# PA Wellbeing Demonstrator project 2023-24

# Evaluation report: expert groups

About the expert groups:

A key activity of the PA Wellbeing Demonstrator project was conducting a systematic review of evidence on PA wellbeing. This would inform Scotland’s PA Programme Board Wellbeing Subgroup on how to better support this often-hidden workforce. To ‘ground’ the evidence and recommendations in lived experience, IMPACT recruited two expert groups of PA employers and PAs from across Scotland to discuss the emerging themes and refine the recommendations. There were nine people in the PA employer group and eight in the PA group.

While not seeking to be demographically representative, the groups were purposively selected to include a range of backgrounds and experiences. They included rural and urban perspectives; disabled employers employing PAs for themselves, employers employing PAs on behalf of adult family members, and employers employing PAs for their children; PAs directly employed by disabled people, PAs employed to support disabled children, PAs employed by their own friends and family, PAs working for more than one employer, and both directly employed and self-employed PAs. Each group met online four times between February and July 2024. A 4-6 page evidence summary (including agenda, reminder of purpose of group, and summary of draft evidence themes) written by Richard and Rhiann was circulated for pre-reading a few days prior to each meeting. Each group member could claim £100 participation payment per meeting from IMPACT (£25 per hour for two hours preparation and two hours in-group), plus any expenses (e.g. PA support, taxis). Although not all members attended all meetings, there was high commitment from both groups throughout the course of meetings. Some group members shared feedback by email when they could not attend. More detail of how the groups were facilitated, including inclusion activities, is in Appendix 3 of the systematic review of evidence on PA wellbeing.

To understand more about our experts’ experiences and continue to develop IMPACT’s approach to co-production and evidence into practice, we did a short online evaluation exercise including closed and open questions. An anonymised questionnaire (coproduced with Dr Aisha Macgregor, IMPACT) was circulated using MS Forms, with accessible options available in Word, to the eight participants in the PA expert group and the nine participants in the PA employer expert group. All respondents were offered £25 for their time completing the evaluation. Four PA employers and five PAs completed the evaluation.

The evaluation results are below, disaggregated across the two expert groups. The analysis is done by Richard Brunner and Rhiann McLean. The findings of the ‘closed’ questions are summarised at the start of that section. The findings of the ‘open’ questions are summarised within sections a. to f.

## A. Closed questions

Summary of findings

While care is required with interpretation due to the small sample and subjectivity of responses, the results of closed questions about participation in the groups were very positive, without significant differences across PAs/PA employers. Both groups found the meetings accessible, and the evidence summaries useful and accessible. All respondents strongly agreed that they felt ‘heard’ in the groups. All respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they understood how their perspectives shaped the evidence review. All respondents felt that based on their experience of this group, they would be interested in taking part in future work with IMPACT. Almost all respondents felt more confident in engaging with evidence and had a better understanding of issues that affect PA wellbeing. All PA employers and all except one PA would not have been able to participate in the group without the participation and expense payments. Almost all respondents felt that the group was innovative and was different to other activities they had been involved with. Most PAs and PA employers felt that they would approach their role as a PA / PA employer differently because of their involvement in the expert group. One PA employer gave an example (Q.11 below), which highlights how a group participant can change the way that they think and act. This underlines the importance of ongoing support for participants in expert groups, as group learning has a real-world impact.

Questionnaire breakdown

Please select the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree

1. **The expert group meetings were accessible to me.**

100% of PAs and 100% of PA employers strongly agreed that the meetings were accessible to them.

1. **The evidence summaries were accessible.**

4 PAs strongly agreed and 1 PA agreed that the evidence summaries were accessible. 3 PA employers strongly agreed and 1 PA employer agreed that the evidence summaries were accessible.

1. **The evidence summaries were useful.**

3 PA employers strongly agreed and 1 PA employer agreed that the evidence summaries were useful. 4 PAs strongly agreed and 1 PA agreed that the evidence summaries were useful.

1. **I felt my voice was ‘heard’ in the group.**

100% of PAs strongly agreed that they felt their voice was heard in the group. 100% of PA employers strongly agreed that their voices were heard in the group.

1. **I understand how my perspectives shaped the evidence review.**

3 PAs strongly agreed and 2 PAs agreed that they understood how their contribution contributed to the evidence review. 3 PA employers strongly agreed and 1 PA employer agreed. It is important to note that not all PAs or PA employers attended the meeting at which the facilitators presented on how group contributions had contributed to the evidence review.

1. **I would not have been able to participate in the group without the participation and expense payments.**

4 PAs agreed that they would not have been able to take part in the group without participation and expense payments, and one neither agreed nor disagreed. 100% of PA employers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

1. **The group was innovative and was different to other activities I have been involved with.**

4 PAs agreed or strongly agreed, and one PA neither agreed nor disagreed that the group was innovative and different from other activities they had been engaged with before. 100% of PA employers strongly agreed.

1. **I feel more confident in engaging with evidence.**

4 PAs agreed or strongly agreed that they now feel more confident engaging with evidence, and one PA neither agreed nor disagreed. 100% of PA employers agreed or strongly agreed that they feel more confident engaging with evidence.

1. **I have a better understanding of issues that affect PA wellbeing.**

3 PAs strongly agreed that they had a better understanding of the issues that affect PA wellbeing, 2 agreed. 3 PA employers strongly agreed, and 1 PA employer neither agreed nor disagreed.

1. **Based on my experience of this group, I would be interested in taking part in future work with IMPACT.**

3 PAs strongly agreed and 2 PAs agreed that based on their experience of the expert group, they would be interested in engaging with IMPACT in the future. 100% of PA employers strongly agreed with the statement.

1. **Just for employers - I will approach my role as a PA employer differently as a result of my involvement in the expert group.**

3 PA employers agreed or strongly agreed that they would be approaching their PA role differently as a result of their involvement in the expert group. 1 PA employer neither agreed nor disagreed.

PA employer comment: ‘*Sometimes when i'm really tired or when its the school holidays, i feel a little 'frustrated' or 'disappointed' when PA's take holidays. But i now realise that its not personal.. its their right. ive realised that i 'impose' how the PA's do things with my child and actually my way might not be the best or the right one.’*

1. **Just for PAs - I will approach my role as a PA differently as a result of my involvement in the expert group.**

3 PAs strongly agreed that they would approach their role differently as a result of membership; 2 PAs neither agreed nor disagreed.

## B. Open text questions

Note on interpretation

Care is required with interpretation due to the small sample and subjectivity of responses. Exemplary quotes from respondents are included below (spelling unchanged).

**a. What was your motivation for joining this group?**

PA employers were motivated to join the group to learn from each other, improve their own practice in managing PAs and develop their knowledge relating to self-directed support.

PAs were motivated to join the group to share their experiences, and to learn from others. The opportunity to contribute to change was positively described throughout the evaluation data.

PA: ‘*That PA well being and PAs in general are quite broadly miss understood/interpretated in the public eye and almost a forgot service of key workers.’*

**b. Can you tell us anything new that you’ve learned about PA wellbeing from taking part in the group?**

PA employers benefited from a range of different views represented in the group, as well as support and sometimes, challenge, to their own role as PA employer.

PA employer: ‘*The different views and being able to interact with such an energetic and enthusiastic group showed me I was part of something and not a retired person with my own thoughts and ideas. Indeed I carried hope and positive challenges from it all.’*

PAs reflected on what they had learned through collaboration - in particular the lack of knowledge, appreciation and recognition of the PA role.

PA: ‘*That PA well being and PAs in general are quite broadly miss understood/interpretated in the public eye and almost a forgot service of key workers*

**c. Is there anything that you are doing differently now because of your involvement in the group?**

One PA employer said they felt more confident in themselves. Another said they felt challenged to 'step back' more and let their PAs direct what support and learning they needed. Another PA employer said they would take learning from the sessions to other groups and forums.

PA employer: ‘*I feel more confident within myself. AND I learned that experience I have built up over the years is valuable and can be used to create a better Scotland for all.’*

Two PAs commented on wanting to continue to contribute to the PA/PA wellbeing agenda in the future. PAs were positive about the structure and facilitation of the setting. Group members felt it was valuable to connect with one another, and to hear a range of different perspectives.

**d. We want to continue learning and improving. What parts worked well for you about the expert group?**

PA employers were actively engaged in the evidence, both from the systematic review and learning from one another. They described the 'pitch' as right for them, not too complex. Payment for involvement was mentioned by two employers as important, as well as a clear purpose to the sessions. One PA employer said that the online meetings worked well for them, and that the ten-minute break in the session was appreciated.

PA employer: ‘*These sessions are probably the best managed sessions that ive ever been part of. We had a clear understanding of what we should consider, read and discuss. No big fancy words, no areas for confusion.’*

PAs were positive about the structure and facilitation of the sessions. Group members felt it was valuable to connect with one another, and to hear a range of different perspectives.

PA: ‘*The virtual sessions were really well facilitated, had good structure and direction and allow each person to express their perpespectives and learn from each other.’*

**e. What should we do differently for future expert groups to improve the experience of members?**

To improve future groups for PA employers, consideration could be given to meeting in person where possible, and offering different times of day for meetings to ensure that people from all backgrounds, including carers can be part of future work.

To improve future groups for PAs, one suggestion was to build in more online ‘breakout rooms’ for larger groups. Another PA expressed interest in staying in touch with other group members to build a peer network.

**f. Other**

Participants appreciated that the groups were friendly. The project being hosted by the University brought some prestige to the offer for one PA employer.

PA employer: ‘*Your lade back and open approach has been apreciated. Your friendly approach.’*

Richard Brunner and Rhiann McLean

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