

LEARNING ROUTES FOR PRACTITIONERS: SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE FOR ADULT GUIDANCE WORK

Landé Wolsey (Careers Service Queen Margaret University College) and Joy Clark (Continuing Education, East Lothian Council)

Background

The aim of the research was to investigate the routes taken by adult guidance practitioners into this field of work, and how they had acquired their professional skills and knowledge.

After piloting, 150 questionnaires were distributed to the NAEGA branch membership in Scotland and Northern Ireland and through the Adult Guidance Networks. 61 completed questionnaires were returned. The questionnaire was to be completed only by people who have worked in adult guidance for more than a year within the past five years and for whom adult guidance comprises (or comprised) at least half their remit.

1) What did we find?

a. Work and Career Patterns

- Respondents 84% of respondents were in full-time work. Of the part-time workers, all but one worked half time or more. 80% of them indicated that their job was wholly concerned with adult guidance or nearly so.
- Previous Careers 13% (8 respondents) indicated that adult guidance was their first or only career whilst for 87% (53 respondents) it was a second or subsequent career. For this second group, the main previous careers before moving into adult guidance were:
 - Careers work with young people (32%)
 - Adult and/or community education (19%)
 - Further or higher education or teaching (13%)
 - Work with training organisations (11%)
 - Counselling or advice work (6%)
 - Other (including clerical, engineering, probation service, trade union education, management and Job Centre) (19%)

b. Qualifications

- Guidance Qualifications Some respondents had more than one relevant qualification so we collated replies in terms of the highest level qualification held relating to guidance or adult guidance.

Respondents for whom adult guidance was a first and only career (8):

- Diploma in Careers Guidance (50%)
- NVQ level 3 or 4 in Advice and Guidance or equivalent (25%)
- Post-graduate Certificate in Adult Guidance (12.5%)
- No qualification in guidance (12.5%)

Respondents who had previously worked in guidance with young people (17):

- Diploma in Careers Guidance (88%)
- Diploma in Vocational Guidance (6%)
- S/NVQ level 4 in Advice and Guidance (6%)

Respondents who had moved into guidance from other fields (36):

- Diploma in Careers Guidance (28%)
- SVQ/NVQ Level 3 or 4 (28%)
- Diploma or Certificate in Adult Guidance or Adult Educational / Guidance or Cert./ Dip. Guidance and Counselling (19%)
- S/NVQ Level 2 (6%)
- M.Phil in Employment Counselling (3%)
- No guidance qualifications (17%)

Of the total respondents who had no formal guidance qualifications, five held qualifications in education, psychology or counselling. It is seen that the most important qualification for the 61 respondents was the Diploma in Careers guidance which was held by 48% of the cohort.

- Other Relevant Qualifications Respondents identified a wide range of other qualifications which they considered relevant to their guidance work. In almost all cases these were in addition to their main guidance-related qualification. The most commonly identified qualifications were in (numbers used here as respondents could pick more than one relevant qualification):
 - Education, Special Education, Adult or Community Education (26)
 - Counselling (24 with 16 at Diploma or Certificate level, 8 at lower or introductory levels)
 - ICT related (12)
 - D Units (7)
 - Other courses identified by respondents as relevant to their guidance work were in a wide range of areas including Sociology, Service Support for Adult Education and Guidance, Management of Lifelong Learning, Mentoring Theory, Psychometric Testing, Information Management, Research Methods, People and Potential, Special Education, D32 and D33, Assessing Achievement and Identifying Learning Needs.
- Other Qualifications (non-certificated) Of the non-certificated courses respondents had found useful, the most frequently listed were Counselling (12), Using the Internet (7), Public Speaking/ Presentations (6), Neuro-linguistic Programming (6), Interviewing (4) and Careers Planning Continuum (4). A further 50 different courses were identified, each by three or fewer respondents.

c. Skills

Conveying information clearly was rated as either very important or important for adult guidance work by all respondents. Of the other skills listed, all were rated either very important or important by over 80% of respondents, with the exception of organising resources which was so rated by 51%.

The skills regarded by respondents as very important were:

Conveying information clearly	92%
Counselling skills/listening	87%
Negotiating/ advocacy	49%
Networking	48%
Accessing information (not internet)	39%
Accessing information (internet)	31%
Monitoring and evaluation	30%
Organising resources	10%

One respondent added a list of skills they regarded as very important which were not included in the question. These were enabling, giving an overview, route mapping and summarising.

- Acquiring Skills Practical experience in guidance work was rated most highly by all groups as a method of acquiring knowledge and skills. This was particularly marked among respondents who had moved into adult guidance from guidance work with young people. Courses other than qualifying guidance courses are clearly valued by guidance workers. The most frequently mentioned non-qualifying courses were in counselling/listening skills, (which were also considered to have high importance: see above). Responses indicated a strong ongoing need for in-service training and professional development. Knowledge and skills gained from colleagues and networking was also significant. For a significant number of respondents the opportunity to discuss cases with colleagues is very helpful, or would be if the opportunity were available.

d. Knowledge Base

Guidance workers use a wide range of methods to update knowledge and information. The Internet was the most widely used method for almost all areas of information, although for most areas written materials and networking/colleagues were almost as important. However the use of the Internet far outweighed other methods in updating careers information.

Networking and colleagues were the most widely used method for updating information on support services and other agencies. This method was also seen as particularly important for keeping up to date with new initiatives and policy change, and also for training options and course information. For student finance, colleagues and written materials were both more important sources of information than the Internet.

2) Comments from respondents

The following responses were given to Question 7 which invited comments on training or acquiring skills for adult guidance work.

There were a *few general comments on adult guidance and routes into it.*

- Five years ago Guidance was a high priority, adults were sign posted and quality was fundamental in the service to adults.
- We are not giving a quality service to adults in universities/colleges, by that I mean not enough listening is being done in a one-one appointment. Through this survey I hope that it is pointed out, for many 'customers ' using the internet is not enough!
- The adult guidance opportunities locally are difficult to secure because of the change in council departments operation and provision of adult guidance. This is now being given to library staff alongside the existing remits.
- There doesn't seem to be a clearly defined route for this - maybe that's a good thing, as a range of backgrounds & expertise areas are brought into as guidance work.
- Careers Scotland does not recognise the variety of routes, nor the range of work, that are encompassed by 'adult guidance'.
- The basis for adult guidance is similar to guidance with young people in terms of interview skills. However awareness of differing issues is considerable. Options due to personal circumstances, opportunities already exhausted etc. can be reduced, however greater maturity is gained if an adult can enable guidance to be more a facilitator role than with young people, as can key into self-help more.

Other comments related more specifically to training.

- Would really benefit from refresher skills training - action planning, interviewing & recording.
- Most training and skills for adult guidance work is learnt on the job. Information quickly becomes out-dated so with every client you still have to check things. Through this you build up additional information of what is available in your area. The people skills necessary for this work also develops over time, through hands on experience rather than class or training based learning. You have to develop your own style.
- Most valuable source of information is peer development session and meetings.
- I should like to have mentioned supervision as a powerful source of skills development. I do not have formal supervision at present, but some of the networking with colleagues in particular settings has this quality.
- I feel I had already acquired the 'soft skills' required e.g. listening, conveying info. plus organisational skills etc in previous careers. The Dip CG helped consolidate

with practical skills. (Being a career advisor is a bit like learning to drive a car - you really start learning once you're on the road on your own!)

- The Dip CG was poor preparation for adult work but the new QCG/SVQ4 seems to be better.
- Careers Scotland seem to have a well thought out approach & a commitment to Continuing Professional Development for its own staff. Guidance workers elsewhere could be missing out due to changes with networks and the weaknesses of the Scottish Guidance Forum, NAEGA etc. Perhaps the Adult Guidance Diploma is meeting some needs but I feel the guidance community in Scotland needs a national co-ordinating body to address guidance issues, organise events + CPD etc. Perhaps the proposed Scottish Centre for Guidance Studies will make a difference.
- Conferences organised by Adult Guidance Networks NAEGA & ICG are useful but staff are often not able to attend because of pressure of work. SVQs in Guidance are demanding & a good way of assessing skills at levels 2 & 3 in particular. Adult Guidance Award was very useful in parts & probably improved since mid 90's.
- Practical experience with a practitioner, training involving case studies & networking with others involved in adult learning is invaluable in building the confidence needed to work with adults.
- For my role the 9281/2 (C&G) course - 'An Introduction To Teaching Basic Skills' was very useful.
- Would like to access meaningful work-based qualification.
- I feel that the list of skills given in part 4 as integral to the role of an (Adult) Guidance Adviser, take a very narrow view of the job. By far the most important aspect of the role is around identifying and clarifying the issues with the client and what would help them progress from the situation they are in. This/these skills are paramount to the success of the interaction and focus on counselling (solution focused), positive action & action planning. Information is not guidance.
- I teach NVQS & think the NVQ framework is very valuable if candidates are given appropriate support.
- I think there is nothing to beat hands on experience. I also feel that other non-related work can develop skills very pertinent to adult guidance e.g. voluntary work with Samaritans.
- I believe that experience of client groups is invaluable and that Practitioner Secondment would increase knowledge bases and increase good practice.
- I think adult guidance training should focus more on counselling skills and listening skills, confidence-building skills.
- Choice of option modules for post grad certificate was reduced to two by Autumn 2002. Colleagues have been unable to start this course at Strathclyde this academic

year. They have had to opt for training in non-guidance skills - such as assessment, volunteer management etc which are other aspects of our jobs. Training needs to be updated and refresher courses required.

- That a lot of people learn 'on the job', but there is no easy recognition process for this and no way of 'filling in the gaps' - which there ought to be. I for example, would have found a module on 'Practical Information Sources' or even 'What you need to know' very useful - but I had counselling skills coming out of my ears.
- Although I had done a PG course, I learnt a huge amount through practical experience. Would have liked more support in the early days. Counselling skills very useful.
- The training pathways are not very clear and it is still hard to determine which course is most suitable and will provide necessary equivalency.
- Although experience is gained while working, believe that a grounding in guidance models is essential and should be updated regularly. Also believe that counselling skills are essential. Important to have understanding of clients' terms of reference - positive regard etc. Trend seems to be towards self-help - fine, but decision making help also needed.
- I think in training there need to be a stronger emphasis on work with hard to engage groups i.e. the complexity and multiplicity of barriers faced by many people. Thus networking, partnership working and robust research skills are very important to guidance practitioners today.
 - 1 Training must be done in confrontational manner
 - 2 Life experience is a must prior to training
 - 3 Counselling training should be an integral part of any guidance course (not just 3 days)
 - 4 Practical experience is essential & should be gained alongside a course.
- As people come from such a range of backgrounds I think readily available structured development of guidance skills is vital - both practical (e.g. via NVQ) & theoretical.
- With adults you do need to explore domestic circumstances so that you are realistic e.g. finance, support for courses of action. You also need to be able to reflect on overview to the client (where are you at now) in relationship to short term & long term planning. Many adult clients are thinking too short term. These skills can be taught with others on courses. Life experience is useful but so are case studies. To state life experience is vital is to miss the point. One person's life experience may be terribly limited or skewed in a certain way.
- I feel all career advisers should have some time each week to meet in their office to discuss with other career advisers professional issues, in particular Case Studies. These are excellent as they demonstrate different approaches, widen the pool of possible advice a client might receive, give advisers access to each others experience and avoid the pitfalls of narrowness or bias, or lack of info.

- MAPS training was excellent for adult clients. This has been the only adult orientated training.
- Most skills have been built up through experience, trial & error. A more specific course would be helpful (e.g. styles of interview linked to client needs, client expectations, adult orientated career info.)
- I think the best medium is by carrying out interviews themselves. This allows basic skills to develop in the best manner possible, reacting to the clients' needs at all times. Other useful methods I think include watching someone else do an interview - it brings a different technique to view that I would not have thought of myself; peer assessment - although fraught - is another way of picking up development skills to improve interview performance.
- Researching & interpreting info from a variety of sources for clients increasingly important in this age of information overload. Networking so as to know what's available locally also important. I have learnt more about adult guidance from colleagues and clients than from anywhere else!
- Element missed out discovered post practise that many issues client face that are work related include wide topics e.g. stress in workplace, unfair dismissal, lack of opportunities - you can advise but the infrastructure may not have the solution.