure on the specialists was somewhat alleviated, as well as more clients helped. From our overview of the project we would note that:

- Whilst the advice line is offering excellent support to clients its potential to provide accurate and quality assistance at the point of need is by no means yet realised. From what clients told us through the outcome tracking, relatively little investment in the advice line enables more women to be assisted per week at a higher level than will ever be possible through capacity building local organisations, and it would seem desirable to boost RoW’s capacity to assist clients directly in this way, particularly as the advice is accessible nationally.
- Supporting professionals through the WoMAN network is happening, but this could be more structured and assisted by RoW developing more targeted second tier support to cohorts of agencies who would thus feel more able to develop their capacity and in house skills. Online would benefit from offline support, in other words.
- Training organisations to deliver advice needs to be more structured, and it is not clear that this is a very effective use of RoW’s limited resources. Whilst the course itself was of five star standard, RoW’s ability to support particularly the VAWG sector would need to be enhanced and it is not clear as yet that this is the best form of developing capacity anyway, with other models (employing immigration lawyers) seeming to provide an easier and more guaranteed route for clients.

Overall, future models need to capitalise on the particular expertise of RoW which is that of an expert and specialist provider rather than a training agency to ensure that this is used to best effect for clients, other professionals in the field, and organisations.

4.3 Cost comparison with other models of delivery

The evaluation looked at three different capacity building investments to try and compare the costs of delivery versus client outcomes. The costing of these three models are below. Costings for these models are drawn from examples which various projects shared with the evaluators confidentially.

Model	Description	Cost per year	No. women advised per year	Comment
CAPACITY BUILDING TRAINING Example: RoW	Training for staff working in women’s organisations to enable them to deliver OISC accredited immigration advice to refugee and migrant women.	£55,480 including estimated project and overhead costs	Not yet known	Difficult to compare with other models as number and nature of cases taken by trained advisers is not yet known. NB Annualised cost not really relevant as takes investment of 2 – 3 years to produce client outcomes
OUTREACH Example:	Outreach, advice to clients, second tier advice and casework,	£70,000 including project	85 cases (estimated average of 50	This offers both a comprehensive and intensive service.

Model	Description	Cost per year	No. women advised per year	Comment
a supervising solicitor working in an advice agency	including some legally aided work (Note: There is better value out of doing this work where there is a legal aid contract, as it immediately levers in the potential for additional funding for casework and can also cover disbursements).	costs and overheads	hours per case to secure an outcome) Also: Back up support to accredited advisers (not known how many advice units this enabled) Information and support to workers and volunteers to prepare cases	The service also provides outreach, general advice and back up support to workers where they are doing the advice in the form of supervision and second tier advice to accredited advisers, or (where not accredited) giving guidance on the documentation needed in order for the legal advice session to be best used.
IN HOUSE LAWYER OR ADVISER Example: Immigration Solicitor/ Immigration Advice Caseworker	Advice and casework delivered in house to clients contacting organisation directly.	£51,500 including estimated project and overhead costs	Advice and referrals to 120 women and casework to 70.	This seems to be a straightforward 'legal adviser doing advice and casework' model.

It is unclear whether or not these different models are necessarily complementary.

4.4 Learning outcomes from the Athena model

Lastly in this section, we would note that the Athena project has enabled considerable learning both for RoW and for the sector.

Other models developed

The seeds of the current Frontline Immigration Advice Project being taken forward by Refugee Action came from the Athena Project, and Refugee Action spoke to RoW early on in its development.

RoW's commitment to learning

RoW has approached this project in the spirit of learning and funders appreciate that they have been able to share lows as well as highs and shape and adapt the project accordingly. "I have loved the fact that they have felt they could pick up the phone at times to say 'Oh my god this has just happened' – it's been great." RoW has developed extensive learning, both about how to approach a capacity building project of this nature (in terms of preparation needed, for instance), and in terms of their awareness of OISC regulation. They have also managed to test and trial different approaches to advice giving which has enabled them to form a view on how to take this element of their service forward.

Additionally the evaluation has provided a useful point of reflection at key points during the project. Staff report it as having been useful in helping them think and change direction, and also in terms of providing useful 'critical friend' advice at points in the project. Funders note, and welcome, that there have been lots of changes and adaptations during the project partly as a result of this input.

5. Recommendations

Many of the recommendations have already been highlighted in the key findings contained in the individual sections of this report. Over-arching recommendations are that RoW should:

1. **Continue and expand the advice line work.** RoW's work in this area is unusual and significantly valued by both practitioners and clients and should be, in our view, expanded pending resources.
2. **Develop a second tier offer which includes both online and offline support.** RoW could help organisations by consolidating and expanding its work on the WoMAN network, and also by providing telephone back up to targeted frontline workers known to be OISC accredited.
3. **Build and capitalise on relationship forged with OISC.** RoW should capitalise on its position as a trusted interlocutor and expert adviser with OISC around regulation. It is clearly the 'go to' organisation for both OISC and the migration/VAW field and will be able to further shape how OISC communicates with and regulates the sector.
4. **Consider occupying a role in specialist training but with more targeted groups.** The excellent feedback on the training courses and trainer would seem to point to RoW having some role in the training space if funds allow. However consideration should be given to who can attend these courses, and potentially segmenting participants e.g. by limiting them to organisations which are already OISC registered (or can demonstrate regulatory understanding and competence such as PAS) so that efforts are just put into training and skilling up those working with vulnerable migrant women and less into chasing and explaining. Conversely courses for non-OISC registered organisations could be run, pending sufficient assessment and reassurance around commitment, and include in this funding for partners to purchase cover, for example.
5. **Develop a menu of support for partners and explore funding sources for this.** RoW could usefully support VAW and other partners who are thinking about how to develop their immigration advice offer in a range of ways. These include:
 - Initial needs assessment and review of organisational strategy and resources
 - Development of a plan which sets out what they want to achieve and how external agencies can support this (including RoW)
 - Providing outreach sessions
 - Providing enhanced telephone advice offers to their clients
 - Providing support for developing funding bids for specialist workers or (if the organisation wants to develop its own capacity), support through training and registration with OISC.

Clearly, such elements would be separately costed.

6. **Consider developing a specialist casework unit on immigration.** RoW is currently acting as a 'hub' for a range of 'spokes' and only in the limited advice it is giving over the phone is utilising its detailed and specialist knowledge. This is frustrating both for the sector (several organisations said they wished they could refer to RoW) and for workers. Whilst there may be understandable reluctance to fund a regular casework unit, we believe that parameters around strategic litigation and only taking on cases of broader value to the clients and the sector more broadly could be drawn which would enable RoW to use its expertise in this area.

Appendix A: Evaluation Methodology

Evaluation questions and principles

The key evaluation questions agreed at the start of the project were:

- To what extent have the Athena Project activities achieved their outcomes?
- What were the project's key achievements and successes?
- Which elements of the project were the most effective?
- What were the project's challenges and barriers to success?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the new model?
- What are the remaining gaps and barriers to meeting the needs of this group of women and what are the opportunities to develop more effective responses to those needs?

The evaluation set out to gather data to help answer these questions using the methods described below.

The principles underpinning our evaluation approach were as follows:

- Taking a realist perspective, attempting to disentangle the specific context in which a model works, for whom it works and how it works.
- Approaching the evaluation as an action research project, with the evaluators working alongside the RoW team and collaborating with them to design the most appropriate ways to obtain information, to interpret the findings and to decide on what action to take.
- Wherever possible using mixed methods, combining qualitative methods such as interviews with qualitative approaches, including analysis of numerical data and surveys.
- Triangulating the information obtained from different sources to build up a picture of how the project was working.

Document review

The evaluators reviewed a wide range of background documentation, including

- *Deeds not words: The future of Rights of Women's immigration and asylum advice and information services* by Cate Briddick, Rights of Women April 2013
- Funder proposals
- Reports to funders
- Training materials
- Training feedback forms
- Correspondence with OISC

Evaluation of the Advice Line

Semi structured telephone and face to face interviews:

- 8 interviews with current and former members of RoW staff
- 12 interviews with advice and support workers from a range of organisations, including women's support groups and domestic violence service providers

- Interviews took place between April and June 2015, in December 2015 and again in January 2017.

Desktop review of Advice Line records:

- Review of a sample of 185 call records spanning the period January 2013 to July 2016. This gave us an overview of presenting problems; sources of referral – where people are coming from; average time spent on case, and type of case.
- Review of call monitoring data supplied by the project. To inform our detailed interim report we compared the data collected by advisers between 1 April 2011 and 31 January 2014 (before the triage system was introduced) and 1 February 2014 and 14 December 2015 ('post-triage').
- We asked staff working on the Advice Line to complete time records for the period July to August 2016 to establish how much time was being spent on calls and how much on follow up and administration. In particular, we wanted to make sure that funding was sufficient to cover the cost of resources allocated to the Advice Line.

Follow up telephone calls to women who had used the Advice Line:

- To understand more about outcomes for users of the service, we supported RoW staff to undertake an outcome tracking exercise for 16 clients to find out what had happened to them. We selected a sample of 16 women who had called the line from the schedule of files reviewed; the intention was that the list of women to call would include those who were likely still to be in the country and who had called because they had an issue that might take some time to resolve. We provided questions and an introduction for RoW staff to use during the call, and then collected and analysed the results. Staff called back because of issues of client confidentiality and consent. Calls were made during the winter of 2016.

Evaluation of WoMAN

- The evaluators joined the group and monitored exchanges, undertaking particular analysis of sample months
- We posted two on-line surveys December 2015 and December 2016. The surveys included questions about use and effectiveness of the network.
- Ceri Hutton attended the network meeting in Manchester on 9th May 2016.

Evaluation of the OISC training

- Between May and June 2015 the evaluators spoke with as many training partner managers as possible to get a sense of what their expectations and hopes were from the intervention, and to clarify responsibilities around reporting and feedback.
- Training observation on 23rd July 2015 (last day of first OISC 1 course).
- Training reflection interviews with trainers Nicole Masri and Jasbindar Bhatia in September 2015.
- Reviewed training feedback forms from OISC Level 2 course and a CPD event held in November 2016 delivered by Nicole Masri.
- Held one to one meetings with partner agencies in November and December 2015.
- Liaised with OISC at several points during the evaluation.
- Assisted with briefing for OISC to frame meeting on 17th December 2015.

- Ceri Hutton chaired and facilitated a seminar with RoW, OISC (Deepa Patel and Deirdre Gilchrist) and partner agencies on 13th July 2016.
- Ceri Hutton organised and chaired a 'summit brainstorm' with other key agencies looking at capacity building in the field (Refugee Action, Islington Law Centre and JCWI) on 26th September 2016.

Evaluation planning and feedback

During the evaluation RoW and the evaluation team met or had discussions on the telephone on the following occasions:

Meetings

- February 2015 to scope work with Emma Scott and Jasbindar Bhattoa
- June 2015 to finalise evaluation framework and plan with Emma Scott and Jasbindar Bhattoa
- March 2016 to discuss emerging findings and next steps for the Advice Line
- June 2016 to meet with Estelle du Boulay (also decided on summit progress)
- November 2016 to discuss the content and timing of the preliminary findings and final reports

Interviews and discussions

- Scoping discussions with Jasbindar Bhattoa, Trust for London and Comic Relief in February 2015
- Discussion with RoW staff in May 2015 regarding partner interviews
- September 2015 interviews with Jasbindar Bhattoa and Nicole Masri about the OISC training and its progress
- Telephone discussions with Jasbindar Bhattoa as the work progressed

Outputs from the evaluation

Outputs produced for RoW during the evaluation comprise:

- Evaluation Framework April 2015
- May 2015 - Advice Line Emerging Findings Report to inform future configuration and bidding
- Memorandum of Understanding first draft for partners
- OISC briefing note for December 2015 meeting
- January 2016 – Advice Line Interim Report
- February 2016 – Full Interim Report
- Preliminary Findings January 2017
- Final Evaluation Report September 2017

Appendix B: List of those interviewed

RoW staff and volunteers interviewed

Thirteen formal interviews were conducted overall with staff and volunteers over the course of the project. Interviews ranged in length but with key staff lasted between 3 – 4 hours on average.

Name	Role	Date(s) interviewed
Amy Murtagh	Advice Line Gateway Assistant	1. May 2015 2. December 2015
Clara Connolly	Legal Officer (Immigration & Asylum)	3. January 2017
Debbie Adler	Volunteer Former Legal Officer (Immigration & Asylum)	4. December 2015
Jasbindar Bhattoa	Senior Legal Officer	5. May 2015 6. September 2015 7. December 2015 8. January 2017
Jordana Adams	Volunteer	9. January 2016
Nicole Masri	Legal Officer (Immigration & Asylum)	10. September 2015 11. December 2015 12. January 2017
Shathies Patkunanathan	Volunteer	13. January 2016

External stakeholders interviewed about strategic and policy context

15 interviews were conducted overall with the following 11 external stakeholders.

Name	Organisation	Role	Date(s) interviewed
Baljeet Sandhu	MiCLU (Migrant and Refugee Children's Legal Unit at Islington Law Centre)	Solicitor and Director	February 2016
Cathy Togher	Comic Relief	Funder of Athena Project	February 2015 January 2016 January 2017
Deirdre Gilchrist	Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner	Head of Operational Regulation	January 2017
Denise McDowell	Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit	Director	January 2016
Don Flynn	Migrants' Rights Network	Director	February 2016
Emma Renshaw	British Red Cross	Family Reunion Operations Manager (Acting)	February 2017
Heather Petch	Joseph Rowntree Foundation		January 2017
Ian Kane	Asylum Aid	Legal Services Manager	February 2016
Nicole Francis	ILPA	Director	February 2016

Name	Organisation	Role	Date(s) interviewed
Ruth Hayes	Islington Law Centre	Director	February 2016
Sioned Churchill	Trust for London	Funder of Athena project	February 2015 January 2016 January 2017

Referral agencies interviewed about their use of the Advice Line

14 agencies were interviewed over the course of the project. The evaluators sought to interview more, but it proved difficult to identify further 'regular referrers' within some agencies.

Name	Role and Organisation	Date(s) interviewed
Adrienne Anderson	Former Advice Line Caseworker, Solace Women's Aid	May 2015
Akram Hallaji	Advice and Support Worker, Ashiana Network	March 2015
Cate Briddick	Former Head of Law, Rights of Women	June 2015
Constance N.	Support Worker, Women Seeking Sanctuary Advocacy Group Wales	May 2015
Farheen Anwar	Adviser, Manchester Women's Domestic Abuse Helpline	May 2015
Frances Trevena	Former Legal Officer, Rights of Women	May 2015
Helen Hibberd	Support Worker, Hackney Migrants' Centre	April 2015
Jenna Warr	Service Manager, Red Cross Refugee Support & International Family Tracing	May 2015
Jo Calcott	Support Worker, Havering Women's Support Group	May 2015
Laurie Ray	Advice Worker, PAFRAS	January 2016
Pavan Lall	BAME Worker, Rape Crisis (Wycombe, Chiltern and South Bucks)	May 2015
Rupinder Parhar	Advocacy Officer, Eaves	May 2015
Vicky Marsh	Support Worker, Women Asylum Seekers Together (WAST)	May 2015
Zahra Rasouli	Support Worker, Iranian & Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO)	December 2015

Partners interviewed about OISC training programme

The following managers and trainees from partner organisations were interviewed or (*) submitted detailed written feedback confidentially to the evaluators. In addition, all feedback forms from all courses.

Name	Organisation	Role	Date of interview(s) or *written submission
Adrienne Darragh	Hibiscus Initiatives	Chief Executive Athena trainee	January 2017
Akram Hallaji	Ashiana Network	Senior Advice & Support Worker	*March 2017

Name	Organisation	Role	Date of interview(s) or *written submission
		Athena trainee	
Alessandra Rossi	Hibiscus Initiatives	Community Project Worker	January 2017 *March 2017
Amrita Kaur	Kiran Support Services	Athena trainee Outreach Worker	*March 2017
Amtal Rana	Kiran Support Services	Chief Executive Officer	January 2017
Anta Brachou	Hibiscus Initiatives	Athena training partner Project coordinator	January 2017 *March 2017
Buffy Sharpe	Prisoners' Advice Service	Athena trainee Fundraiser	January 2017
Brother Vaughan	Praxis	Advice Caseworker	May 2017
Colette Taylor	Aanchal Women's Aid	Athena trainee Manager	March 2017
Dalia Suchodolskiene	Praxis	Athena training partner Advice Caseworker	*March 2017
Deborah Russo	Prisoners' Advice Service	Athena trainee Managing Solicitor	January 2017
Emma Goldie	Paiwand	Athena trainee Advocacy Services Manager	January 2017
Fatima Qureshi	Aanchal Women's Aid	Athena trainee Senior IDVA	*March 2017
Feride Kumbasar	IMECE	Director	January 2017
Lina Amir	IKWRO	Manager	May 2015
Liz Clarson	Hibiscus Initiatives	Athena training partner Volunteer	*March 2017
Mary Mason	Solace Women's Aid	Athena trainee Director	May 2015
Mel Steel	Praxis	Athena training partner Advice Services Manager	February 2017 May 2015 January 2017
Meral Halkaci	IMECE	Athena training partner Services Manager	January 2017
Nazira Mehmari	IKWRO	Athena training partner Advice Coordinator	January 2017
Nicki Rensten	Prisoners' Advice Service	Athena training partner Outreach caseworker	*March 2017
Pam Saleem	Ashiana Network	Athena trainee Housing Services Manager	January 2017
Rapinder Viridi	Ashiana Network	Athena training partner Senior Housing Support Worker	*March 2017
Rupinder Parhar	Eaves	Athena trainee Advocacy Officer	May 2015

Name	Organisation	Role	Date of interview(s) or *written submission
		Athena trainee	
Seika Aziz	Hibiscus Initiatives	Project Worker	January 2017
		Athena trainee	
Senay Dur	Imece	Athena training partner	May 2015
Shaminder Ubhi	Ashiana Network	Director	May 2015
		Athena training partner	January 2017
Sikisa Bostwick- Barnes	Solace Women's Aid	Immigration Solicitor	January 2017
Subarshan Bhui	Aanchal Women's Aid	Chief Executive Officer	January 2017
Vanna Derosas	Hibiscus Initiatives	Project Manager	*March 2017
		Athena trainee	