

THE LEARNING AGE

LOCAL INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE FOR ADULTS IN ENGLAND - TOWARDS A NATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

In “The Learning Age”, the Government set out its determination to bring about a revolution in lifelong learning. Plans are well advanced to expand the number of adults who follow courses of study in further and higher education institutions, who learn at work or who are engaged in learning in more informal settings.

We have announced our intention to increase the number of people involved in further and higher education by 700,000 by 2002. This expansion will be disproportionately concentrated among groups who traditionally have low levels of participation in learning. Two radical new initiatives - the University for Industry and Individual Learning Accounts - will support and reinforce this step-change in participation. The number of adults involved in learning will therefore increase dramatically over the next few years. We are committed to setting an adult participation target to allow progress in expanding and widening participation in adult learning to be monitored.

The Government recognises that these increases in participation will have a significant impact on the demand from individuals for information about learning opportunities and for advice and guidance about what is right for them. The availability of good quality information, advice and guidance can also have a critical role in encouraging people, particularly the socially disadvantaged and disabled people, to become involved in learning and to improve their prospects in the labour market.

Action has already been taken to accommodate this extra demand through the establishment of Learning Direct, the first national helpline to provide information and advice about learning. That service has so far enjoyed a resounding success. In its first six months of operation, more than 340,000 people used it and we plan to extend the service through the University for Industry to be able to handle 1.5 million calls annually.

However, if our objectives for adult learning are to be met, information, advice and guidance services at a local level need to be significantly enhanced. Local services provide detailed local learning information and advice that can complement and support the services that will be available nationally through Learning Direct and the University for Industry.

Excellent services are already in existence in some parts of the country. They are provided by a variety of agencies, usually working in close collaboration, including Careers Services, the Employment Service, TECs, local authorities, further and higher education institutions, voluntary organisations and private sector providers. Nevertheless, if the Government’s objectives for adult learning are to be achieved, more needs to be done to sustain and develop the services that will be needed in the future.

The Government's proposals

Starting from April 1999, the Government therefore intends to work on a partnership basis with local providers of information, advice and guidance (IAG) services in England to bring about significant improvements in the quality and coverage of local services.

The overall aim is to ensure that a local information and advice service of reliable quality is available to adult learners and potential learners who live in every part of England. Wherever possible, the Government wishes to build upon the services that already exist and which are known to local people. Beyond requiring providers to comply with relevant quality standards, in the interests of customers, there is no desire on the part of the Government to impose a uniform model.

In pursuit of its overall aim, the Government will therefore:

- invest substantial additional resources from April 1999 in the development of information, advice and guidance services at a local level;
- contract with partnerships of local providers for the delivery of these services in each area of the country;
- require all providers in receipt of public funds to have plans in place to ensure that they comply with appropriate quality standards from 2001.

Beyond setting out the Government's broad objectives for the development of IAG services, the purpose of this paper is to initiate a dialogue with providers and other interested parties about how those objectives can best be brought about.

Levels of service

Adults' needs for information, advice and guidance depend on their personal circumstances. The most straightforward need is for basic and unmediated - but comprehensive - information about learning opportunities. Many adults also find it useful to talk through with an adviser what is available locally, how it relates to employment opportunities and where they can go for further help. Some adults have a need for a more tailored service, which may include an in-depth guidance interview.

Guidance interviews are already available free of charge to some adults, including in particular the unemployed, through a variety of different Government programmes. The Government is keen to see providers develop a more comprehensive range of guidance services for adults on a local level. For the majority of adults in employment, however, the Government does not believe there is a compelling case for such services to be universally supported out of public funds.

The Government therefore proposes that the available resources should be targeted on developing local services which deliver free of charge:

- largely unmediated but comprehensive information about learning and employment opportunities available locally;
- a brief discussion with an adviser, whether face-to-face, on-line or by telephone, on local learning and employment opportunities;

- “signposting” advice to further sources of information, and guidance, including those for which a charge is levied.

More work will be needed to define exactly what kind of service partnerships should aim to make available locally. In outline, however, they might aim to:

- provide basic information about all learning opportunities available locally;
- provide information about a range of practical issues related to accessing local learning opportunities, including in particular:
 - the physical location of learning providers;
 - public transport arrangements;
 - the availability of childcare;
 - whether fees are payable and whether any concessionary rates are available;
 - whether provision is accessible to disabled people.
- advise clients about the links between local learning and employment opportunities;
- provide impartial advice to clients about the learning opportunities that, in the light of their personal circumstances, are likely to be right for them;
- give clients clear directions about where they can go for further help and advice, including a more detailed guidance interview;
- ensure that their services are accessible to people who want to use them, including in particular disabled people.

Views are invited on the following questions:

Q1. Is the general approach to the provision of local information, advice and guidance services the right one?

Q2. How might the level of service outlined most effectively be specified in practice?

Q3. Are there any specific groups of adults for whom there is a strong case that guidance should be supported out of public funds?

Funding

The following sums have been made available for local IAG services over the next three years:

£ million

1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002
7	19	28

The figures for 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 are indicative only.

Because of the profiling of this funding, the development of services at local level will necessarily be incremental.

The bulk of funding in 1999-2000 will be development funding intended to:

- help partnerships to cohere and to begin to deliver services to local people;
- help existing services work towards the Guidance Council Quality Standards (see below);
- help partnerships prepare for 2000-2001, when they will be expected to deliver an agreed specification for a local information and advice service.

The Government intends to contract with partnerships for the delivery of local information and advice services in a particular geographical area (see below). It is likely that financial allocations to partnerships will be determined largely by a formula related to the local adult population. It is, however, in the interests of customers for the service that new public funding should build on and complement current investment in adult IAG by public and private agencies and not merely displace it. The methodology for distributing the available resources will therefore take account of existing patterns of spending.

To ensure that value for money is achieved in contracting with partnerships for the delivery of local services, the Government will commission a costing study.

Views are invited on the following questions:

Q4. Is the suggested approach to funding partnerships the right one?

Q5. What factors other than adult population should be taken into account in the formula for making allocations?

Q6. How should the funding methodology take account of existing investment in local IAG services by public and private agencies?

Partnerships

We believe that adult information, advice and guidance services will be an important aspect of the Lifelong Learning Strategic Partnerships, which were announced by the Secretary of State on 26 November. With that in mind, we will promote a partnership approach to the delivery of local services. In particular, we wish to avoid competition between different local agencies, where that detracts from the quality of service available to local people.

Effective local partnerships should amount to more than the sum of their parts and should include substantial participation by community and voluntary groups, which are often the most accessible agencies for local people.

Accordingly, the Government is considering contracting with only a single organisation in each area for the delivery of local IAG services. Although that organisation might well include a “lead body”, it will also need to demonstrate significant involvement by relevant statutory and other local agencies, with clearly specified arrangements for the division of responsibilities and resources between them. Public funding may be withheld from areas where there is scant evidence of an effective partnership approach.

Views are invited on the following questions:

Q7. Is the suggested approach to partnership the right one?

Q8. What more can be done to foster effective partnerships at local level?

Geographical coverage

The Government intends to contract with partnerships for the delivery of services in particular geographical areas in England. There are, however, a number of options for defining those areas, including:

existing TEC areas;
existing LEA areas;
existing Careers Service areas;
a hybrid of two or more of the above;
groups of two or more TEC/LEA/Careers Service areas;
the areas covered by the new Learning Partnerships.

To inform future consideration of these issues, we will commission a study of the existing patterns of local IAG provision.

Views are invited on the following question:

Q9. What is the most appropriate geographical basis for the delivery of local IAG services?

Quality

To ensure that a reasonable standard of service is delivered to local people, partnerships would initially be expected to provide satisfactory evidence that they were working towards the relevant quality standards which are currently being developed by the Department and the National Advisory Council for Careers Education and Guidance. From 2001, all providers who were members of a local partnership would need to possess the Guidance Council Quality Mark as a condition of grant. They would also need to demonstrate that staff were appropriately qualified.

Views are invited on the following questions:

Q10. Is the suggested approach to quality assurance right?

Q11. What qualifications are appropriate for staff employed by local IAG services?

Customer charges

The Government intends that the services for which it will contract with providers would be free to customers. Monitoring information will, however, be collected on the charges levied by providers for other services. Partnerships will be expected to set out their plans for providing guidance and any charges they would intend to levy.

Links with other services

The Government intends that partnerships should be able to demonstrate that they have thought through the arrangements for making effective links with related services on a local level. Many of these services, including the statutory work of the Careers Service and the provision of further and higher education, will be provided by local organisations which will themselves often be members of partnerships.

Some of the most important links, however, will need to be with national organisations which are engaged in the information, advice and guidance business, including in particular the Employment Service, Learning Direct and the University for Industry.

The Employment Service is developing a more comprehensive range of information, advice and guidance services for the unemployed, in particular through the New Deal and the evolving role of Personal Advisers. Local IAG partnerships will also need to forge close links with their local ES Disability Service to ensure that there are clear links between learning, job search and retention in employment.

Local services will need to complement and support the work of Learning Direct and vice versa. The aim should be to create a seamless information and advice service which ensures that, whatever their point of entry, clients are referred quickly to the service that is best able to address their individual needs.

Learning Direct will continue to provide telephone and on-line information and advice that is free and impartial to all members of the public who contact it. There will need to be frequent referral of clients between Learning Direct and the relevant providers of local services. Detailed work will be needed on the “terms of trade” between them. We do not propose that resources will be available for the development of local call centres.

The provider-generated National Database of Learning Opportunities being developed by the University for Industry will be a common resource on which both Learning Direct and local IAG partnerships will be able to draw to inform their work. Partnerships will be expected to use this dataset, and funding will not be available for the collection of local data on opportunities, or the development of provider information software.

The University for Industry will not aim to provide comprehensive advice and guidance services on a local level. Its franchised local learning centres will focus on the delivery and marketing of Ufi products and services. Since these centres will themselves be important local providers of learning, local partnerships will need to develop effective and close relationships with them.

Partnerships will also be expected to make links with Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships, which are convened by local authorities to plan local childcare provision, including childcare information and training. In providing IAG services, it may be appropriate in some areas to build on existing Children's Information Services; a number of information services already cover training and childcare.

Next steps

We would welcome views on the content of this document and on the future development of local IAG services generally, by 12 February 1999. Although respondents may wish to use the attached sheet, which summarises the specific questions listed above, we would also welcome views about relevant issues not specifically covered in this document. Responses will be publicly available on request, unless respondents make clear that they wish their response to remain confidential.

After considering responses to these proposals, the Department intends to publish more detailed plans for the development of local IAG services early in 1999.

Any comments on this document should be sent to Anne Lidster, DfEE, Room E8d, Moorfoot, Sheffield S1 4PQ (or by email to anne.lidster@dfee.gov.uk) by **Friday 12 February 1999**.

Further copies of the document can be obtained from the above address or downloaded from the Internet. The address is <http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk> .

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- TOWARDS A NATIONAL FRAMEWORK**

RESPONSE SHEET

It would be very helpful if you could record your answers to the questions contained in the consultation document on this response sheet. Additional copies of the sheet, including electronic copies, can be obtained from Brian Turner on 0114-259-4600.

Q1. Is the general approach to the provision of local information, advice and guidance services outlined in the paper the right one?

Q2. How might the level of service outlined in the document most effectively be specified in practice?

Q3. Are there any specific groups of adults for whom there is a strong case that guidance should be supported out of public funds?

Q4. Is the suggested approach to funding the right one?

Q5. What factors other than adult population should be taken into account in the formula for making funding allocations?

Q6. How should the funding methodology take account of existing investment in local IAG services by public and private agencies?

Q7. Is the suggested approach to partnership the right one?

Q8. What more can be done to foster effective partnerships at local level?

Q9. What is the most appropriate geographical basis for the delivery of local IAG services?

Q10. Is the suggested approach to quality assurance right?

Q11. What qualifications are appropriate for staff employed by local IAG services?

Other comments:

From:

Organisation:

Address:

Date:

Please send, fax or e-mail this response sheet to Anne Lidster, DfEE, Room E8d, Moorfoot, Sheffield S1 4PQ (Fax: 0114-259-3236, E-mail: anne.lidster@dfee.gov.uk) by

Friday 12 February 1999