Measuring the Impact of Nextstep Career Advice in the North East of England

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iCeGS OCCASIONAL PAPER

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The International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS) is delighted to be able to publish this Occasional Paper summarising an LSC-funded collaboration between the Centre and the four nextstep networks operating in the North East of England in 2007/2008. It summarises the process by which a practice-based impact assessment framework was developed through consultation with providers and practitioners and piloted with customers within the four networks. A key feature is the level of provider ownership and 'buy in' achieved throughout the project and this, together with the more technical aspects of the framework, should be of interest to all those involved in the delivery and management of information and advice services.

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Formerly known as the Centre for Guidance Studies (CeGS), the International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS) was launched in April, 2008. Within the context of its significant national and international achievements, the Centre will continue to deliver a research and training programme to bridge the gap between policy and practice within the career guidance field.

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1. Context

The Learning and Skills Council proposal

1.1 In September, 2007, the main contractors of the four nextstep networks in the North East[1] (referred to in this paper as the 'consortium') successfully submitted a proposal to the Learning & Skills Council (LSC) for funding to develop a framework for measuring the impact of career advice[2]. It was agreed that the project would result in a practice-based 'Impact Toolkit' that would include:-

- a set of impact measures that should be used in the new adult careers service with a rationale for their inclusion;
- methodologies for each of the impact measures identified;
- approaches to obtaining information on progression in learning and work – with templates and case study material;
- approaches to measuring soft outcomes; and
- suggested Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

As well as informing and supporting the development of a framework to measure impact within the new Adult Advancement and Careers Service, the project would also have the potential to contribute to the North East`s Regional Employability Framework that envisages the application of common reporting and tracking systems.

1.2 The proposal to the LSC indicated that the consortium would commission the then Centre for Guidance Studies (CeGS)[3] to help develop an impact assessment framework that would provide a higher level of consistency and best practice in the collection and use of the impact measures contractually required by the LSC, *whilst at the same time*, accommodating the collection and use of additional, 'softer' impact measures. The latter was described as the 'added value' element that colleagues were looking to iCeGS to provide drawing upon its national and international expertise in this area. A literature review was undertaken by iCeGS to underpin and support this development work. The consortium also agreed that the framework should be developed in liaison with the four provider networks to ensure ownership and practicability.

Overall timescale

1.3 At a project inception meeting in Newcastle in October, 2007, it was agreed that iCeGS would:-

- review the current arrangements within the four networks to assess impact and impact-related data and identify elements of consistency and good practice (November, 2007);
- identify options for the new framework drawing upon existing best practice within the North East and elsewhere (November, 2007);
- consult with the sub-contractors of the four networks on the suitability and practicality of the identified options (December, 2007 to January, 2008);
- review the results of the consultation and agree with the consortium the main instruments of the framework to be tested within the networks (February, 2008);
- following a test phase (March to April, 2008), present finalised instruments to be piloted (April, 2008);
- present key findings within a published iCeGS Occasional Paper.

1.4 This Occasional Paper presents the background to the project, summarises the initial development work and the outcomes of the consultation process, and presents details of the impact assessment framework agreed by the consortium for piloting across the four networks. **Section 2** summarises a review of current impact assessment arrangements in the North East nextstep networks and possibilities for development drawing upon current practice

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1 The networks and the main contractors are: Tyne and Wear and Northumberland (Connexions Tyne and Wear); Durham (CFBT); Tees Valley (IGEN).

2 The title of the consortium`s proposal to LSC was: 'Measuring the Impact of nextstep Career Advice'.

3 In December 2007, CeGS was formally re-launched as the International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS).

elsewhere. **Section 3** details the emerging draft impact assessment framework and the process of consultation with the provider networks. **Section 4** presents the results of the consultation process. **Section 5** details the post-consultation developments, the finalised pilot framework and future issues to be addressed for the successful implementation of the new framework post-July 2008.

2. Current impact assessment arrangements in the North East nextstep networks

2.1 At the consortium`s project steering group meeting in November, 2007, iCeGS presented the results of a review of current impact assessment arrangements across the four networks within the context of the wider research literature on impact assessment. A summary of the results of the review, and a summary of wider research issues are presented below. Following the presentation at the November meeting, the consortium agreed the key elements of a draft impact assessment framework to be circulated for consultation throughout the four networks.

Review of current impact assessment arrangements across the four North East nextstep networks

2.2 All four networks are contractually required by the LSC to collect and report 'impact measure data' in terms of changes in client circumstances following the advice session. The categories specified for the collection of this data are as follows:-

- part-time employment
- full-time employment
- became/remained unemployed
- self employed
- entered further education
- entered higher education
- found voluntary work
- entered full-time education or training
- continuing existing programme of learning
- entered Personal & Community Development Learning
- other

2.3 The 2007/2008 LSC nextstep delivery specification states that contractors should ensure that a representative sample of their participants are followed up six months from the date of their intervention, though they do add that as a minimum they expect all participants should be followed up within a year. All of the main contractors require sub-contractor providers across the North East networks to collect the above data for all advice clients at six months following their advice session. Some sub-contractor providers are more successful than others in following-up their participants and in providing meaningful data on customer circumstances at six-months; there is also some variability in the use of the 'other' category to report outcomes.

2.4 The LSC delivery specification also lists the following key performance indicators:-

- at least 45% of advice service participants yet to achieve level 2 qualification to participate in further learning and/or work as appropriate;
- at least 17% of advice service participants yet to achieve level 2 qualification to be aged 50 or over; and
- at least 15% of advice service participants yet to achieve level 2 qualification to have a self-declared learning difficulty or disability.

In addition, a number of delivery targets are specified by the LSC including those relating to the number of advice sessions to be delivered and the expectation that 92% of advice participants will be 'satisfied' with the service they receive.

2.5 During 2007/2008, all four networks collect some other impact-related data, additional to that contractually required by the LSC as described above. The Durham network captures 'softer' outcomes data for all advice clients as part of the follow-up at six months (using a Client Feedback form to record action plan monitoring and the extent to which clients believe their needs were met) and at the advice session (using an Advice Session Evaluation form to record what clients believe they have learnt and how confident they feel in moving forward). The three other networks do not capture 'softer' outcomes data at the six-month follow-up but do so at other times, using separate client feedback arrangements. Tees Valley survey all their advice clients seen in the six-monthly 'quality week' (using a Service Evaluation Questionnaire to record what clients report in terms of skills learnt, needs met and barriers overcome). Northumberland and Tyne and Wear surveyed all advice clients in 2005/06 (using an Evaluation Questionnaire to record what clients report in terms of the help received with career planning, opportunity awareness, skills acquisition including application skills, and self-knowledge/self-confidence).

2.6 The fact that some impact data additional to the contractual LSC requirement is being collected and reported within the consortium was encouraging. It provided a basis to compare and contrast current consortium practice with a fuller range of possible impact measures as summarised in the research literature and practice from further afield. Details of the differences and similarities between the four networks and their procedures are summarised in **Appendix 1** and a summary of the relevant forms and documents they use in collecting key data is given in **Appendix 2**.

Types of measures that could be used to assess the impact of information and advice interventions

2.7 A number of authors have described the various forms of possible impact of information, advice and guidance (IAG) interventions in terms of a number of *outcomes*[4] that can range from those observable at or soon after the intervention (immediate outcomes) and those that are observable some time after (intermediate and longer-term outcomes). These possibilities are summarised in **Table 1** below.

Table 1: Summary of IAG service outcomes as possible impact measures

Immediate outcomes

- *Knowledge/skills,* including: increased awareness of opportunities; ability to action plan; job application skills; enhanced decision-making skills.
- *Attitudes and motivation*, including: increased optimism; reduced anxiety/stress; positive attitudes in relation to work and/or learning.

Intermediate outcomes

- *Search strategies*, including: sustaining of search strategies beyond initial period; exploration of channels of information and progression routes.
- *Decision-making*, including carrying out action plans; applying for jobs/training/learning; coping with, and planning beyond, initial disappointments.

Longer-term outcomes (individual)

- *Training and education*, including: taking-up opportunities; successful completion; increased attainment levels.
- *Employment*, including: re-entering the labour market; change of employment; change of role and/or promotion; increased wages.

Longer-term outcomes (economy)

- *For employers and learning providers*, including: increased productivity; increased flexibility; enhanced enrolments, retention and achievement.
- *For the economy*, including: GDP growth; reduction of skills gaps and shortages; lower unemployment and exchequer savings.

4 As summarised in: Hughes, D., Bosley, S., Bowes, L. & Bysshe, S. (2002) *The Economic Benefits of Guidance*. Derby: Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby.

2.8 The consortium recognised that although **Table 1** might summarise the whole range of possible impact outcomes of IAG, it may not be practical, or desirable, to include all of them in the proposed impact assessment framework for the North East nextstep delivery. It was for this reason that the consortium had requested iCeGS to present practical examples of what impact outcomes, and the associated data collection procedures, had been used effectively elsewhere in comparable settings in the recent past.

2.9 Research findings into impact assessment (inter alia: Hughes et al., 2002; Reed et al., 2005; Tyers & Sinclair, 2005; Learning and Skills Council, 2005)[5] provide a number of case studies that illustrate the types of measures and methodologies that have proved most popular to assess the impact of information, advice and guidance (IAG). Unsurprisingly, progression into employment and/or learning is a consistent feature of much past research echoing the LSC six-month follow-up requirement for all nextstep contracts. However, this research also shows that in addition to recording key changes in personal circumstances, clients are also asked to report how influential they believe the service has been in bringing about changes or whether they would have occurred anyway. Other, 'softer', impact measures have also been included and the main types of service outcomes that feature in the case studies are summarised in **Table 2** below.

Table 2: Summary of main service outcomes from the case study examples

Satisfaction with support received, in terms of:
- ease of access to service;
- the extent to which needs were understood and met;
- likelihood of recommending service to a friend and/or using the service again.

Client perception of the usefulness of the support in helping them to:
- clarify next steps;
- produce an action plan;
- develop and learn new skills;
- feel more confident about making changes;
- be more likely to make changes;
- be more aware of learning/work opportunities.

Action plans carried out, and any other relevant steps taken, including:
- obtained information on training/learning/jobs;
- applied for job/course;
- produced CV.

Significant changes in personal circumstances since receiving support, including:
- entry to employment;
- change of job;
- promotion;
- entry to education;
- increased qualification levels;
- involvement in voluntary work.

Client perception of how important the support has been in influencing:
- any career-related decisions made and actions carried out;
- any other significant changes in personal circumstances.

5 Hughes et al. Op cit.
Reed, K., Mahony, K. & Gration, G. (2005). *Career Guidance for Adults in Wales - Making a Difference*. Derby: Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby.
Tyers, C. & Sinclair, A. (2005). *Intermediate Impact of Advice and Guidance, Research Report* 638. London: DfES.
Learning and Skills Council (2005). *The Impact of Adult Information and Advice Services 2005: National Analysis*. Coventry: LSC.

2.10The case studies highlight that many follow-up interviews are conducted by telephone with the length of time after the initial IAG session varying from 3 months to up to a year and with the average interview time varying from 11 minutes to 30 minutes. More commonly, interviews are carried out by individuals who have not been associated with the initial IAG session and who have been specifically trained for the task. In a number of cases, interviews were carried out by specialised survey companies; in contrast Reed et al., (2005), report on the use of advisers as interviewers, who, in the interests of ensuring impartiality, did not deliver the initial advice and guidance. Often, interviews were structured by the use of standardised questions prefaced by an introductory script. An example of an introductory script adapted from previous surveys is shown in **Table 3** below.

Table 3: Example of an introductory survey script

Introduction, permission and purpose of interview

Good morning/afternoon/evening. My name is…………… and I'm calling on behalf of …………… to ask about the interview - and action plan - you had with an adviser at ….. on……You may remember that when you had your interview you gave us permission to contact you. This is a voluntary survey and you can, of course, change your mind and not take part.

Are you happy for me to continue?

Thank you; this survey will take only a few minutes and your answers may help us to improve our services and enable …………… to identify and share good practice. The survey will also give you the opportunity to request further information and advice if this would be useful to you.

Let me re-assure you that all the information you give will be treated anonymously and confidentially and any data we collect is stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

There are several short questions. Please ask me to repeat any question if necessary.

OK; first of all I`d like to ask you ………………

Key emerging issues and the draft impact assessment framework

2.11In reviewing the range of possible impact measures and results from the review of research and practice, the consortium agreed that iCeGS should develop a draft impact assessment framework for the North East that would address the following key elements and issues.

Proposed impact-related outcomes and associated performance indicators:-

- career-related changes of circumstance recorded at six months following the advice session (building on and clarifying the LSC existing impact categories to better reflect changes *during* the whole 'participant journey' within the six month period);
- participant ratings of how influential the advice session might have been in bringing about key career-related changes of circumstance; and
- changes in career-related knowledge, plans and motivation as indicated by participants following the advice session.

Survey options for impact data collection for all advice participants:-

- survey options and draft instruments to be developed for the collection of impact-related data for all advice participants to reflect the range of existing practice in the North East networks and best practice elsewhere;
- one option to consist of two separate surveys (the first at, or soon after, the advice session and the second at six months) and the other option to consist of a single survey at six months.

In-depth case study material:-

- additional to the two main survey options for all participants, there should be the possibility of further longitudinal tracking of a small sample to provide more in-depth case study material.

Consideration of methodological and practical issues associated with the collection of impact-related data; these to include:-

- the type and number of staff who would carry out the collection of data (for example, each provider`s own advisers, or a specially trained centralised team);
- the use of written ‘scripts’ or ‘prompts’ to guide the follow-up conversation with participants versus the use of a more open-ended approach;
- the arrangements for analysing, reporting and making best use of the data, both within and across the networks.

2.12The emerging draft impact assessment framework and associated issues informed the production of a paper circulated for consultation with the wider provider networks, as detailed in the following section.

3. The consultation process and the draft impact assessment framework

3.1 A consultation document summarising the background to the project and the draft impact assessment framework was circulated by email to all provider organisations in late December, 2007. Also included was a questionnaire to enable providers to comment on the draft framework in advance of a series of provider meetings held in late January, 2008.

Proposed impact-related outcomes and performance indicators

3.2 The consultation document proposed that the following *impact-related outcomes* be adopted as standard across all four networks:-

- learning/work outcomes at six-months (although this is an existing contractual requirement it is proposed that the wording of the current LSC outcome categories be strengthened to provide a better profile of changes in participant circumstances over the whole six month period);
- participant ratings of how influential the advice session has been in bringing about key career-related changes of circumstance during the six-month period; and
- changes in participants` career-related knowledge, plans and motivation after the advice session compared to before the session.

3.3 The consultation document recognised that the LSC specifies that at least 45% of advice service participants yet to achieve level 2 qualification should participate in further learning and/or work, and that at least 92% of advice participants should be satisfied with the service they receive. Accordingly, it was proposed that the following additional performance indicators be adopted as standard across all four networks:-

- XX% of advice participants to report improved personal circumstances within six-months, either by participating in work and/or further learning or by achieving some other career-related outcome (this represents an extension of the existing LSC performance indicator and is linked to the strengthening of the wording of the LSC outcome categories noted above);
- XX% of those advice participants who have improved their circumstances within six months to report that the advice session was important in bringing these changes about; and
- XX% of advice participants to report that the advice session has made a positive difference in relation to their career-related knowledge, plans and motivation (it was noted that it may be possible to replace this indicator with more specific indicators that represent its component parts: increased awareness of opportunities; greater clarity of plans; and, increased confidence/motivation).

3.4 It was made clear that percentage benchmark figures would need to be set by the consortium for each of the above indicators. Although iCeGS has information from other impact assessment research that could provide useful contextual referencing data, it was stressed that any benchmark figures agreed by the consortium should realistically reflect current performance across its own networks and that the results from the piloting and embedding of the survey instruments could inform this process.

Two main survey options for the following-up of all advice participants

3.5 Two survey options were proposed as the main alternatives for consideration. Both options contained in total the same number and type of impact-related categories and questions; the difference related to *when* and *how* the data would be collected. Both options addressed the three main impact-related outcomes indicated above and both would enable the associated performance indicator data to be collected for all advice participants.

3.6 Consultation Option 1 consisted of two separate surveys:-

- the first survey at, or soon after, the advice session during which much of the 'softer' impact-related data would be collected together with service satisfaction ratings;
- the second survey at six months following the advice session during which a minimum number of questions would be added to the LSC contractual requirement to ask participants about their learning/work circumstances.

The rationale for Option 1 was that there are some questions about the impact of service that are best asked at, or soon after, the advice session whilst the customer's memory is still fresh; for example, questions related to things learnt, changes in motivation and attitude, and questions about the quality of the service. However, the consultation document also raised the possibility that two separate surveys might prove too resource-intensive for providers and too onerous for participants resulting in 'survey fatigue'.

3.7 Consultation Option 2 consisted of a single survey at six months following the advice session during which most, or all, of the 'softer' impact data would be collected at the same time that participants are asked about their learning/work circumstances. The rationale was that since there is an existing contractual requirement to follow-up all participants at six months, it could be argued from a resource and logistics point of view that this option could be more cost-effective; the need for feedback from participants at, or soon after, the advice session would be much reduced with something as simple as a 'How was it for you?' postcard given to participants at the end of the session. However, the consultation document also raised the possibility that a single in-depth follow-up at six-months could be too late to ask participants about what they might have learnt, about changes in motivation and attitude, and about the quality of the service; it could be argued that participants may not remember everything that far back in time.

The possibility of the in-depth longitudinal tracking of a small sample of participants

3.8 This possibility was presented as additional to Options 1 and 2 above. A selected sample of participants could be followed up, at a number of dates following the advice session, to provide more in-depth *participant-journey case study material,* including what has worked best for them, insights into the impact and influence of the advice and support given, and other key influences on their decision-making. This could provide rich, qualitative data to complement the more quantitative approach of the post-advice and six-month follow-ups of Options 1 and 2.

Methodological and practical issues associated with the collection of impact-related data.

3.9 In addition to the timing of the collection of customer impact-related data, the consultation presented a number of other methodological issues that needed to be addressed, including the:-

- type and number of staff who would carry out the collection of data (each provider`s own advisers, or a specially trained centralised team, etc?);
- use of written 'scripts' or 'prompts' to guide the follow-up conversation with participants versus the use of a more open-ended approach; and
- arrangements for analysing, reporting and making best use of the data, both within and across the networks.

4. Results of the consultation process

4.1 A total of 34 completed consultation questionnaires were submitted from 31 different providers fairly evenly spread across the four networks. This represented a responses rate of almost 75% which was considered to be satisfactory in view of the time of year (just before and after Christmas) and the relatively tight timescale of the consultation. A summary of the questionnaire results were presented for discussion at the face-to-face meetings with the four networks during which a number of emerging issues were identified and additional feedback recorded. Although the providers had some differing views about the detail of impact assessment and data collection, both the questionnaire response rate and the quality and range of comments made by providers showed overall that there was strong support for, and understanding of, the need to evidence the impact of nextstep service delivery.

The headline results from the consultation questionnaires and the face-to-face meetings are summarised below.

Proposed impact measures and performance indicators

4.2 The three proposed impact measures were strongly supported by network consultees, namely:-

- strengthened and clarified learning and work outcomes at six-months;
- participant ratings of how influential the advice session has been in bringing about key career-related changes of circumstance during the six-month period; and
- changes in participants` career-related knowledge, plans and motivation ***after*** the advice session compared to ***before*** the session.

4.3 A total of 32 respondents (97%) agreed with using 'strengthened and clarified learning/work categories', and 31 (91%) agreed with using 'changes in career-related knowledge, plans and motivation'; no one disagreed with these two sets of measures and only a small minority said they were 'unsure' (3% and 9% respectively). There was strong but slightly reduced support for the third proposed measure, 'customer perception of the importance of advice in career-related change of circumstance'; 26 agreed (79%), 6 were unsure (18%) and just one respondent did not agree. The level and pattern of support for the three related performance indicators were broadly similar to that noted above for the impact measures.

The two main survey options

4.4 Option 1 (two surveys, one at or soon after the advice session, and one at six months) was preferred by 14 respondents (41%). Option 2 (one survey at six months) was preferred by 18 people (53%). Overall, only 2 respondents (6%) indicated they were unsure of either option.

4.5 The main reason given for preferring Option 1 was the need for some key questions to be asked sufficiently soon after the advice session whilst participants memories were still fresh. The main reasons given for preferring Option 2 were that two separate follow-up surveys might be seen as excessive for participants and difficult for providers to manage and resource.

4.6 Although more questionnaire respondents expressed a preference for Option 2, in the face-to-face network meetings it became apparent that several of these individuals would be more inclined to favour Option 1 provided that the first of the two separate surveys were given to participants at the conclusion of the advice session, and that the type of questions used, and how they were to be written, were carefully considered to take into account differing types of service users and the needs of service providers linked to formal in-house and external reporting requirements.

The longitudinal tracking of a sample of participants

4.7 A total of 21 respondents (66%) supported the longitudinal tracking of a clearly identified sample of participants as a means of providing rich, in-depth case study material; 2 (6%) did not agree and 9 (28%) were not sure.

4.8 The reasons given by those favouring this approach was that as well as providing high quality case study material, it would also enable changes to be observed over a longer time-scale thus reflecting the 'dynamic nature and impact' of IAG interventions. The reasons given by those who did not agree, or who were unsure, were that a one hour advice session did not warrant such 'excessive attention', that the additional resources needed were unlikely to be made available, and that there could be problems trying to ensure that the sample was representative.

Methodological and practical issues associated with the collection of impact-related data.

4.9 A total of 21 respondents (66%) agreed with the proposal to introduce 'standardised written scripts', 2 (6%) did not agree, and 9 (28%) were unsure. In the Durham and Tees Valley face-to-face network meetings, support was particularly strong for written 'guidelines', rather than scripts, that would indicate the overall structure for interviewers to follow whilst at the same time giving them a degree of flexibility to adjust the delivery of questions in response to customer background and experiences.

4.10 A total of 18 respondents (58%) agreed with the concept of introducing a 'centralised customer contact team', 3 (10%) did not agree, and 10 (32%) were unsure. Some of those supporting this concept reported that this approach would provide greater consistency in both data collation and impartiality of approach and would play to the strengths of specialists trained specifically for this purpose. Some of those against, or unsure of this possibility, thought that centralised interviewers may not have sufficient background knowledge of participants and may not easily win their trust, and that centralisation might limit the flow of information back to providers and slow down the speed with which any service issues/problems could be resolved. In response, iCeGS indicated during the consultation meetings the possibility that a centralised approach to customer follow-up may be more cost-effective. Work undertaken by iCeGS with Careers Wales[6] indicates that using centralised staff can result in lower unit costs per contact. Also, the Educational Guidance Service for Adults (EGSA) in Belfast, Northern Ireland, has indicated the cost-benefits derived from a centralised approach that continues to involve advisers through a rota system rather than having this as a core feature of their follow-up activities.

4.11 There was strong support for the use of common consortium-wide protocols for both the reporting and sharing of evaluation and impact data across networks (91% and 87.5% respectively); a small number of respondents were unsure and no one disagreed.

Other issues raised in the face-to-face consultation meetings

4.12 In the face-to-face network meetings there was some discussion of the kind of minimum service delivery requirements it might be appropriate to use as a checklist for participants to comment upon. The service delivery requirements listed by way of illustration in the early consultation documents were:-

- Was it easy to find out about our organisation?
- Were you made aware of your rights in relation to data protection?
- Did you get an action plan?
- Were you given the opportunity of a follow-up advice session if you needed it?

4.13 In the Tees Valley and Durham meetings a number of additional/alternative possibilities were 'brainstormed' and these included:-

- If you needed to make a complaint about the service, would you know how to do this?
- Were you given enough time/did you feel you needed more time in the advice session?
- Was the location and/or time of your advice session convenient?

6 Reed et al. Op cit.

Conclusions from the consultation process

4.14 An overall conclusion from the consultation process was that although providers have some differing views about the detail of impact assessment and approaches to data collection, there was nevertheless *strong support* for the need to evidence the impact of advice session interventions and to achieve a consistency of approach across the consortium, whilst at the same time recognising the differing types and backgrounds of the participants served by individual providers. There was also strong general agreement for the type of impact measures and performance indicators that should form the basis of the impact assessment framework. In light of the consultation findings, iCeGS formulated a series of recommendations as to how the draft framework could be developed further. These recommendations, and the resulting developments, are summarised in the next section.

4.15 An overarching development that emerged at the same time that the consultation process was underway was the National Office Learning & Skills Council's (LSC) decision to move towards regional main contractors. This means that, from August 2008, there will in effect be a single North East nextstep network. Although there was strong support from the consultation for the use of consortium-wide reporting protocols, this has now become, in effect, a 'fait accompli' in view of the National Office LSC's decision to move towards regional main contractor arrangements.

5. Post-consultation developments and finalised pilot framework

Recommendations from the consultation process

5.1 At a project steering group meeting in early 2008, iCeGS presented findings from the consultation process and recommended to the consortium that:-

- the three outcome related measures included in the consultation document, and the associated performance indicators, be formally adopted;
- further consideration would need to be given to the respective merits of the two survey options to determine which should be adopted for piloting in the next phase of the project;
- in determining which survey option to pilot, it should be recognised that more questionnaire respondents would have been inclined to favour Option 1 if the first of the two separate surveys were given to participants at the conclusion of the advice session, and that the type of questions used, and how they were to be written, were carefully considered to take into account differing types of service users and the needs of service providers;
- whichever of the two survey options is chosen, further discussion will be needed on the merits or otherwise of establishing a *link* between the data collected through these processes for each participant and his/her details contained within the main contractor client database;
- the six-month follow-up should be used as an opportunity to identify participants who would be willing to engage in a longitudinal tracking study commencing approximately one year after the initial advice session (those participants who are willing volunteers could then be selected on the basis of defined criteria and questioned again in a further six months` time);
- greater emphasis should be placed upon the flexibility of the users` notes and that they should cover suggestions as to how to structure the beginning, middle and end of the survey and how to lead into specific questions from the survey taking into account the needs and background of the participant being interviewed;
- consideration should be given to piloting a centralised customer/participant contact approach from August 2008 onwards, focussed initially on the main contractor`s provision, to enable the outcomes to be reviewed in terms of the 'made contact/did not make contact' ratio, the quality and range of customer information gained and the duration of contact and relative cost per contact.

Development of the survey instruments and guidelines for testing prior to the main pilot phase

5.2 Following a review of the consultation findings, the consortium accepted the iCeGS recommendations and decided to develop a modified Option 1 (two separate surveys) as the main impact assessment instrument with the additional possibility of more in-depth tracking of a smaller sample. The main survey option would consist of a hard copy advice session questionnaire and a telephone interview form to follow-up participants six months after the advice session. The project steering group agreed modifications to the relevant survey instruments that had been included in the consultation document. These modifications largely consisted of simplifying the language of the hard copy advice session questionnaire and clarifying the users` notes for the six-month follow-up.

5.3 It was also agreed that the modified advice session questionnaire would be tested during March 2008 with a sample of participants being asked to hand in a completed questionnaire to reception before leaving the office, or to post this using a pre-paid addressed envelope. Testing of the advice session questionnaire would involve a sample of the main contractors` own participants and those of a range of their sub-contractor providers and it was estimated that involving around 4-5 organisations from each of the 4 networks, with 10-20 participants per organisation (depending on their throughput) would be sufficient. Testing of the six-month instrument would also take place during March, 2008, and would involve the main contractors discussing the instrument and the users` notes with a number of their colleagues, including sub-contractors, to assess suitability and practicality.

Findings from the testing phase and development of the pilot instrument and framework

5.4 A total of 91 hard copy advice session questionnaires were completed and submitted by participants with response rates varying across the four networks from 35% to 80%. The majority of the completed questionnaires were handed in by participants before they left the premises; some were posted on using pre-paid envelopes, particularly where the provider was working on an outreach basis and where there was no recognisable reception point for participants to hand in their completed document. The test results for the hard copy advice session questionnaire showed that participants did not have any apparent difficulty in completing the closed-response questions; however, only a minority of participants had responded to the open-ended questions. Interestingly, where responses to open-ended questions were given, the majority of these were from participants who had used the pre-paid envelope facility. The test results suggested that the second open-ended box in each of the two main sections to the hard copy advice session questionnaire ('*Did the advice session meet your particular needs?*' and 'Did the advice session make a difference for you?') did not generate any fresh responses and that the questionnaire could be further simplified by removing the second open-ended response box in each case.

5.5 The six-month survey instrument and users` notes were discussed with a broad range of advisers and providers from across all four networks. Few issues were raised and the feedback from colleagues was generally positive. However, it was suggested that additional data fields would need to be added to record the customer/participant reference number and the date(s), time(s) and the number of any unsuccessful telephone calls.

5.6 At a project steering group meeting in April 2008, the consortium reviewed the findings from the testing phase and agreed further modifications to the main survey instruments to enable iCeGS to prepare the finalised pilot instruments. The finalised pilot survey instruments are shown as Appendix 3. The further modifications to the hard copy advice session questionnaire included:-

- simplification of the layout and language of the '*Did the advice session make a difference for you?*' series of questions;
- reduction of the two open-ended boxes in the two main questionnaire sections to just one in each case; and,
- making use of the resulting additional space by enlarging the font size overall.

The modifications to the six-month survey focussed upon the survey instrument and included:-

- the addition of the extra data fields indicated above;
- the addition of a data field to capture qualification details for differentiated service users as required by the LSC 2008/2009 service delivery specification; and,
- re-phrasing of the survey question headings to reflect the more flexible nature of the users` notes.

Where next?

5.7 The consortium agreed that each of the four networks would *implement* the pilot framework, including the finalised pilot survey instruments, during the period May to July, 2008. Exactly how the new framework would be implemented after July 2008 would depend upon which provider would be successful in being awarded the main contract for nextstep delivery in the whole of the North East region. Whatever happens after July, 2008, it was agreed that the new framework would be used by the Connexions Hub Services in Tyne and Wear within the context of an existing European Social Fund (ESF) enhanced IAG contract due to be completed by December, 2010.

5.8 It was also agreed that there would be a number of outstanding issues associated with the implementation of the framework that would be need to be resolved by the successful regional main contractor, post-July 2008. These include:-

- the need to reconcile the data collection requirements of the framework with the main contractor`s client database and the data recording collection arrangements of the sub-contractor providers;
- the setting of the percentages for the proposed performance indicators based upon past performance and other contextual factors;
- decisions about exactly which staff would be responsible for data collection, including customer/participant follow-up; and
- the nature and extent of the longitudinal tracking of a selected sample of participants to provide more in-depth case study material.

5.9 Key lessons learned from this research and development project include positive benefits accumulated over a relatively short period of time through shared dialogue within and between the networks. This is pertinent in relation to involving those responsible for delivering IAG to identify, agree and apply key performance indicators to assess the impact of service delivery. iCeGS has worked closely with practitioners and managers at the sharp end of delivery in the North East region in order to help explain:-

> *'We can't have full knowledge all at once. We must start by believing; then afterwards we may be led on to master the evidence for ourselves'* St Thomas Aquinas.

The majority of colleagues in the North East region confirmed they believe in the need to measure the impact of nextstep career advice but have had limited opportunities to develop this particular aspect of their work. In most cases, practitioners and managers highlighted a strong desire to capture evidence on impact in a more systematic and meaningful way. This project has energised nextstep practitioners and managers to focus more on how best to collect data systematically so that results can feed into both policy and practice developments at a local, regional and national level.

5.10 A key lesson learned from this research process is the need for policy-makers and managers to move beyond 'simple explanation of the rationale for data collection' towards a more 'inclusive practitioner/ manager approach' whereby individuals learn more about the complexity and challenges associated with measuring the impact of services and, in particular, the benefits of building the evidence-base for careers work. This will require continuous professional development (CPD) activities based on this particular theme, designed to enable individuals to recognise the limitations of certain approaches as well as the opportunities that can be accrued through more innovative approaches to data collection, client follow-up and reporting mechanisms.

5.11 The overall aim is to develop improved datasets over time as well as supporting professionals to learn new strategies and techniques for building the evidence-base for their clients, policy-makers and, most importantly, themselves.

Appendix 1: Similarities and differences between the profile of the networks and their data collection procedures

Tees Valley (IGEN)	Durham (CFBT)	Tyne and Wear; and Northumberland (Connexions Tyne and Wear)
Network profile 11/12 sub-contractor providers; all but one matrix accredited; most fairly small providers including voluntary and community organisations and some specialist providers; colleges broadly absent because of double funding issues; also includes a team of 4/5 IGEN advisers; all advisers qualified to NVQ 3 as a minimum (or working towards); funded for 4,000 + advice session per year.	***Network profile*** 14 sub-contractor providers; all matrix accredited; mix similar to Tees Valley but includes two colleges; also includes a team of 6 CFBT advisers; all advisers qualified to NVQ 3 as a minimum (or working towards); funded for 4,000 + advice session per year.	***Network profile*** Tyne and Wear: 18/20 sub-contractor providers; all but one matrix accredited; mix includes small community voluntary organisations and large county-wide organisations; includes a team of 10 FTE Connexions advisers; funded for 7,000 + advice session per year. Northumberland: 18/20 sub-contractor providers; all but one matrix accredited; mix includes small community voluntary organisations; includes one part-time Connexions adviser; funded for 2,000 + advice session per year. All advisers qualified to NVQ 3 as a minimum (or working towards).
Client data collection Paper form at advice session (Service Delivery Form) maintained and kept by providers. Key data from form entered directly onto web-based system (IGEN own system aspire.net). Matched funding used by LSC requires client signature on form.	***Client data collection*** Paper form at advice session (Client Contact Form) maintained and kept by providers. Key data from form entered directly onto web-based system (CFBT own system 'Tracker'). Matched funding used by LSC requires client signature on form.	***Client data collection*** No requirement to use a paper form (though Connexions provide a template if providers wish to use it) and providers can enter data directly into web-based system ('Solid state' provided by 3rd party IT company). Understood that different funding arrangement by LSC means client signature on a form is not required.
Client tracking/follow-up All providers are required to follow-up all advice clients at one month and six months after the advice session. Carried out by phone by same adviser thereby providing the opportunity for continued advice. Questions cover progression and impact measures only. Guidance notes provided but no standard scripts used. When each adviser logs on to web-based system it lists those clients still to be contacted and provides an action prompt.	***Client tracking/follow-up*** All providers are required to follow-up all advice clients at six months only, after the advice session. Carried out by phone by different adviser capturing satisfaction rating and details about action plans in addition to progression data. Guidance notes provided but no standard scripts used. Prompts to remind advisers of clients yet to be contacted are more paper-based compared with other networks.	***Client tracking/follow-up*** All providers are required to follow-up all advice clients at six months only, after the advice session. Carried out mainly by phone by same adviser. After 3rd unsuccessful attempt to make phone contact a form is posted to client for response. Questions cover progression and impact measures only. Guidance notes provided but no standard scripts used. When each adviser logs on to web-based system it lists those clients still to be contacted and provides an action prompt.

Monitoring of satisfaction ratings and action plans These issues are not included in the one month and six month follow-up. Instead, there is a 'Quality week' every 6 months during which all clients are surveyed by questionnaire at advice session; results analysed by independent consultants. Audit team carry out random sampling of action plans and compare to Action Plan data on ASPIRE.	**Monitoring of satisfaction ratings and action plans** These issues are included in the six month follow-up as detailed above. Also, an instant feedback form is issued at the point of advice as an additional means of gauging satisfaction with service.	**Monitoring of satisfaction ratings and action plans** These issues are not included in the six month follow-up. Satisfaction postcard given to client at advice session (used to be part of follow-up but separated out in the interests of impartiality). Action plans submitted to Connexions each month and these are sampled for quality. Details from action plans are entered onto web-based system but progress of client implementation of action plans is not monitored or followed-up.
Quality assurance and provider reviews Sample of paper-based forms are checked against online database as part of an annual audit of providers. Monthly review with feedback given on quality and quantity of data submitted by providers. Sample of advice sessions are observed (but not follow-up telephone contacts).	**Quality assurance and provider reviews** Annual provider reviews including targets, data quality and quantity, action planning etc. 6th month self-assessments to be introduced. Monthly feedback to providers. Sample of advice sessions are observed (but not follow-up telephone contacts).	**Quality assurance and provider reviews** Every 4 months provider reviews using an 18 point template including targets, impact data, satisfaction ratings etc. Monthly quantitative monitoring of targets, data submitted etc. Sample of advice sessions are observed (but not follow-up telephone contacts).
All main contractors are of the opinion that there is variability of performance amongst providers in terms of:- • the extent to which all advice clients are adequately followed up; • quality of data submitted sometimes linked to data competence; • the % of clients progressing to a positive outcome within 6 months (though stressed that this variation may be explained by external factors such as the nature of the different client groups targeted by different providers.)	**All main contractors are of the opinion that there is variability of performance amongst providers in terms of:-** • the extent to which all advice clients are adequately followed up; • quality of data submitted sometimes linked to data competence; • the % of clients progressing to a positive outcome within 6 months (though stressed that this variation may be explained by external factors such as the nature of the different client groups targeted by different providers.)	**All main contractors are of the opinion that there is variability of performance amongst providers in terms of:-** • the extent to which all advice clients are adequately followed up; • quality of data submitted sometimes linked to data competence; • the % of clients progressing to a positive outcome within 6 months (though stressed that this variation may be explained by external factors such as the nature of the different client groups targeted by different providers.)

Appendix 2: Summary of North East networks` key forms and documents

Durham

1. Client contact form:- completed at advice session to capture client characteristics and updated at follow-up to capture transitions impact data; key data extracted and entered onto online system (as per Tees Valley).

2. Contractors' monthly information return form:- summarises key throughput data for main contractor; includes number of sessions, number of follow-ups etc.

3. Client feedback form:- action plan details entered following advice session and form completed at follow-up over telephone; captures: action plans carried out; transition impact data; ease of access to service; satisfaction ratings.

4. Client advice/guidance session evaluation card:- given at point of service; captures: What have you learnt? What do you need to do next? How confident are you moving forward; would you recommend service?

5. Follow-up guidance notes: clear guidance to advisers and sub-contractors of importance of follow-up and what is required

Tees Valley

1. Client contact form:- completed at advice session to capture client characteristics and updated at follow-up to capture transitions impact data; key data extracted and entered onto online system (as per Durham).

2. Client questionnaire:- completed by all clients during 'quality week' (every six months) captures: whether the service provided the required information and whether the adviser understood their needs; new skills learnt and any barriers overcome as a result of service; usefulness of action plan and whether likely to carry out; helpfulness of adviser and whether able to recommend service; suggested improvements.

3. Guidance notes for client contact form:- clear guidance to advisers of how to complete contact form, including follow-up impact data.

Tyne and Wear and Northumberland

1. Client contact details:- in the main entered directly onto online system (paper form similar to Tees Valley and Durham is available if sub-contractors wish to use it); client characteristics details captured at advice session and further details of transitions captured at follow-up. Also, permission to contact client again for follow-up is requested at advice session and recorded.

2. Feedback postcard:- given at advice session; captures satisfaction rating and any suggestions for improvements to service.

3. Where are we? Postal form used to follow-up clients if contact cannot be made directly by telephone and entered directly into online system; captures transitions data only.

4. Standard procedures sheets:- a number of these are provided to guide and instruct the sub-contractors; most relevant to this project are those relating to follow-up and action plans.

5. Evaluation questionnaires:- used with all advice clients in 2005/06; recorded, amongst other things, what clients report in terms of the help received with career planning, opportunity awareness, skills acquisition including application skills, and self-knowledge/self-confidence.

Appendix 3: Main survey instruments piloted between May - July, 2008

a) Hard copy questionnaire given to participants at the conclusion of the advice session

Client name
Client D.O.B.
Provider ref.

Above client details to be entered in advance by the Adviser

Advice session questionnaire

Can you help us to improve our services?
Please be reassured that any information you give will be treated in the strictest confidence and will only be used for the purposes of our research

Q1 Did the advice session meet your particular needs?

Please answer the questions below by ticking the appropriate boxes:

	Yes, definitely	*Yes, to some extent*	*No*	*Not sure*
Was it easy to find out about our organisation?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Was the adviser welcoming and friendly?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Did you feel that the adviser understood your needs?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Did you feel that your needs were met?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Overall, were you satisfied with the advice session?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Would you recommend the advice service to a friend?	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please tell us about anything you think we should do to improve our service:

Q2 **Did the advice session make a difference for you?**
Please agree or disagree with the statements below by ticking the appropriate boxes:

As a result of the advice session, I`m more aware of:

	Agree	*Partly agree*	*Don't agree*	*Not sure*	*Not applicable*
Possible options for learning or for work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My personal learning and work goals	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
What I need to do next to achieve my personal learning and work goals	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
How to get further information if I need it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Any financial costs involved in trying to achieve my personal learning and work goals	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Any financial support that might be available to me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My skills and strengths	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The skills I need to develop	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Also: As a result of the advice session, I`m more confident about moving forward with my personal learning and work goals	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

If you have any further information, or examples, of how the advice session made a difference, please tell us:

Q3 **Are you willing for us to contact you in six months` time to see how you are getting on?** Please tick the appropriate box:
Yes.................................. ☐ *No*.................................. ☐

Appendix 3: Main survey instruments piloted between May - July, 2008

b) Six-month follow-up interview guide and record form

Six-month follow-up interview guide and record form

Interviewer guidance notes

It is important that all of the questions are answered, though exactly how they are put to the customer can vary depending upon the circumstances and their background. For example, although the customer`s current circumstances should be accurately recorded by ticking one or more of the boxes in 1. below, for many it would not be appropriate simply to read out the categories to them by 'rote'. It may be more appropriate to have a general conversation with them along the lines of (for example) 'I notice you were looking for a job six months ago. Did you have any luck? What are you doing now?' As the conversation progresses it will become clear as to which boxes you should tick on behalf of the customer.

It is also important to stress that involvement in the survey is voluntary and the information given will be treated confidentially. Any data collected will be stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act and will be reported anonymously.

Bearing in mind that all participants are different, and that you need to be flexible in your approach, the following is offered as a possible starting point for the interview – please adapt as you think appropriate.

Suggested introduction

'Good morning/afternoon/evening. My name is.............. and I'm calling on behalf of .... to ask about the interview you had with an adviser at ..... on......You may remember that when you had your interview you gave us permission to contact you. This is a voluntary survey and you can, of course, change your mind and not take part.

Are you happy for me to continue? Thank you; this survey will take only a few minutes and your answers may help us to improve our services and enable .... to identify and share good practice. Let me re-assure you that all the information you give will be treated anonymously and confidentially and any data we collect is stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

There are several short questions covering how your learning and/or work circumstances may have changed during the last six-months. Please ask me to repeat any question if necessary. If it's OK, first of all I`d like to ask you.........'

Suggested ending

'Thanks for telling me about what`s been happening in the last six months. I`d like to finish by asking you about any difficulties you may have been experiencing in carrying out your personal learning and work plans and whether there`s anything more we might be able to do to help......'

(N.B Six month follow-up abandoned for any participants where three unsuccessful attempts at contact are made.)				
Customer name:				
Customer date of birth:				
Customer telephone number:				
Unique learner number (if applicable):				
Provider identifier:				
Date of advice session:				
Action plan available to person carrying out follow-up?			Yes	No
Insert date(s) and tick appropriate contact box(es)	Date	Made contact	Did not make contact	
First attempted contact:				
Second attempted contact:				
Third attempted contact:				

1. Please discuss with the customer how their circumstances may have changed during the last six months and record their CURRENT circumstances by ticking one or more of the following boxes:

Was unemployed but now working part-time		Entered Higher Education	
Was unemployed but now working full-time		Entered voluntary work	
Has become unemployed or remains unemployed		Entered full-time education or training	
Was unemployed, found PT/FT work, but has become unemployed again		Entered part-time education or training	
Continued in employment		Started a short course	
Remains employed but has moved to better/ different job		Entered skills for life training	
Has become self-employed		Continuing existing programme of learning	
Entered Further Education		Entered personal & community development learning	
Other career–related change (please specify):			

If started learning/training programme, please name course/qualification aim and indicate whether full or part-time:		F.T		P.T	
If completed learning/training programme, please name course/qualification aim and indicate if qualified to a higher level:		Higher level? Yes		No	

2. If the customer`s circumstances have changed for the better (for example, by moving into work, learning/training, and/or voluntary work) please discuss how important they thought the advice session might have been in helping to bring this about. Please tick the appropriate box. You may wish to introduce the boxes by saying: "on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is 'Not important' and 4 is 'Very important'…..

Please note: "Not applicable" should be ticked if the customer`s circumstances have not changed for the better.

Very important (4)		Important (3)		Not very important (2)		Not important (1)		Not sure		Not applicable	

3. If the customer believes that the advice session was an important factor in bringing about changes, please discuss and record any examples of exactly how the session helped to do this. Examples might include: by clarifying goals; by increasing confidence and motivation; by sign-posting to the relevant information, etc:

4 Please discuss with the customer any barriers that might have hindered them in trying to carry out their personal learning and work plans. Please tick the appropriate box.

Finance		Child-care		Health-related issues		Personal	

Other (please specify):

5. Please discuss with the customer the extent of their progress in carrying out any actions agreed at the advice session. Please tick the appropriate box. You may wish to introduce the boxes by saying: "on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is 'Complete progress' and 4 is 'No progress'….."

Complete progress (4)		Much progress (3)		Some progress (2)		No progress (1)		Not sure	

6. (This question is optional and is dependent upon each provider`s capacity.) Please ask the customer whether there is any more information or advice we could provide that might help them in carrying out their personal learning and work plans.	Yes		No	

If "yes" please provide details and direct/advise customer as appropriate dependent upon the relevant provider`s arrangements:

7. Please explain to the customer that we would like to follow-up a small cross-section of our participants over a longer time-scale. Ask them whether, in principle, they would be willing for us to contact them again to see how they are getting on.	Yes, willing		No, not willing	

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