

Guidance Workers as Learning Brokers

RUTH HAWTHORN

National Institute for Careers

Education and Counselling, UK

e-mail: ruthhawthorn@btopenworld.com

A.G.WATTS

National Institute for Careers

Education and Counselling, UK

e-mail: agw2@btopenworld.com

ABSTRACT *Between 1997 and 2002 a five-country Socrates Grundtvig Project, the Go-Between Project, looked at the career guidance worker as broker between user and supplier in adult education. In particular, two of the concepts involved, 'advocacy' and 'feeding back', had been central to the UK model of adult guidance associated with the Unit for the Development of Adult Continuing Education (UDACE) in the 1980s. The Go-Between partners identified three models of brokerage for guidance workers: (1) where they simply inform clients of what is available; (2) where a two-way flow of information is set up, and they feed information about client need back to providers of learning opportunities, hoping to influence provision; and (3) where they in effect exert some control over what education or training is provided. Most countries and localities have the option of moving from the first of these models to the second, and the project identified the financial, cultural and structural factors that can support such a change. The third model operated as a specific initiative in one area of Sweden during the lifetime of the project; although it was then discontinued, many valuable lessons were learned from it. The article identifies the main factors that encourage development of guidance services as brokers of adult learning, and looks briefly at the potential in England for movement from the first model to the second. It concludes that the key factor may be local or regional agencies that have responsibility both for adult guidance and for adult learning provision (in England, local Learning and Skills Councils), as well as government policies that favour collaboration rather than competition between providers.*

Background

During the second half of the 1980s, people working in the United Kingdom in educational guidance for adults took it for granted that one of the things they should be doing, even if they never found the time to do it, was 'feeding back'. This referred not to collecting feedback from clients, but to collecting information about the learning programmes which their adult clients wanted and which were not on offer, and then passing that information to local learning providers, making the case for adding those courses to their menu.

The concept of learning brokerage can be traced back to the work of the National Center for Educational Brokering in the USA in the 1970s (Heffernan, Macy & Vickers, 1976). It was subsequently promoted in the UK in influential reports from the Advisory Council for Adult and Continuing Education (1979) and the

Unit for the Development of Adult Continuing Education (UDACE, 1986), and was further developed during the life of UDACE's Educational Guidance Initiative (see, for example, Rivis, 1989). The idea was explored in more depth in Oakeshott's study of feedback arrangements in three further education colleges (Oakeshott, 1990), which concluded with nine pages of detailed recommendations to educational guidance services for adults (EGSAs), to learning providers, and to the key policy and funding bodies of the day.

The reasoning behind such feedback was that guidance workers were ideally placed to help providers shape the adult learning curriculum more closely to clients' needs and wishes. This developed a potential brokerage role for adult guidance workers: in the market discourse that was to come to dominate the education and training field in the following decade,

they could be seen as having a market research role to play. Ironically, though, it was during that next period that attention moved away from feeding back. The funding channels for adult guidance shifted from local education authorities and the education ministry (where some of UDACE's precepts had started to take hold) to the new Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) - local bodies with a brief for employment and economic development. Guidance could still have played a market research role; but the emphasis now was on the delivery of guidance as units of experience to clients that would help them back into the labour market. Its wider potential as a source of information about adult learners' needs and interests was largely overlooked.

Feedback was not the only way that UDACE envisaged guidance workers influencing the curriculum to benefit the learner. Another of the 'seven activities of guidance' was advocacy, in which the guidance worker was to help the client speak for his or her self in negotiating with the college or training provider, either over curriculum content or in the timing of classes or aspects of student support.

With the emphasis in the new millennium on the potential of adult learning for social inclusion, and the UK Government's expressed concern to foster a positive attitude to learning among people with little experience of formal learning since school (as expressed in England in the White Paper, *21st Century Skills*: DfES, 2003, p. 60), and with a new interest in the concept of learning brokers (for example, LSRC, 2003), the time is ripe to review the contribution of guidance workers to brokerage. For the whole of the UK, feedback and advocacy are ideas whose time may have come round again. Policy research on guidance provision in Europe and beyond (Watts and Sultana, 2004) suggests that it is also a good time to highlight the key brokerage role that guidance could play in countries setting up new services. In England the structures now in place to fund and support adult guidance (Information, Advice and Guidance Partnerships - IAGPs) are well positioned to foster feedback arrangements, and the organisations that support IAGPs and lifelong learning (local Learning and Skills Councils) are well placed to process and monitor them. Guidance workers are not the only

learning brokers: that role is also filled by a range of other agencies and individuals, formally and informally. But guidance workers already act in this capacity, and could increase the impact of what they do.

The Project

Between September 1998 and December 2002, the Socrates Grundtvig Programme funded the Go-Between Project: a transnational project to look at the part played by adult guidance workers in acting as brokers between clients and providers (demand and supply) in adult education (Hawthorn, 2003a). The countries involved were Belgium, Sweden and the United Kingdom for the first phase (1998-99); and Ireland, Italy, Sweden and the UK in the second (2000-02). The UK partner was based in Bradford, so operating under the English arrangements for adult guidance (which differ from those in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland).

The first stage had been evaluated by a Swedish team (Roos with Hellsten, 1999). The National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling (NICEC) was involved as evaluator of the second stage: Tony Watts for the first few months, and then, after the first project meeting, Ruth Hawthorn (Hawthorn, 2003b). The role of the evaluator was not to evaluate the work of the individual partners but, as stated in the project proposal, to identify 'issues and models that cut across the national projects', and to 'realise the potential added value that stems from the transnational nature of the project'. The method involved attending project meetings, contributing to the discussions, and suggesting and refining issues and models in light of the partners' remarks on the work they were carrying out in their own countries (Watts, 2000a). At the end of the project's second stage, the four partners were asked to reflect on the situation in their country against a list of questions.

The starting point for the project was an unusual experiment carried out in Söderhamn in north-central Sweden between 1997 and 2002 during the Swedish Adult Education Initiative. In this particular municipality, a new, single provider of adult guidance was granted the whole of the adult learning budget to commission courses and other learning opportunities from the adult learning providers in the town, rather

like a doctor's practice being given purchasing power on behalf of their patients to spend at local hospitals. The guidance workers in Söderhamn, far from being marginal to the adult learning endeavour, became central players. Providers needed to gain the approval of the central broker to maintain a flow of students and therefore their own survival. What made the experiment particularly interesting was the fact that the guidance agency (with attractive high-street premises) was a partnership between the Employment Service and the Adult Education Service, presenting the latter's client-centred, locally responsive ethos, but backed up by the former's national computerised databases of skills shortages and jobs, and its tradition of service to the whole community, whether employed, unemployed or employer.

The key question for the project was the extent to which this model of brokerage could be adapted to countries where the funding flow is different, where decisions about provision are taken by colleges or other providers, and where the guidance agency is informed (but only if it asks) about what is on offer. Advocacy and feedback are not easy to formalise in the ever-shifting local scene where guidance services can be very junior players. In England, the now firmly-established partnerships of local adult guidance services (the IAG Partnerships), and the local Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) that have replaced the TECs with a wider lifelong learning brief, have great potential for reviving this dimension of adult guidance; and this might be true in other countries too. One-stop shops existed in some areas in England throughout the 1990s and continue to do so, and collaborations between the public employment service and education authorities are also familiar. However, it was not clear that the most significant features of the Swedish initiative could be exported. It was not even clear whether they would survive the end of that particular experimental period in Söderhamn.

Contexts and Concepts

Guidance workers are not the only professionals in touch with what potential learners might want. Adult education and training is delivered through numerous and different institutions in every country, from the

most informal community settings to large colleges and institutes: all would see themselves as responding to learners' needs in their own way. Equally, not all those who could act as brokers would view themselves as guidance workers: staff in community centres, trade union workers, employers and personal friends can all take action on behalf of a potential learner to negotiate new courses or change the conditions under which learning opportunities are offered, without viewing this as part of a wider guidance role. One challenge for the project was to focus on the contribution of guidance workers without implying that they are the only, or even necessarily the key, agents responsible for brokerage (or conversely, in some situations, that they are not).

The transnational questions for the Go-Between Project were the following:

- Is there a particular brokerage role for the guidance worker?
- Are there similarities in this role between member states in spite of their different working contexts?
- Is it possible to extract lessons from the work of this particular group of partners to help others not involved in the project?

Given the very different contexts in which the partners were working, an essential preliminary task was to clarify a meaning for brokerage that could apply to all. A central idea was a distinction between *weak* (type I) brokerage (finding existing education or training that the learner wants) and *soft* (type II) brokerage (negotiating with a provider to put on something that does not currently exist). Both contrast with the *strong* brokerage of Söderhamn where it is the guidance agency that determines provision. With the first two types in mind, the partners agreed that guidance for adults in every country, and in any locality within a country, might vary along a continuum between two models: one (model A) in which the guidance agency simply passed information from the provider to the learner (just type I); and the other (model B) in which the flow of information went both ways (both type I and type II). In both cases it is the provider who decides what is put on, under the

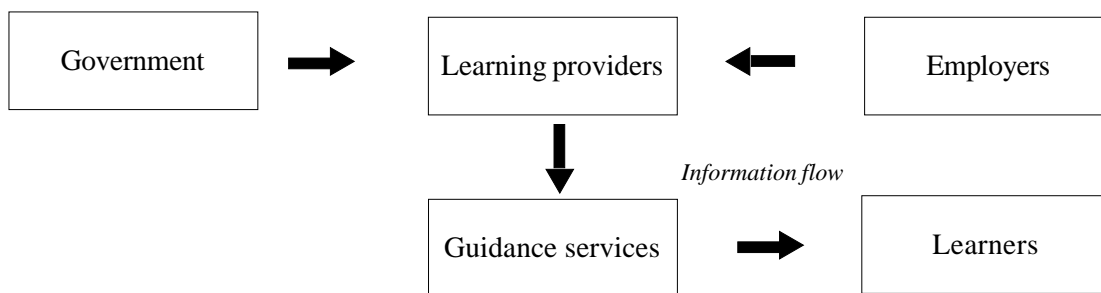
influence of the government (generally via funding programmes) and of local employers. These models are presented below.

The Söderhamn experiment fitted neither of these models. Model C was an attempt to configure it within a similar framework. Here government and employer influence is directed to the guidance agency, which then directs the learning providers as to what they should offer, through *strong* brokerage (type III) under which it is the broker who sets up for his or her clients what learning opportunities they want.

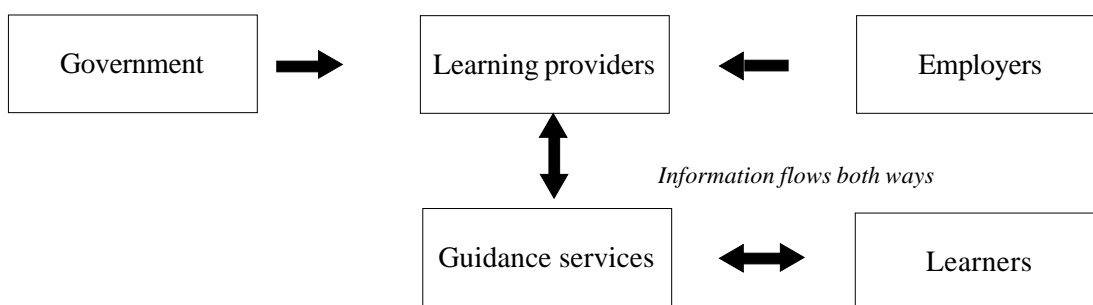
The project partners were seeking to find out if lessons learned from the unique experiment with strong brokerage in Söderhamn would have application in

other member states. The considerable structural differences between the municipality of Söderhamn and the other partners in terms of national education and employment policies, in the economic, social and geographical nature of the locality, and in the material and cultural infrastructure, presented problems in both stages of the project, by suggesting an ideal that was out of reach of the other partners (Roos *et al.*, 1999, part II, 1, 3). But it also helped to clarify what was and was not essential for at least soft brokerage to take place in other areas; and towards the end of the second stage, Söderhamn even provided a potential ideal natural experiment to test whether its ‘pure’, hard form of brokerage could survive when some of those infrastructural advantages were removed. In December 2002 the special funding stream of the Adult

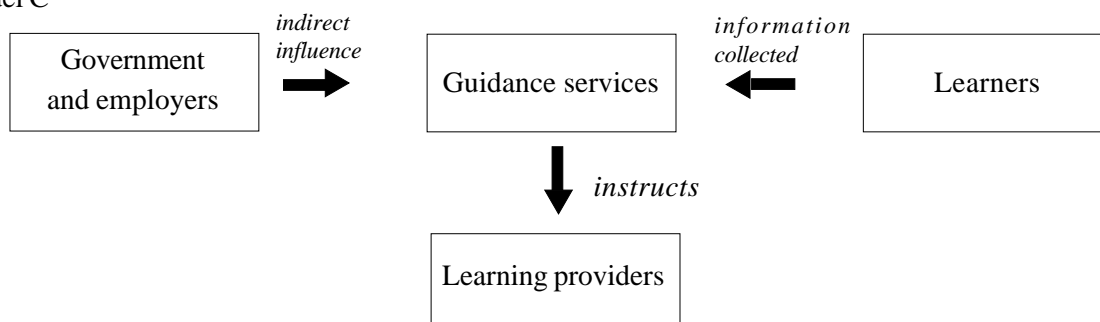
Model A



Model B



Model C



Education Initiative came to an end, which resulted in the money available for the programme being halved. This meant the end of the high-street premises, and the education service guidance staff were relocated in the local adult education college. This was no ordinary college, but a brand-new, purpose-built 'Centre for Flexible Learning', to meet all adult vocational and educational needs from basic skills through to higher education. The move did lead, however, to the withdrawal of the Employment Service from the scheme. The question hanging over the guidance staff was whether these changes would erode the authoritative role they had enjoyed during the five years of the initiative.

In fact, six months after the end of full funding, the guidance staff were still able to use their reduced budget to purchase courses from providers outside the adult education college. As might be imagined, this arrangement – although agreed with senior management – was not much appreciated by the staff of the college. The guidance team certainly also missed their partnership with the employment service (though the two organisations were still working closely together, perhaps helped by their five years of closer understanding). The new college Guidance Unit had, however, obtained funding for a new initiative that had carried the brokerage concept into a different context: the workplace. A guidance worker from the team was now available to work with employees on an individual basis to identify the vocational skills they, the workers, wanted to develop and then to find ways to provide it. This was often through a 'teacher', also in the workplace, who could also act as a mentor and might even be involved in external assessment. Because this new initiative had attracted funding and considerable interest from other municipalities, and indeed nationally, it had done something to offset any tensions with colleagues in the college. It also suggested that once a service starts to think 'outside the box' in relation to one challenge, this quality can be transferred to other challenges.

The other project partners' situations were very different. In Ireland, the South County Dublin Guidance Outreach Project was part of the very new country-wide Adult Educational Guidance Initiative

and was only just beginning to convene local networks with learning providers. In the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy, a relatively new network of Centri Territoriali Permanenti (comparable to UK community education centres attached to primary and secondary schools) were only just beginning to develop a brokering role on behalf of their adult students with the larger vocational education colleges. In Bradford, the upheavals resulting from the introduction of, first, the Lifelong Learning Partnership, then the IAG Partnership and finally the local LSC had set many hares running. However, they had not yet permitted the team to explore fully the potential for these organisations to think about setting up arrangements to collect information about learners' unmet needs, distribute it effectively to learning providers, and then follow it up to see whether there had been any response.

Factors Favouring Brokerage Within Guidance

Over both phases of the transnational project, a number of factors emerged that appeared to influence the chances of establishing a model A arrangement that could move towards model B. These factors can be divided into three categories: financial, cultural and structural, discussed below.

1. Financial factors

Financial issues include the levels of funding available, and who has control over the funding.

(a) *Levels of government funding* available for adult guidance and for adult education and training.

The recent comprehensive survey of guidance policies throughout Europe and in some other countries (Watts and Sultana, 2004: a summary of studies of 37 countries carried out by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Centre Européen pour le Développement de la Formation Professionnelle (CEDEFOP), the European Training Foundation, and the World Bank) shows very variable levels of funding at national and also at local levels. Even where funding is available, it is often temporary,

preventing the continuity of service required to set up the structures necessary for effective brokerage systems.

- (b) *Who controls it?* The institution only, or a planning authority which can influence its spending?

As the structural factors below suggest, if funds for lifelong learning go to institutions, or even 'follow the learner' in a quasi-market, and if institutions then compete against each other for learners, the level of trust between providers is likely to be too low to permit systematic exchange of information about client needs. This is explored in more depth under 2 (d) below. There is much more potential if a single planning authority at local or (small) regional level controls funding. In Söderhamn it was the municipal education authority which was able to take the decision to pass control of the budget to the guidance service.

2. Cultural factors

Cultural issues include clients' and practitioners' expectations, the decision-making 'traditions' of providers, and the levels of trust and respect between parties.

- (a) *Clients' expectations.* Do adults seek help from guidance services at all, and if so, would they expect to be able to get help in actually changing what education and training is offered?

The question of whether or not clients in the partner organisations asked for courses that were not provided depended on the target group but also on the culture and focus of the service. The picture was complex. For example, both the UK and the Irish project partners were working with 'new' adult learners. The focus of the UK (Bradford) project partner was on basic skills for employment, and it was felt that this target group would not have sufficient knowledge of education and training to ask for training that was not available. However, the South County Dublin partner, with the perspective of an adult education service, found that their clients' lack of awareness of what they might do led them to expect *more* of education

than the existing provision could deliver, particularly in terms of flexibility. In Emilia-Romagna, with very diverse sources of advice, many of which were attached to learning provision, requests for what was not available were seen as being asked in the 'wrong place', and as a matter for referral to the 'right one'. In Sweden there might have been expected to be more demand for what was not there, as guidance workers asked clients directly what they wanted, without the use of catalogues; but in fact the Söderhamn partners reported that generally clients' wishes were ones that could be met from within the existing expectations of local providers.

- (b) *Practitioners' expectations.* The key feature of the Söderhamn model was that the guidance service was set up to negotiate provision on behalf of the client, so the guidance workers saw it as part of their role. To what extent did this happen elsewhere?

In Bradford, guidance workers in services attached to learning provision, such as further education (FE) colleges, did feel able at least to make enquiries about the possibility of setting up courses not currently offered; but guidance workers in free-standing services did not have channels other than personal contacts that would encourage them to do so. Work with the Go-Between Project produced training materials to raise their awareness of the potential for working in this way. In Ireland it was not considered common practice to try to negotiate the introduction of a new course. The Emilia-Romagna partner aimed to increase mutual understanding between guidance workers and learning providers, with advocacy and feedback being part of the goal, but the latter were not widespread at the time of the project.

- (c) *Providers' decision-making traditions.* Do colleges and institutes expect to listen to other agencies like guidance workers when thinking about what courses to put on?

Learning providers in the UK were said to be interested in any suggestions for new provision. But, as the Irish partners pointed out, learning providers in general did not yet 'recognise the full

potential of the guidance role'. It was for this reason that the project concluded that some sort of structural agency was needed (see 3 (d) below).

- (d) *Trust and respect* between education/training providers and guidance agencies.

All partners reported some form of resentment between different kinds of adult learning providers: for example, between community-based provision and large, more formal college-based provision; or between independent training providers and publicly-funded education providers. Some received subsidies envied by others; some were limited in what courses they could offer. In such circumstances it was difficult to set up a collaborative forum that favoured systematic feedback.

Even where an institution wanted to respond to individual requests, competition with rival institutions might result in pressure on guidance workers located within the institution to pass information on only internally - or, worse, not to create trouble by encouraging clients to ask for something not already provided.

The question of impartiality arose throughout the project: for all partners, guidance attached to learning providers was less likely to be seen as impartial. This was a matter of particular concern for the Söderhamn guidance workers who after the end of the Adult Education Initiative were to move into an adult education college.

3. Structural factors

Structural issues included the systematic collecting of feedback from learners and passing this information to providers, sufficient flexibility on the part of providers to respond to this information, compliance mechanisms on the part of providers, and policies that promote and facilitate collaboration.

- (a) *Systematic collection of information* about what learners want.

Guidance agencies in all the partner countries kept client records, so there was considerable potential to systematise the collection of information about

clients' unmet needs. But in all cases this would have required much better co-ordination, and possibly a more forceful steer from funding agencies.

- (b) *Structural systems* for passing the information to providers of education and training.

In all the project areas there were local or regional network groups that might act as a medium through which this information could be shared with providers, but their potential for carrying out this function was still under-developed.

- (c) The need for *flexibility* on the part of education and training providers.

Learning providers in situations other than the one in Söderhamn did not have much flexibility: the risk of putting on a new course that might not attract many students was simply too great. If there was no point in finding out about unmet needs because the providers could not respond to them anyway, there was little incentive for the providers to co-operate.

There was more money for the provider in running standard courses for mainstream target groups (e.g. computer classes for employees), whereas providing opportunities for minority requests was costly. Where post-compulsory education was predominantly market-driven, an institution was unlikely to be willing or even able to respond to individual requests, and so had no incentive to encourage guidance agencies to send the information through (though the Swedish experience suggested that only a small proportion of requests were 'unusual').

- (d) *Compliance*. When the guidance workers have passed information to the providers, is there a mechanism to ensure that something is *done* about it?

An important difference between the Söderhamn model and the other partners was the fact that at Söderhamn the guidance workers did not just make recommendations: it was they who decided what learning programmes would be run and how the budget would be spent. Even if providers can be

encouraged to listen to feedback from guidance workers, it is not clear how they can be persuaded to respond if the guidance agency has no ‘teeth’ to follow it up. The Belgian partners in stage 1 concluded that a central planning agency was needed, to which providers would be accountable, and which would process information about learners’ wants. This planning agency would then be able to ‘progress-chase’ where requests were not met.

In many countries or localities it is not clear who can provide this monitoring role. Where the mechanism for feedback is a committee of equal partners, it will not be easy for guidance agencies - as just one member of such a group - to put pressure on providers to respond, for the reasons outlined earlier. Feedback and advocacy arrangements that depend solely on personal contacts at the level of the practitioner, without recourse to such a committee, may be effective under certain circumstances but are even more fragile.

- (e) *Policies*. Do government policies promote collaboration between different adult education and training providers, so that the learner, rather than the survival of the institution, comes first?

The Bradford partners concluded that national policies by the end of the Go-Between Project had the potential to develop brokerage in England, as the Learning and Skills Councils controlled funding both for lifelong learning and for guidance. The Italian partners were hopeful that recent national initiatives relating to guidance, and regional policies relating to education and training, would support the development of better links between guidance workers and learning providers. However, one partner reported that local politicians had put pressure on guidance agencies to refer clients to publicly-funded rather than private provision.

One way to address such difficulties is to replace simple market pressures on individual institutions with targets for adult learning participation for the whole locality. Providers would then have financial incentives to collaborate in the interests of learners, and might be encouraged to look to guidance

workers as a source of literally valuable information. Söderhamn measured success by the percentage of adults in the Kommun who took up learning opportunities. In England some Learning and Skills Councils at the time of the project were turning away from ‘league tables’ that showed individual college success, to the monitoring of participation in ‘whole settlements’, encouraging providers to work together and put learner needs first. The more recent Strategic Area Review (StAR) system has required such an approach and offers a framework within which brokerage could be nurtured.

Other Issues

1. *Workforce development and the role of the public employment service*. There may be tensions created by gaps between what a national or local government is prepared to fund for workforce development, and what individuals want to study for their personal development. Educationalists and some employers regard the two as being closely linked (see remarks on employee development schemes under 2 below), but among the partner countries this was not reflected in public funding arrangements.

Funding for work-related skill training in many countries is channeled through a ministry of labour or employment, and usually is supported by a national network of offices providing information about local jobs as well as work-related training. This separation between employment offices and adult guidance agencies presents a problem for a single guidance-based brokerage system, particularly since there are fundamental differences in their two roles which are hard to resolve. Guidance workers often express unease about the pressures that can be put on clients in employment offices where entitlement to state benefits are at stake, and may not regard decisions made in such situations as being client-centred enough to qualify as guidance. On the other hand, employment offices generally see a fuller range of potential learners than guidance agencies, whether the latter stand alone or are based in colleges.

The unusually close collaboration between the local Employment Service and the Adult Education Service in Söderhamn during the life of the Adult Education Initiative was indeed a key element in its success: integration brought special benefits. The fact that they shared a high-street office and presented a single face to the public, that staff worked together and saw each other's clients as whole individuals, and that each had access to the other's national and local information systems, contributed greatly to the effectiveness of the experiment. The two sets of staff stressed the importance of working as friends, and understanding each other's missions and restrictions, and were even able to make constructive use of each other's constraints.

2. *The role of employers and trade unions.* This did not come under direct scrutiny in the Go-Between Project, but the Swedish partners have more recently begun to develop employer-based work, and the principles underpinning such work should be explored in future studies. In some localities in other countries, employers have set up micro-brokerage schemes through their personnel departments and employee development schemes which fund individuals to study 'leisure' subjects as well as work skills, on the grounds that a learning employee will give more to the company (the Ford motor company's Employee Development Assistance Programme is one example of these: see Southee, undated report). In most places local employers do have a strong direct or indirect influence on what training is provided through vocational colleges. In the Söderhamn experiment this was mediated through the adult guidance agency, where clients made decisions about the training they wanted, with the help of guidance workers who had regularly updated information about local skill needs. By contrast, in England at the start of the project, local Training and Enterprise Councils still had responsibility for a large part of the adult training budget, and by statute these councils had a majority of employers as members. Workforce development is still a major part of the remit of the TECs' successors, the Learning and Skills

Councils. Hopefully the guidance worker as broker can enrich local provision and refine it more closely to the preferences of the learners, but possibly this will come into conflict with what may be argued as being the more 'realistic' needs of the economy. There may be models of more positive and closer partnership with employers: more work is needed on this. Equally, trade unions in several countries are exercising their role to press for better lifelong learning provision for members as well as to arrange such provision themselves, and have a great deal to contribute to an understanding of the brokerage role (for an account of recent developments in England, see Shaw *et al.*, 2002).

3. *Different target groups.* The Söderhamn high-street shop partnership with the employment office was remarkably successful, but it was not reaching disadvantaged adults, and staff felt that this would need an outreach approach not in place at the time of the project. By contrast, the South Dublin Adult Guidance pilot was essentially an outreach operation targeted at disadvantaged learners. Brokerage can operate independently of which target groups are served, but local arrangements will differ according to which providers are most able to respond to which kinds of needs.
4. *Different forms of learning.* The brokerage principle works most easily for short vocational courses that can be run from time to time according to demand, and is more complicated for longer academic learning plans. However, the creative use of open and distance learning, often the only way that individuals can achieve their learning ambitions, can be obstructed by gaps or other restrictions that could be addressed if the provider was aware of it; so the potential for brokerage exists here too. In Sweden the Söderhamn model has been taken up by the national higher education distance learning scheme, and clearly has potential for distance learning for upper secondary and vocational courses as well.
5. *Guidance workers based in adult education providing institutions.* It is easy to see how guidance that is part of a providing institution could establish micro-brokerage systems within their own

institution, but this can be a severe limitation on the guidance workers' potential contribution to brokerage more widely. In the Emilia-Romagna area, the advisers based in Permanent Territorial Centres might have been able to influence their own centre's provision, but these centres were restricted in what they could offer and had little influence over the larger Vocational Training Centres. From the end of the Adult Education Initiative, the Söderhamn guidance workers were to be relocated in the large and well-resourced Adult Education Institute, which would have some advantages; but as a result might lose their potential for influencing other providers.

Application of the Model: The Case of England

The first of the key themes in the government's strategies for reform and investment in the post-16 learning and skills sector, as presented in *Success for All* (DfES, 2002), was improving choice and, significantly, 'responsiveness' in each local area. Local guidance services could make a considerable contribution to this, building on lessons learned through the Go-Between Project.

Most parts of UK are well-served by adult guidance provision, and brokerage of the type described by Model A is reasonably well established. There are now also key elements in place that would permit movement towards Model B, but some obstacles remain. Many adult guidance providers collect information about what clients initially ask for, but then do not have time, or do not think, to analyse this information or find ways of passing it back to organisations such as further education colleges, the local education authority, or voluntary or private providers of learning opportunities. As things stand, even if they did, the providers would not necessarily be interested, or in a position, to respond.

However, the Learning and Skills Council (LECS) controls funding for co-ordination of guidance provision at local level, and has a statutory duty to fund and plan all post-16 learning. This excludes higher education but includes provision offered through further education and local education authorities. Local LSCs are

required to promote this responsiveness in their own areas through very clear guidelines drawn up by the national body (LSC, 2003b). The StAR programme has required local LSCs to look at learning throughout their areas and identify their own key issues, and then focus on strategic options, but the decision about what these should be is in the hands of the local LSC. It could require the local IAG partnership to collect information about unmet needs, and could also require all recipients of LSC funding to show how they are using this information in planning provision for the coming year. Local lifelong learning partnerships provide an ideal structure for supporting this. An LSC IAGP co-ordinator could collate information about unmet needs gathered from the IAG partnership members, and could present this at regular intervals to the lifelong learning partnership meetings. Members of this group could identify learning activities and programmes that they could readily fit into their existing offer. If a provider undertook to introduce any of these into their programme, they could be made accountable to the LSC, to make sure that they did do so in exchange for this market research information. Any items left on the list that were not attractive (because numbers were too small, or space or personnel was not available) could be the subject of negotiation between the LSC and individual providers during the months that followed. But this is not national policy, and LSC guidelines for IAG do not currently include the brokerage role along the lines of our model B.

Experiments of this kind took place during the late 1980s under the Educational Support Grant funding that went to LEAs and Careers Services to develop guidance for adults. For example, in one large metropolitan area the educational guidance services for adults collected information about unmet or inadequately met needs on a regular basis, and circulated it to further and adult education colleges through a combination of structured lists and meetings. There were also many other good examples of feedback and advocacy built into guidance provision (Oakeshott, 1990). At that time, however, there was no mechanism for following up whether the needs had been attended to.

Now that all parties are accountable to the same agency, and one that is committed to making provision responsive to demand, there is a real chance that a stronger and more comprehensive arrangement could work. The Go-Between Project has shown that England is relatively well placed in terms of both the financial and structural factors to make good use of the invaluable information about learners' goals and needs collected by IAG providers; it has some work to do on changing the culture of expectation - of the clients, of the IAG staff, and of college and other learner providers. But LSCs are well placed to effect this shift and would be achieving their own ends by doing so.

Conclusion

The responses from the partners at the end of the project in 2002 suggested four countries on the brink of change but in different directions. The brokerage model in Söderhamn had benefited from five years of imaginative and co-operative development, but now risked erosion if the guidance service lost its independence. In the other three countries, although they were working in very different circumstances, the building blocks that might construct locally appropriate brokerage systems were being put in place one by one. In Söderhamn there was suggestion of movement from Model C 'back' to Model B. In the other countries Model A, far from being a starting point, was still under construction in some areas, but where such arrangements were firmly in place there was evidence of potential for movement towards Model B. It remained to be seen whether the lack of flexibility in national funding policies for learning provision would prove an insurmountable barrier.

The models, and the factors associated with the development of brokerage within guidance, are rooted in the experience of four European countries. But because of the universality of the components, they may be helpful for developing the brokerage role of adult guidance workers elsewhere too.

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