

Local Lifelong Guidance Strategies

NICEC

The National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling is a network organisation supported by CRAC. It conducts applied research and development work related to guidance in educational institutions and in work and community settings. Its aim is to develop theory, inform policy and enhance practice through staff development, organisation development, curriculum development, consultancy and research.

CRAC

The Careers Research and Advisory Centre is a registered educational charity and independent development agency founded in 1964. Its education and training programmes, publications and sponsored projects provide links between the worlds of education and employment. CRAC has sponsored NICEC since 1975.

Sheraton House, Castle Park, Cambridge CB3 0AX
Tel: 01223-460277 Fax: 01223-311708

D/EE

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There is increasing recognition that individuals need to have access to high-quality career guidance throughout their lives. If guidance is to be available on a lifelong basis, many agencies need to be involved. Local strategies are needed to ensure that their resources are used to best effect, to encourage continuity and progression in guidance provision, and to fill gaps in such provision.

This Briefing outlines the results of a NICEC project on developing local lifelong guidance strategies. The project was funded by the Department for Education and Employment. It comprised pilots in four areas (Central London, Gloucestershire, Solihull, South Cambridgeshire). The Briefing examines:

- The rationale for local strategies (*why?*).
- A methodology for developing such strategies (*how?*).
- The form which the strategies might take (*what?*).
- *Issues* that need to be addressed in developing such strategies.

WHY?

If Britain is to achieve a skills revolution within a flexible labour market, individuals need to have access to high-quality guidance throughout their lives. Such guidance can help:

- To motivate individuals continuously to develop their skills.
- To ensure that their decisions about learning and work are informed in relation to their own potential and the needs of the labour market.

If guidance is to be available on a lifelong basis, many agencies need to be involved:

- The guidance services provided by schools, colleges and universities.
- The statutory provision of the Careers Service for (mainly) young people.
- The wide variety of services for adults: some provided by employers; some provided by government agencies (including the Employment Service); and some in the voluntary and private sectors.

THE NEED FOR COHERENCE

Strategies are needed for encouraging coherence between these various agencies:

- To ensure that existing resources are used to best effect.
- To encourage continuity and progression in guidance provision.
- To identify gaps which need to be filled, and ways of filling them.

Coherence recognises and values the multiple nature of guidance provision, but implies:

- Close links between providers.
- Effective working relationships.
- Clarity about who does what.
- Collaboration on joint activities where appropriate.
- Maximum "transparency" of the full range of available guidance provision from the viewpoint of the client.

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

At national level, the merging of two previously separate government departments into the new Department for Education and Employment should be helpful in encouraging greater coherence: careers education and guidance is an area where it should be possible to reap a "merger dividend".

Two other recent national developments are of strategic importance in fostering coherence:

- The work of the Advice, Guidance, Counselling and Psychotherapy Lead Body is leading to the development of a single system of qualifications for guidance practitioners in all sectors.

- The National Advisory Council for Careers and Educational Guidance now brings together the major employer bodies, education and training bodies, guidance professional associations, and other interested bodies, with government observers. Its aim is to act as a voice of strategic leadership, and to improve the quality, quantity and consistency of guidance about learning and work throughout the United Kingdom.

LOCAL NEEDS

These initiatives need, however, to be mirrored at local level. Patterns of provision vary considerably between localities. While strategic frameworks need to be set nationally, detailed strategies for achieving coherent access to guidance on a lifelong basis have to be developed and delivered locally.

Work has already been done in many areas on building networks and implementing some degree of strategic co-ordination in relation to guidance services for adults. There has however tended to be little contact between services for adults and those for young people. This divide is damaging:

- Many services for young people also include adults in their clientele (and vice-versa).
- Stronger links could help to ensure that the guidance provided for young people is in closer touch with the realities of the labour market and of changes in career patterns.
- The foundations for lifelong career development need to be laid in schools.
- Any strategy that is genuinely "lifelong" must incorporate young people as well as adults.

There is accordingly a need for local strategies for guidance which cover both young people and adults.

How?

In each of the four pilot areas, the work involved three stages:

- The *interview* stage, involving interviews with key guidance agents, conducted by an external consultant.
- The *consultation* stage, bringing together the key guidance agents to explore the possibility of developing a local strategy.
- The *implementation* stage, involving the establishment of a formal mechanism for developing and implementing the strategy.

THE INTERVIEW STAGE

In each case, a small initial working group was established by the local Training and Enterprise Council to manage the initial stages of the project. The individuals interviewed varied, but commonly included:

- Training and Enterprise Council (Chief Executive, Education Manager, Training Manager, Guidance Co-ordinator).
- Local Education Authority (Chief Education Officer, Chief Inspector (Schools), Adult/Community Education Officer).
- Careers Service (Chief Executive, Education Services Manager, Adult Guidance Manager).
- Schools (Headteachers, Careers Co-ordinators).
- Further Education (Principals/Vice-Principals, Heads of Student Services, Guidance Managers).
- Higher Education (Principals/Vice-Principals, Heads of Student Services, Heads of Careers Services).
- Employers.
- Employment Service (District Manager, Jobcentre Manager).
- Library Service.
- Others (training providers, Chamber of Commerce, Business Link, private guidance agencies, Government Regional Office).

Those interviewed were asked:

- To outline their current roles and responsibilities, and how these had been influenced by recent national and local developments.
- To explore ways in which their work might be more effectively linked to those of other guidance agencies in the area.

The outcome of the survey was a report outlining the range of local guidance provision, the potential for stronger local collaboration, and issues relevant to the development of a local strategy.

The merits of the survey were:

- Issues which people were prepared to mention in private could be brought into the open, without attribution.
- Subsequent discussions could start from a common information base.

THE CONSULTATION STAGE

In three of the pilot areas, a 24-hour consultation was held (see panel). The dynamics of a residential event permits issues to be explored in some depth, and areas of friction to be voiced, with time to resolve difficulties, galvanise energies and move towards concerted action.

In the fourth area, the project as a whole was viewed as part of a programme to develop a broader lifelong *learning* strategy. A task-group was set up to carry out the consultation phase on the guidance strategy, leading towards a more broadly-based 24-hour consultation on lifelong learning as a whole.

THE IMPLEMENTATION STAGE

In each area, the consultation resulted in the establishment of a negotiated mechanism for developing and implementing a strategy, plus some groundwork – including working papers and draft statements – on which the strategy could be built. The convenor of this mechanism varied:

- In one area it was the Careers Service.
- In two areas it was the TEC.
- In the fourth area, it was decided that, following the TEC's initial work, it would rotate.

Outline Programme for Local Residential Consultation

Day 1 (starting with lunch)

Session 1: Strategy and Principles (plenary)

Should there be a local strategy in ... for lifelong access to guidance in support of lifelong career development for all?
If so, what form should it take?
On what common vision and common principles should it be based?

Session 2A: Issues (small groups)

What needs are there for greater coherence, continuity and progression across different sectors of guidance provision within the strategy?
What is the strategic role of the TEC and/or the LEA and/or other organisations?
What are the delivery roles of different guidance providers within the strategy?
What gaps are there? How might they be filled?

Session 2B: Issues (plenary)

Feedback from small groups

Session 3: Review (plenary)

How far have we got?
How many of the issues in the survey report have we addressed?
What are the key issues we want to address further on Day 2?
How do we want to address them?

Day 2 (ending with lunch)

Session 4: Moving Forward (small groups)

To address some of the key issues identified in Session 3 (different groups addressing different issues)

Session 5: Agenda for Action (plenary)

Report-back from Session 4
What recommendations and/or decisions do we want to make?
What happens next?

WHAT?

No blueprint for what a strategy should comprise was prescribed by the project. The models developed, however, contained common elements:

- A vision (or "mission" or "aim").
- Common principles.
- Specified areas of collaborative action to achieve the vision.

THE VISION

The vision in all cases was concerned with lifelong access to guidance for learning and work. The statement agreed in one area, for example, was:

- "To ensure access to guidance for all individuals in ..., so as to encourage them to develop their knowledge, skills and abilities to their full potential by taking opportunities to continue learning throughout their lifetime, in support of their own success and that of the local community and its economy."

COMMON PRINCIPLES

The common principles included attention to such issues as:

- Impartiality.
- Confidentiality.
- Individual ownership.
- Equality of opportunity.
- Transparency.
- Accessibility.

The publication by the National Advisory Council for Careers and Educational Guidance of its *Code of Principles* should make it possible in future to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort here.

COLLABORATIVE ACTION

The areas of collaborative action covered:

- *Communication* – where no working patterns are changed, but efforts are made to help services understand what each other offers so that they can, for example, cross-refer clients appropriately.
- *Co-operation* – where services co-operate on some joint task.
- *Co-ordination* – where services alter their working patterns to bring them more closely into line with one another, while remaining within their existing professional boundaries.
- *Cross-fertilisation* – where efforts are made to encourage services to share and exchange skills, and in effect to work across professional boundaries in ways that are likely to re-draw the boundaries themselves.
- *Integration* – where the cross-fertilisation process is developed to a point which means that the boundaries between the different services disappear altogether.

COMMUNICATION

An important initial step was to establish more effective networking, so that different guidance providers would be more aware of what each other offered. Such "internal transparency" within the guidance field could aid exchange of good practice, facilitate more effective referral of clients, and provide an essential base-point for more extended forms of collaborative action – e.g. joint marketing, and seeking to fill gaps in provision (see below). It could be achieved informally, or through a formal audit of what was available where, and to whom.

CO-OPERATION

Possibilities included:

- Joint marketing ("external transparency"), indicating the range of guidance services available locally to different client-groups, and seeking both to articulate the entitlement to publicly-funded services and to generate demand for fee-charged services.
- Partnership bidding to invest in jointly-funded activities, which could lead to more advanced levels of collaboration.

CO-ORDINATION

Possibilities included:

- "Segmenting the market", on a collaborative basis – i.e. resolving boundary issues between different services.
- More co-ordinated approaches to outreach work.
- Harmonisation of processes of recording achievement and action planning across sectors.
- Defining quality standards in relation to different levels and different sectors of guidance provision, including attention to levels of impartiality.
- "Branding" or "kitemarking" guidance services that met the appropriate standards (including initial access points – libraries, Citizens' Advice Bureaux, etc.).

CROSS-FERTILISATION

Possibilities included:

- Educational guidance desks in Jobcentres.
- Open learning centres based in public libraries, jointly funded from library resources and government-enhanced TEC funds, with Careers Service involvement.

INTEGRATION

Possibilities included:

- Merging educational guidance services for adults into the Careers Service (already completed in one area), and/or merging careers services within colleges of further and higher education into the Careers Service (mooted by a college of higher education in another area).
- Establishing an integrated mechanism for pooling funding, making it possible to "programme funding rather than fund programmes" – i.e. enabling provision to be need-led rather than funding-led – and also to seek concerted action in relation to gaps in existing provision.

ISSUES

In the course of the project, a range of issues arose which need to be addressed if there is to be a concerted attempt to encourage the development of local lifelong guidance strategies.

GEOGRAPHICAL BOUNDARIES

What are the most appropriate geographical boundaries for such work? Where the boundaries of the TEC, the Local Authority and the Careers Service are contiguous, this presents no difficulty. Where however these boundaries vary, as they do in many parts of the country, this raises the issue of which set of boundaries are regarded as superordinate. Related issues include:

- The need to recognise diversity within the boundary chosen, e.g. because of different structures of school systems, or different communication structures between rural and urban areas.
- The possible need, if the chosen boundary covers large (e.g. county-wide) areas, for more local mechanisms (e.g. area forums) to deliver the strategy.
- The need to recognise that some clients will want to move across boundaries to find services, and should be able to do so.

COMPREHENSIVE REPRESENTATION

How does one secure comprehensive representation of all the local organisations and agencies involved in the delivery of guidance? It was not difficult to identify key organisations which must be at the table: the TEC, the LEA, the Careers Service, major institutions of further and higher education, the Employment Service, and the Library Service. In the case of schools and employers, however, there are many "units", and it may be impracticable for all of them to be actively involved: in such cases, unless an existing mechanism is available to provide a legitimated representative voice, the selection of "representatives" is inevitably somewhat *ad hoc*. Related issues include:

- How far should involvement be extended to the private and voluntary sectors?
- Should school representation be confined to secondary schools, or be extended to primary schools?
- Should organisations be represented at senior-management level and/or at guidance practitioner level?

SUSTAINED COMMITMENT

How is the commitment of the various organisations involved to be sustained?

- Organisations for whom guidance is a primary activity may feel more deeply committed than those for whom it is an ancillary activity or who have a "stakeholder" interest in it.
- Issues relating to guidance for adults outside the reach of statutory services may tend to dominate the discussions, with "lifelong" being interpreted by some participants as starting after – rather than embracing – initial full-time education.

Care needs to be taken to address a range of issues and tasks that together affect all the organisations involved, as well as those that affect only *some* of them.

COMPETITIVE REALITIES

How can competitive realities be recognised within a collaborative framework? Competition is of two kinds:

- Between *opportunity* providers (i.e. providers of education, training and employment). This is particularly relevant where guidance providers are also opportunity providers. Schools and colleges of further education, for example, are often in competition in relation to their opportunity provision, and have a vested interest in recruiting and retaining students; the same, of course, applies to employers. Other bodies may have output targets in terms of particular forms of opportunity provision (e.g. TECs, Employment Service). To what extent can guidance staff in such organisations be expected to offer fully impartial guidance, and to collaborate in doing so?
- Between guidance providers, where a market or quasi-market exists in *guidance* provision. This applies mainly to fee-charged adult guidance provision: particularly private-sector guidance agencies, but also other organisations like the Careers Service which are beginning to charge some clients for their services.

In some cases these two forms of competition come together: in one area, earlier co-operation between schools and the Careers Service had been severely undermined by the schools' need to retain students into the sixth form, and the Careers Service's need to generate income from its activities wherever possible, including direct mailing to the students' homes.

In all of these situations, care and patience may be required in such situations to clarify the areas where competition and collaboration respectively are appropriate.

LEVEL OF "CLOUT"

What level of "clout" (i.e. power of effective action) should be sought from the mechanism set up to develop and implement the strategy? Options include:

- A loose *network* focusing mainly on communication.
- A *forum* providing a focus for collaborative action.
- A *board* or *council* able to bid for and manage funding and to exert sanctions.

The commitment of the business community may be greater if there is a strategic decision-making, rather than purely advisory, remit.

CONVENING ROLE

Which organisation is to be responsible for the convening role?

- The *LEA* was viewed in the mid-1980s as the natural convenor for educational guidance networks for adults. But the weakening of the role of *LEAs* since then, and the greater emphasis on guidance for work as well as for learning, meant that there was no significant lobby within the project for the *LEA* to assume such a role.
- In most areas, the *TEC* was viewed as the best-placed convenor, though sometimes with reservations relating to its reduced budgetary capacity, its lack of professional guidance competence, its lack of strategic vision, and conflicts between its strategic and delivery roles; it was also noted that within many *TECs* responsibilities for different areas of guidance were split between different managers, without effective channels of communication and collaboration.
- An alternative adopted within one area (and considered in others) was for the role to be assumed by the *Careers Service*, particularly where the service was regarded as a "durable market leader" and also where it was based on an *LEA-TEC* partnership and viewed by both bodies as their chosen collaborative mechanism in the guidance field. Elsewhere, however, the *Careers Service* was regarded as only one provider among others, as being preoccupied with its own market position, and as lacking strategic credibility, particularly in relation to adult guidance.

An important consideration here was whether the convening role was viewed in purely operational terms, or was regarded as implying a *primus inter pares* status. It was important also to take account of existing patterns of collaboration, which were stronger in some localities than in others.

LINKS WITH OTHER BODIES

What links should there be between the mechanism set up to develop and implement the strategy, and other local and regional bodies? The latter include:

- *Strategic Education Forums*. One possibility was that a Guidance Forum might become a sub-group of the Strategic Education Forum: this would give it a broader supportive frame, and demonstrate close links between guidance and local attainment of the National Targets for Education and Training. Doubts were however voiced, more strongly in some places than in others, about the credibility and "clout" of the Strategic Education Forums.
- *Careers Service Advisory Councils/Committees*. It was noted that these bodies often contained many of the key stakeholders in developing local guidance strategies, and might be looking for a clearer (and, perhaps, stronger) role.
- *Government Regional Offices*. Should *GRO* officials be involved in work on developing local strategies, perhaps as observers?

CONCLUSION

It is as yet too early to judge what the long-term effects of the project's work are likely to be in the four areas in which it has operated: these are to be the subject of a follow-up evaluation. In the meantime, however, the project has indicated that encouraging local lifelong guidance strategies could have considerable value:

- In making more effective use of public funding for guidance provision.
- In encouraging a more vibrant and well-regulated market for costed services.
- In supporting the culture of lifelong learning that is widely regarded as necessary for national competitiveness.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The material in this Briefing is drawn from:

Watts, A.G., Hawthorn, R., Hoffbrand, J., Jackson, H., and Spurling, A.: "Developing Lifelong Guidance Strategies". *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, Volume 25, 1997 (in press).

Further copies of the Briefing are available from:

NICEC, Sheraton House, Castle Park,
Cambridge CB3 0AX (please send A4 sae)

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