

# Information, Advice and Guidance Services for Adults

## Towards a National Policy Framework

*A response from the National Association for Educational Guidance for Adults.*

## Feedback Form

### Availability of IAG Services for Adults.

- Q1. How should we target IAG services for adults, and on whom, to maximise the contribution of IAG to the skills strategy, and make best use of available public funding?**
- Q2. In what circumstances might clients need guidance and/or personal support?**
- Q3. What are the implications for delivery and in particular for managing demand and supply?**

Information and advice must be a *universal entitlement*, to support the development of a learning culture for all. Our members continuing experience is that the use of eligibility criteria is both a real and perhaps more importantly, a perceived, *barrier to access* to both IAG and learning. Further more a *clear and uncomplicated message* is necessary to maximise the impact of promotional campaigns, national and local.

More extensive support, that is guidance, should be concentrated on those groups with few or no skills and qualifications. These are the groups least likely to participate, or even consider participating in learning, and are the most vulnerable in the current labour market, [NIACE/RSGB survey, 2002, Developing a National Skills Strategy, Progress Report SU 2002]. They are also likely to put a low value on learning and we believe only a *proactive and sustained approach* will have any lasting impact. Specific target groups might include women returning to the labour market, young men of 25-30 years, over 45s, the homeless and mentally ill.

While people with low basic skills are clearly a priority group we do not think it is sensible to treat them separately. Basic skills requirements need to be approached within the whole context of low skills.

Research bears out our members experience that people returning to learning are likely to hold negative attitudes based on previous poor experiences of learning and lack confidence and motivation. *Guidance, as opposed to information and advice, must therefore be seen as a process* not as a one off or even a series of events or 'episodes'. [Please note the definition of guidance [under Q8, which is accepted by the NAEGA membership.]. *Guidance should be the key element of locally based and proactive strategies* to encourage people with few/no skills back into learning. This group is unlikely to seek out information and advice and must be approached directly and/or through organisations in which they already have confidence.

Guidance needs to be proactive, ensuring continuing help and encouragement. Some contacts may be brief, 'keeping in touch', progress chasing and encouragement, others more extensive, progress review and forward planning, according to individual need. The skills necessary to carry out this process are considerable. It is difficult to distinguish between guidance and personal support, especially as a person's relationship with a single practitioner may be the prime motivator in a continuing process. Although in some cases personal support as a form of mentoring may be applicable, we consider the use of the term in the discussion document as unhelpful and even misleading. The guidance process should be led by a skilled guidance practitioner, with access to the appropriate information and support.

The Mori Poll commissioned by the Guidance Council in 2000, showed that people used a wide range of IAG providers, depending on which organisations they were most familiar and confident with at the time. Strategy developments, particularly funding must ensure *as wide a range of IAG providers as possible*. All learning providers, large or small, receiving public funding, must provide high quality IAG relating at least to their own provision and be part of an effective referral network. We believe impartiality is an indicator of quality. Many such providers, including active members of NAEGA already make this commitment, which is embedded in the Common Inspection Framework.

Funding for IAG should be *clearly identified* and allocated through the LSC funding formula as well as provided through IAG Partnerships. The role of the partnership is to ensure a wide range of IAG providers are involved and provide the appropriate support for a quality service. The host agency's possible role as a direct provider underpins, but should not lead this process.

Funding must be sustainable. Project funding may be appropriate for piloting activity, but otherwise mitigates against the recruitment, training and retention of suitable staff and the credibility of the service as a whole.

## Customer awareness of IAG services to adults.

**Q4. What are the key messages needing marketing at national and local levels?**

**Q5. Should the marketing be targeted in any way?**

We suggest that an integrated national and local approach to delivering IAG, provides an opportunity for more efficient as well as effective promotion. The eleven year experience of Adult Learners Week has shown the far greater impact of combined national and linked local campaigns. IAG provision is integral to the success of ALW in motivating non traditional learners. We suggest this campaign has much experience to offer including:

- co-ordinated national and local partnerships;
- small grants for encouraging innovative practice at a community level in reaching the target groups;
- high quality materials which can be customised for local use;
- a multimedia approach, especially use of local radio;
- use of role models with which the target groups can identify.

Marketing IAG itself has never been particularly successful. We suggest IAG should be promoted through all publicly funded campaigns for promoting learning and skills.

The message is simple; impartial information and advice on learning is freely available nationally, through the national helpline and locally, wherever the 'brand' is shown. The role of the national helpline needs to be clear, as a direct source of initial information and advice and a signpost to local support. Currently many of our members do not feel that link is made. We applaud the commitment within the developing skills strategy to an integrated national and local approach to IAG and see the LSC as the appropriate body to manage this process. We also support the concept of a national brand and suggest this can, relatively easily, be linked to established local brands where these already have impact.

More extensive support, guidance, should be a part of *locally based strategies for promoting learning directly* to the relevant target groups. As indicated above the service needs to be proactive and to work through networks and partnerships, which include groups who are composed of and/or work with the target groups. Providing IAG in a range of community settings is in itself insufficient. Guidance is a vehicle for taking proactive support and help directly to the target groups. Marketing in this sense needs to be seen in a broader context than promotion.

## Access to IAG services for adults.

**Q6. In what ways can IAG be of most help in addressing the main barriers to learning and work?**

**Q7 Do these proposals adequately reflect the range of barriers to IAG services?**

We suggest that the barriers to access to IAG are the same as those to learning. Accumulated data from both the annual NIACE/RSGB surveys on adult learning and Mori, for the Guidance Council, 2000, indicate those least likely to consider IAG or learning are those with few skills and qualifications and in social groups D and E. The 'Learning Divide', which we suggest, mirrors the IAG divide 'is alive and well', ['Two Steps Forward, One Step Back', NIACE, 2002]. In our view the greatest barriers to access are attitudinal and can make practical barriers such as childcare, travel, specific support requirements, seem insuperable to those with low motivation, [Mori State of the Nation Poll 1996]. That is not to say that the latter do not exist and sensible levels of support should be provided to meet individual needs. However building motivation and confidence through proactive, guidance based approaches is essential.

Effective penetration of the target groups will be through locally based strategies which might include; cold calling following local promotion, perhaps using local radio; appropriate awareness raising events in community venues; working with and through local organisations who already work with and/or include members of the target groups. All of these activities currently take place but they are intermittent, depend on the uncertainty of project funding, are consequently short term and not available in all areas. A coherent and consistent approach depends on sensible funding, local knowledge and the combined expertise of partnerships again at a local level. *Such approaches must be based on promoting learning and IAG not on the promotion of individual providers or even partnerships.* The Local LSC is the appropriate body to lead on developing locally based strategies with the LSC nationally, ensuring consistency.

Such strategies must incorporate a programme of first step to learning activities, which might include learning tasters, guidance workshops on job search, learning choices, confidence building, developing cvs. These must be free to encourage access. *We feel the discussion document places insufficient emphasis on both the need for a strategic approach, incorporating development work at a local level and the proactive nature of effective guidance activity.*

*It is our expectation that funding IAG should be an integral part of funding adult learning and a key element in ensuring the success of the developing skills strategy.*

## Ensuring High Quality Guidance.

**Q8. What are the key competences required to deliver the proposed range and quality of IAG services?**

**Q9. How can we support IAG practitioners to achieve, and improve on, the competences required to deliver the range and quality of IAG services?**

**Q10. How should we ensure a consistent approach to maintaining and improving high quality IAG service delivery?**

The competencies of any IAG practitioner are based on their ability to engage with the client/ user through recognising their needs. We believe the areas of competence and attitude, both equally important, are similar regardless of whether the practitioner is delivering information and advice or guidance. It is the depth of competence, which changes. The UDACE definition of adult guidance, attached as an annex to this response, gives an indication of the range and depth of skills required. Guidance is an umbrella term. While one or more of the activities listed may be provided at any one time it is not a simple matter of providing information, switching to advice and then moving onto a third service, guidance, if it is required. The term IAG has supported a funding methodology, but cannot be used to identify the competencies required by the adult guidance practitioner. Personal support is incorporated in several of the activities and cannot be provided in isolation from the guidance process.

Capacity of staff is as important as competence. IAG practitioners must be committed to and understand the value of learning. Otherwise they cannot pass on the right messages. They should also demonstrate commitment to equal opportunities and putting the user/client first.

We suggest the support, which our members, as practitioners, would value is based on current thinking on good practice in learning for work.

This would include:

- bite sized, credit rated chunks of learning, especially applicable for front of house staff, leading into sensibly paced longer term qualifications at level 2 and 3.
- modular options to help build up a broad range of skills which can enhance and develop existing qualifications at degree level.
- a clear focus on adult needs and on outreach related skills.

We consider that a focus on a particular qualification is unhelpful to improving quality across the range of both practice and providers.

Particular concerns are front of house staff, the first point of contact for many and tutors in further, adult and community learning. The latter are the second largest group who potential customers would approach, Mori Poll 2000. A government steer is needed to ensure that FE teaching qualifications include modules on IAG at an appropriate level. Several members have noted that the existing FENTO standards do not achieve this. It is necessary to ensure that all tutors understand what guidance is and therefore their role in on course delivery and referral. We believe such a development would have a direct effect on progression in learning.

Members of NAEGA have been heavily involved in the development of the *matrix* standard. We believe *matrix* has the potential to become the key tool for quality assurance for IAG. However there remain serious concerns, which must be addressed. Colleges are the second largest deliverer of IAG, according to the Mori Poll, 2000, but accreditation to the national standards for IAG is largely restricted to small central guidance teams and may not include reception staff, even more rarely does it include tutors. A medium size college could employ up to 250 tutors and it is not surprising that managers of student services find the task daunting. However a practical approach could be developed through sampling, perhaps with a particular emphasis on ESOL and basic skills programmes, which provide an entry point to routes into learning for many of the key target groups. This method could be equally applicable to adult and community providers.

Small voluntary/community organisations perceive accreditation to *matrix* as a massive exercise. However it is essential that such bodies play an active part in IAG partnerships and particularly local strategies to widen participation. We suggest that a modified process can be developed to support these groups. Locally based accredited assessors, a development of the present GAB process, might work directly with such organisations through a rigorous but simplified process. If these assessors are a part of the partnership they can then ensure other partners understand the voluntary organisations role. It remains important to keep the accredited assessor link to GAB, but also to vest the experience in the local partnership.

It is our view that concerns like these lessen the credibility of the *matrix* standard. We feel the current accreditation process has the capacity for flexibility, but we do not see the appropriate bodies getting together to address the various issues.

# Measuring the impact and effectiveness of IAG services for adults.

## **Q11. Are these the key indicators of an effective IAG policy for adults?**

The indicators listed are applicable to measuring the overall impact of IAG. However they do not relate to a policy, which includes funding guidance for specific target groups. We suggest a clearer relationship to the skills strategy is required.

Our contention that LLSC s lead on the development of local strategies for reaching those with no/few skills and qualifications would demand a range of relevant indicators set at a local level. We suggest indicators are set for both learning providers and for partnerships, which directly promote collaborative working.

It is essential that performance targets do not lead the development of local strategies but are set to reflect the chosen methodologies, for working with the target group. The current situation mitigates against innovation and creativity in delivering information and advice. Development work, around awareness raising and first step activities, is difficult to fund or measure against performance targets, which relate to individual progress. We suggest a separate system is developed to fund and monitor development activities as opposed to direct delivery.

The NIACE/RSGB surveys provide an objective annual picture of changing patterns of participation in adult learning, which have informed the developing skills strategy. We suggest appropriate additional use of this survey, or a similar exercise could provide clear indications of the impact of new IAG policy. However we also suggest involvement of the Guidance Council to ensure an appropriate range of questions.

## Principles of IAG service delivery.

### **Q12 Do these principles reflect the full range of client requirements for delivery of an integrated IAG service?**

We would not disagree with any of the principles listed, but we feel they have been developed to underpin information and advice with guidance as only an occasional add on activity. We would strongly recommend the addition of 'proactive' to reflect the need to reach out to those groups less likely to consider learning and therefore less likely to seek information, advice and guidance.

## Elements of an integrated IAG service.

### **Q13 What elements of an integrated IAG service are the critical ones to enable people to access and progress in learning and work?**

We have already raised these key elements within previous answers as follows:

- Universal entitlement to information and advice
- Guidance provision targeted at those with qualifications at or below level 2
- An integrated national and local campaign to promote access to learning and work through IAG
- A universal brand
- Genuine partnership between the range of IAG providers at national and local level
- Integration of IAG with learning and skills development
- Sustained funding

- Sensible funding and monitoring arrangements for development work, ie awareness raising, proactive local activities to reach the target groups
- Locally based proactive strategies including guidance and first step provision
- Identifiable IAG funding for learning providers additional to funding through local partnerships
- Sensible performance indicators, which do not constrain effective practice in reaching the target groups.
- Clear signposting link between national helpline activity and local IAG providers
- LSC management of funding and strategy at local and national level, including the national helpline

**Q14. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the attached model and would it work in practice?**

In summary we support:

- the role of the LSC as funder and manager of IAG at national *and* local level, ensuring integration with widening participation and skills development,
- the concept of a national co-ordinating unit *which incorporates representatives of key stakeholders, including practitioners,*

We have already expressed concern that delivery must be funded through learning providers as well as local companies and feel the role of the latter must be based on ensuring co-ordination, supporting quality development and genuine partnership. We would expect the company board to be representative of key local stakeholders and locally based individuals with a track record in IAG development.

Some of our members have expressed concerns that the model does not present a clear picture of policy impact at individual provider level. In this context we think further consultation should take place on the role and purpose of the local company, including measures to ensure consistency as well as meeting local needs.

May 12th 2003



