

# Guidance for Adults: Harnessing Partnership Potential



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Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) Partnerships have the potential to:

- transform guidance provision for adults;
- enable many more adults to take advantage of learning, work and related opportunities;
- raise local levels of achievement.

Strategies are needed at both national and local level to realise this potential.

This Briefing:

- focuses on one IAG Partnership to illustrate the achievements and potential of Partnerships;
- identifies areas where national and local strategies are required to harness the potential.

The Briefing has been written by Geoff Ford (NICEC Fellow). It is based on an evaluation of the Cheshire, Halton, Warrington and Wirral Information, Advice and Guidance Partnership, and informed by feedback from other IAG Partnerships.

## THE POTENTIAL

The experience of the Cheshire, Halton, Warrington and Wirral IAG Partnership illustrates how much some Partnerships have achieved in a short space of time. The Partnership was established in October 1999 to cover four Local Learning Partnership areas. Six constituent networks were created to conform to the main geographical areas. In April 2001 the IAG Partnership was divided so that its boundaries are coterminous with those of the Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs). Connexions - Cheshire and Warrington Ltd is responsible for the Cheshire and Warrington IAG Partnership; Halton and Wirral became part of the Greater Merseyside Partnership.

## ACHIEVEMENTS

The achievements of the IAG Partnership during its short life are considerable, and have provided an important foundation on which to build the two new Partnerships. Some illustrate processes and activities that are likely to be central to the successful operation of IAG Partnerships on a national basis, and therefore merit wider dissemination. These include:

- *The energy, vision and commitment of the Management and Development Team, and the support they have provided to the membership.* IAG Partnerships have no legislative underpinning, and depend heavily on the personal and professional qualities of the staff responsible for developing and co-ordinating the Partnerships, and the trust and respect that the staff command from the membership.
- *The number of organisations joining the Partnership, and their inclusiveness.* Over an 18-month period, 82 organisations became Full or Associate Members; 48 of these were voluntary agencies. Many IAG Partnerships are finding that community-based agencies have much to contribute to the guidance process, and provide access and support to groups of adults previously excluded – or who, for a variety of reasons including low self-esteem, may have excluded themselves – from mainstream learning and work opportunities, and guidance provision.
- *Quality development for member organisations and their front-line staff.* The IAG Partnership has organised a sequence of meetings and workshops for members on quality issues, especially relating to the Guidance Council Quality Standards. Liaison between the IAG Development Team, and staff of the Guidance Council and Guidance Accreditation Board, has been close and effective. Over 60% of the member organisations have either gained successful accreditation against the 'A' or 'B' Standards, or have signified their intention to prepare for accreditation. Many of their front-line staff are working towards National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in Information and Advice, or undertaking foundation training.
- *Special projects.* The Partnership has initiated a number of projects with individual members to develop information, advice and varying forms of support for adult priority groups, including: adults with disabilities; ethnic minorities (Bangladeshi); women offenders; excluded men (mainly redundant manual workers and older men); adults, including farm workers, living in a remote rural area; and adults with basic skills requirements (the project includes awareness training for front-line staff in all member agencies). The Partnership

has funded a website information and advice enquiry service to test the value of ICT and e-mail in making IAG more widely available to adults. Other IAG Partnerships are also finding that targeted projects provide a valuable means of piloting and developing approaches towards different groups of adults, and exploring ways to mainstream the approaches where they prove successful.

- *Close liaison with the Learning Partnerships.* The four local Learning Partnerships have been represented on the IAG Consortium Management Group. Although the Learning Partnerships are at varying stages of development, IAG/Learning Partnership liaison has been close and indicates that effective collaboration, if it is nurtured, can provide the LSCs with valuable information and advice on the learning and inter-related guidance needs of local communities. Mechanisms that enable Learning Partnerships to listen carefully to their local communities are essential; IAG Partnerships have much to contribute to this process.

## POTENTIAL

Arguably, the fundamental achievement of the IAG Partnership has been to demonstrate the breadth and richness of expertise that exists within inclusive memberships to contribute towards the guidance process. This expertise includes:

*Careers education and guidance:* career guidance (all levels of ability through to graduates and higher education); career and learning information and resources; self-help information systems including IT and computer-assisted guidance; individual assessment including the use of psychometric instruments; careers education for adults; jobsearch; work experience for adults; learning tasters; vacancy databases; labour market information; employment vacancies; opportunities in voluntary work; helping and supporting volunteers into the intermediate labour market and full-time employment.

*Holistic support and guidance:* holistic counselling; counselling and supporting families; youth counselling and mentoring; individual and group advocacy; individual and group mentoring (adults); outreach and home visits.

*Specialist information, advice and guidance:* housing and accommodation issues; financial and debt counselling; employment law.

*Learning:* basic skills; employability skills; activities to raise adults' self-confidence and self-esteem; adult education more generally; work-based learning; creative use of leisure.

*Special initiatives:* New Deal and other government initiatives; intermediate labour market.

*Special groups:* people with disabilities including access, mobility, family and benefit issues; multi-cultural requirements; third-age issues; lone parents, single people and those suffering from isolation; prison education and related guidance work and after-care; work in socially and economically deprived communities; work with isolated rural communities; work with ex-forces personnel.

Other IAG Partnerships may be able to identify other examples of expertise in their own areas. Properly co-ordinated, the combined expertise that exists within inclusive IAG Partnerships is formidable.

## REALISING THE POTENTIAL

If IAG Partnerships are to realise their potential, there is a need for a broader strategic vision at national level. Currently a number of constraints that are inhibiting performance are apparent when the Partnerships are viewed from the 'grass-roots'.

### BROADENING 'GUIDANCE'

The list of members' expertise (above) contrasts with the more limited understanding of guidance on which IAG Partnerships have been based. This is at least partly the result of the reduction of guidance into three activities (information, advice and guidance), largely for funding purposes, and within a model of guidance which is essentially 'career-centre' oriented. Although the tripartite division of guidance has made a valuable contribution to current developments (especially during times of financial constraint by helping to preserve a nucleus of adult guidance provision on which IAG Partnerships can be constructed), it is less appropriate to the new era of adult guidance development now made possible by the diversity of specialist expertise contained within many IAG partnerships.

In 1992, the Standing Conference of Associations for Guidance in Educational Settings (SCAGES) identified eleven adult guidance activities, building on the seven guidance activities previously set out by the Unit for the Development of Adult Continuing Education (UDACE). IAG Partnerships are likely to find most, and probably all, of these activities present within their membership. They will also want to add other activities, which recent developments have shown to be central to high-quality guidance for all age-groups. These include:

- signposting;
- mentoring;
- sampling (work experience, work trials, learning tasters);
- following up (including tracking).

Guidance approaches that motivate individuals and help them to overcome low levels of self-confidence and self-esteem are also critically important functions underlying the practice of high-quality guidance. Currently, the Guidance Council Quality Standards do not cover the full range of guidance activities.

Within the narrow definition of adult guidance, there is a risk that 'guidance' may be understood solely as an interview with a professionally qualified guidance practitioner which is longer than 'advice' (i.e. over 20 minutes and normally one hour or more) and may also be chargeable, subject to local budgetary considerations. Consequences of a limited interpretation of adult guidance include the following:

- Partners may not be fully aware of the contributions they can make, and may already be making, towards adult guidance in its broader sense.
- Information on relevant practice and initiatives may be insufficiently disseminated at local level, because the agencies themselves may not recognise the practice and initiatives as relevant to the wider agenda.
- Some agencies may separate information and advice on work and learning from their other mainstream functions, thus undermining the impact which integrated and holistic guidance provision can have in helping adults to overcome barriers to work, learning and personal fulfilment more generally.

## THE ACTIVITIES OF GUIDANCE

### Informing

Providing information about opportunities available, without any discussion of the relative merits of options for particular individuals.

### Advising

Helping individuals and groups to interpret information and choose the most appropriate options.

### Counselling

Working with individuals to help them discover, clarify, assess and understand their own experience, and to explore alternatives and their possible implementation.

### Assessing

Helping individuals, by formal and informal means, to obtain a structured understanding of their personal, educational and vocational development, in order to enable them to make informed judgements about the appropriateness of particular opportunities.

### Teaching

Providing a planned and systematic progression of learner-centred experiences to enable learners to acquire knowledge, skills and competences related to making personal, educational and career decision and transitions.

### Enabling

Supporting individuals and groups in dealing with organisations providing or influencing employment and learning opportunities.

### Advocating

Negotiating directly with organisations on behalf of individuals or groups for whom there may be additional barriers to access.

### Networking

Establishing specific links with a range of individuals and organisations to support and enhance guidance provision. These links may be formal or informal, but will include regular contact for information exchange, referral and feedback, and other joint activities such as staff development, monitoring and review, and outreach work.

### Feeding back

Gathering and collating information on the unmet needs of individuals and groups (including designated 'target groups'), and encouraging providers of opportunities to respond by adapting or developing their provision.

### Managing

Managing guidance activities into a coherent programme, ensuring it is sustainable within its institutional or organisational setting, co-ordinating and developing its human and physical resources, evaluating its effectiveness, and promoting its services and interests.

### Innovating/Systems change

Supporting developments and changes in organisational and guidance practice, in order to improve the quality and organisation of provision.

- Members' expectations of the IAG Partnerships may only be partly met where the agenda is determined by information and advice, and does not embrace members' wider requirements and areas of interest – which may be contained within a broader interpretation of guidance.

The combination of these and other factors can have serious implications for the overall effectiveness of IAG Partnerships and their constituent networks. These could be underpowered because they are 'firing on too few cylinders'. As a result, adults may not receive the full range of services that the wide and growing membership of IAG Partnerships can now make possible.

At local level, there is a need to:

- identify the services that members can provide, or are providing, to members;
- help members to recognise that these activities may be integral to effective guidance;
- support them in developing the quality of the wider range of guidance provision.

At national level, there is a reciprocal need to:

- ensure that national policy positively encourages and enables Partnerships and their constituent networks to work consciously towards genuine coherence of services and the achievement of sufficiently 'joined-up' local guidance provision;
- review the existing Guidance Council Quality Standards in order to identify key guidance activities currently practised by many local agencies but missing from the existing Standards; scope to accredit the activities would help to ensure national and local recognition.

## COHERENCE WITH CONNEXIONS

Members of the IAG Partnership expressed concern about the possible effect of Connexions on the balance of their existing all-age IAG provision. Concerns include:

- The disparity between the wider vision of guidance contained within the Connexions strategy and the more limited conception within IAG for adults. There was a general recognition that many adults also require access to a broader range of guidance activities including mentoring, advocacy and in-depth guidance to help them overcome barriers, gain in self-confidence and establish personal direction.
- The possible consequences of receiving funding for integrated and all-age services from different funding streams with differing targets and objectives, and different lines of accountability. Colleges, in particular, queried whether the needs of the Connexions target groups may predominate, to the possible detriment of the guidance provision which they are currently offering to adults.
- The appearance or imposition of 'fault-lines', which may prevent one age group from having access to facilities financed from a funding stream that applies to another age-group, even though the provision could be of equal benefit to both age-groups.

There are clear benefits in achieving coherence between the services provided by Connexions and IAG Partnerships in terms of efficiency, cost and the seamless delivery of services. IAG

Partnerships are required in their business plans to describe how they will work with Connexions Partnerships through organisational links, service delivery arrangements, client referral, and staff development. However, genuine coherence between Connexions and IAG Partnerships may only be properly attained where IAG Partnerships are in a position to adopt the broader vision of guidance implicit within Connexions.

Connexions Services that are also responsible for IAG Partnerships should be particularly well placed to identify the fault lines, and to introduce policies and practices that can promote genuine coherence between the two partnerships. The Cheshire and Warrington IAG Partnership has the specific objective of developing 'Guidance Action Zone' strategies, in which areas of common interest are identified between members on an all-age basis, and mechanisms and procedures are established which facilitate partnership working across the age groups.

There could be much to be learned from the experience of joint Connexions/IAG Partnerships in integrating elements of guidance provision for the two age groups, and from the methods they adopt to do so. It is suggested that their progress should be monitored closely at national level.

## TARGETS FOR COHERENCE

National policy rightly encourages IAG Partnerships to widen the network of IAG provision and to increase the number of voluntary and community organisations in the locality that become Full or Associate Members. Partnerships are required to link their in-year targets for member recruitment to the 3-year target. Large and inclusive networks have the potential to penetrate deeply into local communities, open up opportunities for individuals and groups, identify barriers to progression and help in a variety of ways to overcome these barriers.

However, although a wide membership provides an important foundation on which to build successful Partnerships, size by itself is not a criterion against which the effectiveness of IAG delivery can be assessed in the longer term. Large and expanding local networks also increase the demands on the co-ordinators, with implications for overheads. As IAG Partnerships develop, emphasis on widening membership needs to be balanced by a simultaneous emphasis on attaining coherence.

National steps to focus attention on the quality and coherence of IAG Partnerships might include:

- Introduction of more detailed specifications and/or design of a framework against which local IAG Partnerships and national bodies can assess the coherence of local networks.
- Agreement of a limited number of targets for each Partnership that promote and support coherence within Partnerships and local networks, and balance targets relating to member recruitment and accreditation.
- Introduction of a national inspection mechanism to examine and quality-assure the coherence and effectiveness of IAG Partnerships and networks. There may be advantages in relating this to the inspection and quality assurance of Connexions Partnerships, so that inspection agendas clearly include local co-ordinating procedures that link the two Partnerships.



## EVALUATING PARTNERSHIPS

There can be difficulties for all parties in assessing the added value of Partnerships (as distinct from individual agencies) in developing IAG for adults. This was clear throughout the evaluation. The difficulties include:

- *The newness of IAG Partnerships.* Much of the initial effort has had to be devoted to getting the foundations into place, including recruiting members and – where applicable – helping them through the Quality Standards. The practical outcomes of local collaboration – including outreach initiatives and improvements in the quality of IAG delivery – are still at a comparatively early stage of development.
- *Problems for members in distinguishing between added value that is the direct result of the Partnership and added value that might have happened anyway.* Local initiatives frequently result from liaison and encounters within members' personal networks. It can be difficult at this stage for members to identify whether the initial liaison that sparked a particular project occurred within or outside the Partnership, or to assess the extent to which the local networks have strengthened personal relationships where people knew each other previously. These distinctions will be easier to make as IAG Partnerships become integral features of the local infrastructure of provision.
- *The unavoidable absence of benchmarks against which to assess added value.* Where targets commence from a zero starting point (e.g. the number of members joining the Partnership, and the number gaining accreditation against the Guidance Council Quality Standards) it is possible to see the considerable distance that IAG Partnerships have covered since their inception, measured in quantitative terms. However, these target figures give no indication of added value in terms of the quality of the collaborative product. What happens to IAG as a consequence of meeting nationally-agreed targets is important in assessing the additional efficiency, productivity and quality of service resulting directly from partnership working.

Observations include the following:

- Suitable benchmarks against which to assess the added value of IAG Partnerships are often implicit within individual Business Plans. For example, local analyses of service coverage and client needs could be used to extract a number of benchmarks linked to objectives, especially in relation to the performance of local networks.
- Systems to assess added value should focus on the local networks and the overall Partnership as well as the performance of individual members. Annual Reports can be helpful in assessing added value, especially where they include reports from each of the local networks (including accounts of joint activities, the results of local marketing exercises, etc.).
- Local documentation, such as audit questionnaire and traffic recording sheets for completion by individual members, can provide important data to help in assessing added value – although, again, the distinction between what is attributable to the Partnership and what would have happened anyway may ultimately depend on subjective judgement at this stage of development.

- The most important factor in assessing added value should be improvements to IAG services for clients and to client satisfaction with both the process and the outcomes. Client feedback and follow-up data are therefore crucial measurements, obtained through normal procedures and special samples.

- Information on client destinations is useful, but is more helpful where the follow-up has taken place after some months and where information is also obtained on client 'stability' and satisfaction with the outcomes. This suggests that periodic detailed follow-up exercises may provide information of more value in assessing added value than routine follow-up (although the latter remains important).

- DfEE has suggested that Partnerships may wish to put forward proposals for in-depth evaluation of particular aspects of their provision, especially where there is potential good practice which could be shared nationally. This is a critically important proposal in assessing the added value of partnership working.

- Qualitative and quantitative information are both required in order to provide a more genuine picture of true added value. The latter can provide useful comparative information on, for example, the number of people entering particular courses of learning, but cannot look in any depth at the impact on the individuals concerned.

- Added value in a guidance context is often most readily conveyed through annual reports which use quantitative data, and are illustrated with examples of local good practice and anecdotal information from clients. There would seem to be a strong case for the preparation of a National Annual Report that reviews the quality and progress of IAG Partnerships, and is based on information and data provided by the Partnerships themselves.

- The introduction of a national annual reporting procedure would strengthen the requirement for quality development processes that are focused on the operation of the Partnerships and local networks themselves, as well as on the performance of individual members through assessment against the Guidance Council Quality Standards. Part of this process would include the preparation of local annual reports which would feed into the national reporting strategy.

Unless evaluation procedures are introduced which are concentrated on the impact of collaborative working, as well as the quality of IAG provided by the individual members, it is difficult to see how it will be possible to demonstrate the value of IAG Partnerships to the national and local policy-making and funding bodies.

## DISSEMINATING GOOD PRACTICE

The evaluation has shown that there is an acute need for a national system to facilitate the dissemination within, and between, IAG Partnerships of information on good practice, and developments of national relevance and interest. The system is required because:

- Ready access to information on good practice, and mutual sharing of information and experience, can make a significant contribution to the quality and coherence of provision at grass-roots level. It is also cost-effective and avoids a perpetual reinvention of the wheel. Currently it is not easy for IAG Partnerships and their members to find out what is happening in other areas.
- IAG Partnerships, especially through special projects, are already making a substantial contribution to the (relatively limited) pool of national knowledge about ways of extending IAG to particular adult target groups. Government is currently financing a potentially rich source of action-based research in Cheshire, Halton, Warrington and Wirral and within other IAG Partnerships, and it is imperative that this knowledge and experience should not be lost.
- It would enable 'grass-roots' experience and expertise to be fed back to policy-making bodies at local, regional and national levels. Evaluations of the Cheshire, Halton, Warrington and Wirral, and other IAG Partnerships, show that the cumulative experience of the needs of particular target groups within IAG Partnerships is very considerable, and could be used more extensively to inform the policy-making process.

The system could combine:

- a national and regularly updated ICT database of information on good practice, research and relevant developments, linked to the national programme of quality assurance and development;
- a national publication focused on IAG for adults;
- local IAG Partnership publications and/or newsletters which can feed material into the national system.

In addition to special projects, other aspects of IAG provision where there is a need to circulate information and good practice, include:

- Special expertise – for example, the availability of expertise in IAG for older people (a priority group) varies considerably across the country.
- IAG within industry – this is an area of IAG which is central to the government's lifelong learning objectives, but which can be particularly difficult to influence and deliver. The wider availability of information on projects which have extended IAG to employees (e.g. in partnership with the Ufi and TUC) could help more IAG Partnerships to introduce successful initiatives.
- IAG related to volunteering – encouraging more people to volunteer is also a government priority. However, although voluntary agencies are increasingly prominent members of many IAG Partnerships, the provision of IAG on volunteering is not normally a main objective. This is an area that may need national and local review.

- Collaborative working and 'bottom-up' involvement of members – how best to ensure proactive local networks.
- Foundation training in IAG skills – including foundation programmes that lead into NVQ assessment and accreditation in IAG.
- IAG programmes designed to raise adults' levels of self-confidence and self-esteem, including motivational interviewing.
- Employability, mentoring and related programmes for adults that include 'small step' assessment.
- Arrangements to ensure coherence between IAG and Connexions Partnerships.

The need of IAG Partnerships and front-line staff for national access to information on good practice is considerable. Systems to provide this could contribute substantially to the overall quality of IAG provision for adults.

## CONCLUSION

IAG Partnerships have much to contribute:

- to the adult guidance process;
- in helping adults to reach higher levels of achievement, for themselves and for the communities in which they live and work;
- in enabling many adults to find a deeper sense of personal fulfilment.

However, the full extent of the contributions IAG Partnerships can make to their local communities may have been underestimated. Now that the Partnerships are more firmly in place, their potential has become more evident. The realisation of that potential calls for a broader strategic vision, shared by policy-makers at both national and local level. This Briefing has been designed to indicate some practical ways in which this broader vision might be achieved.

June 2001

## FURTHER INFORMATION

Copies of the full report on the IAG Partnership – *Information, Advice and Guidance: Involving the Community* – are available from:

The IAG Partnership, c/o Career Connections, 41/43 Bebington Road, New Ferry, Wirral CH62 5BE (tel: 0151-472-4600); and

Cheshire and Warrington IAG Partnership, Partnership House, 2 The Stables, Gadbrook Park, Northwich, Cheshire CW9 7RJ (tel: 01606-305200).

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