

National staff development model for LSC Staff, IAG Staff and Partnership Staff

Research report

Quality Development

Summary

This report outlines the findings and recommendations resulting from a national Quality Development Fund (QDF) project commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in July 2002. The aim of the project was to produce a development and training programme aimed at information advice and guidance (IAG) staff. Outputs from the project include a staff development framework on compact disk (CD), detailing the skills and knowledge required in various work areas within the IAG initiative and correlating these with specific training and development opportunities. This report also lists eight recommendations for further improvement put forward by the project team.

This report is of interest to IAG managers and coordinators in local Learning and Skills Councils (local LSCs), IAG partnerships and other IAG organisations.

The absence of a prescribed IAG staff development and competence model has meant that local partnerships have been empowered to come up with their own definitions of ‘competence’ and ‘experience’ locally. This flexibility has been enhanced by the promulgation of the matrix standard and its predecessor which state that ‘staff competence and the support they are given are sufficient to deliver the service’ but intentionally does not define what competencies are required to deliver IAG.

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The aim of this project was to develop a comprehensive competence-based training pack for IAG delivery staff, front-line and support staff in delivery organisations, IAG coordinators/managers and LSC staff involved in the initiative.

There is a wide range of benchmarks for staff competence in place across IAG partnerships – some require a national vocational qualification at level 3 or 4 for specific levels of delivery, for example. Whilst this is a laudable policy, it can have an adverse effect on widening representation of agencies within the IAG partnership by excluding staff whose competence may be appropriate for delivering information and advice.

Section 1: Introduction and Background

Introduction

1 This is the report of a national Quality Development Fund (QDF) project: A National Staff Development Model for Learning and Skills Council Staff, Information Advice and Guidance Staff and Partnership Staff. The project was commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in July 2002, and is one of five national QDF projects that were announced in a prospectus issued in June 2002, inviting competitive tenders from a range of organisations.

Project Rationale

2 The prospectus for the national QDF projects identified a number of reasons for commissioning this project, and research and feedback from information advice and guidance partnerships (IAG partnerships) have identified a number of issues relating to staff competence that need addressing.

3 There is a wide range of benchmarks for staff competence in place across

IAG partnerships – some require a national vocational qualification (NVQ) at Level 3 or Level 4 for specific levels of delivery, for example. Whilst this is in one sense a laudable policy, it can have an adverse effect on widening the representation of agencies in the IAG partnership by excluding staff whose competence may be appropriate for delivering information and advice.

4 There is also the possibility that the national shortage of IAG staff is not helped by the fact that in some areas overqualified staff are delivering information and advice only and may be being diverted from delivering guidance.

Most of the development offered by IAG partnerships has been for delivery staff but it is equally important that others, such as IAG coordinators and managers have access to appropriate opportunities.

5 It is likely that there are significant differences in the amount and range of staff training and development being offered in different areas.

6 Most of the development offered by IAG partnerships has been for delivery staff, but it is equally important that others, such as IAG coordinators and managers, have access to appropriate opportunities.

7 Finally, given the wide range of backgrounds from which LSC staff come, it was important that they were included in any framework that emerged from the project.

Aim of the Project

8 The aim of the project, as specified in the prospectus, was:

to develop a comprehensive competence based training pack for IAG delivery staff, front-line and support staff in delivery organisations, IAG coordinators/managers and LSC staff involved in the IAG initiative.

Objectives

9 The objectives of the project were:

- to research job roles and required competences of staff involved in the IAG initiative;
- to research development work already undertaken by the Department for Education and Skills and local LSCs, and planned for local QDF projects, on the competences and development needs of IAG staff and others;
- to research appropriate competence-based qualifications or units currently available that match required competences; and
- to develop open-learning materials as part of a progressive, innovative training programme for IAG staff, linked to the requirements of the **matrix** Standard for information advice and guidance services and to appropriate NVQ units.

Outputs

10 The projected outputs included a CD containing the development programme, to include as a minimum:

- an introduction to IAG and to the IAG initiative;
- sections covering each element of the initiative and the key players and background policy;
- descriptions of the range of roles carried out by people involved in the initiative;
- a summary of the key points of relevant legislation;
- a self-assessment and training-needs analysis facility;
- a step-by-step development progression route for interested staff, linked to appropriate competence units; and
- information on accreditation of competence.

11 Work began on the project in August 2002 and continued until March 2003.

Section 2: Project Methodology

Start-up

12 The consultants (Merlin Minds) attended a start-up meeting with the LSC in Coventry in August 2002, to agree methodologies and to fine-tune proposed activities. As a result of this meeting, some slight changes were made to the project plan to reflect the possibility that a greater number of dissemination activities might be required.

13 In the event, the dissemination activity has been limited to a presentation at the National IAG Conference, which is covered in more detail below.

Desk Research

14 During the remainder of August and into September, the consultants carried out desk research on a range of materials, including: the DfES and Employment National Training Organisation (EMPNTO) packs for coordinators, managers and front-line staff; local LSC research into the job roles within their IAG partnerships; and a mapping exercise known as the IAG Checklist Project, carried out by the Suffolk IAG Partnership on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).

15 The consultants trawled local LSC quarterly reports on the IAG initiative and isolated all references to staff development activity; they also had access to a list of local QDF projects, identifying those areas that had secured funding for activity relating to staff development.

Local Staff Development Quality Development Fund Projects Meeting

16 In October 2002, a consultant visited the local QDF project run by Connexions West of England in Bristol for LSC West of England. As a result of discussions and discoveries at this meeting, the consultants called a meeting in Sheffield in January for a number of other local QDF projects majoring on staff development to exchange information and to confirm that there was no overlap between national and local project work.

It was no surprise that the survey confirmed that hardly any coordinators had received developments for their specific job

role or elements thereof.

Survey of Information Advice and Guidance Partnerships

17 Over a period of weeks during October and November, consultants carried out a telephone survey of IAG partnerships, eliciting responses from 68 out of 75. The aim was to pick up on activity relating to staff training and development in IAG partnerships not recorded in any of the documentation referred to above, and to elicit the IAG partnerships' plans in this respect for the financial year 2003-04.

Table 1: The most popular staff development topics planned for 2003/04, taken from a telephone survey of IAG partnerships.

Subject	No. of IAG partnerships
NVQ in Guidance and Advice at Level 3	49
Open College Network	31
Basic skills	39
Referral	29
Disability awareness	25
Introduction to IAG	24
Refugees or asylum seekers	20
Equal opportunities	20

18 The IAG partnership survey confirmed many of the original views about the topics on which IAG partnership staff development tends to concentrate. Table 1 shows the most common subjects: 49 IAG partnerships offer an NVQ in Advice and Guidance at Level 3 (a number offer it at Level 2 and Level 4 but not to the same degree). The next most popular is the Open College Network qualification. The research found that some IAG partnerships have produced extremely comprehensive support materials in this area, including learning packs and CDs.

19 The total number of staff development topics identified in this survey came to almost 50, ranging from full qualifications to one- or two-day workshops. A number of IAG partnerships offer development on specific issues, such as hearing and sight problems, dyslexia, mental health problems and HIV and AIDS. Some IAG partnerships provide a wide range of development opportunities for their members, but the consultant team was a little surprised at some of the findings – for example, only 39 out of 68 were offering support for accreditation in the **matrix** Standard.

20 It was no surprise that the survey confirmed that hardly any coordinators had received development for their specific job role or elements thereof, and only

six IAG partnerships provide any leadership or management training.

21 The full survey outcomes are at Annex A of the CD.

Survey of Local Learning and Skills Council Information Advice and Guidance Contract Managers

22 During December 2002, consultants carried out a telephone survey of local LSC IAG contract managers, receiving responses from 33 out of 47. The aim was to identify what they felt were the essential skills and knowledge required for carrying out the role of an IAG contract manager. The most common responses appear in Table 2.

Table 2: Essential skills and knowledge required by IAG contract managers, taken from a telephone survey of local LSCs.

Skill or knowledge	No. of contract managers
Understanding of IAG and IAG partnerships and delivery models	34
Communication or presentation skills	27
Interpersonal and relationship management skills	25
Contract management	23
Business planning experience	19
Finance or accountancy or budgeting skills	18

23 Of those surveyed, few of the contract managers had an IAG background, although many had contract management experience. No one had received any specific development before taking on the IAG remit. There was high consistency across the responses, with a mix of personal qualities and job skills.

24 The full survey responses are at Annex B of the CD.

Additional Fieldwork

25 The consultants carried out an additional brief research project with a small number of IAG partnerships to ascertain the suitability of the current methodology for addressing network members' staff development issues and to elicit the added value of relevant documents and materials as tools for supporting staff development. The outcomes provided valuable additional data for the project.

26 The Open College Network training in Information Skills for Front-line Staff

is popular and seen as more appropriate for front-line staff than the NVQ at Level 2.

27 Links between network training programmes and the 10 elements of the **matrix** Standard are clear.

28 Bite-sized training in guidance models and units of the NVQ is in demand from network members, but IAG partnerships are more likely to provide or insist on full NVQs rather than customised needs based training.

29 The DfES and the EMPNTO publications are well liked but all too often remain on the shelf – IAG partnerships need reminding of their existence and the wealth of quality material they contain. However, the content for front-line staff is seen as less strong than other materials.

30 The introduction of the continuous professional development (CPD) pilot is welcomed as a means of demonstrating current competence and encouraging continuous improvement through reflective practice. (The Institute of Career Guidance had asked a number of individuals to participate in a pilot, which centred on the formalised planning and recording of CPD activities for more experienced practitioners across the sector. The outcomes have not yet been published.)

Steering Group Meetings

31 Throughout the project, the consultants had the resource of a steering group to help with the project implementation. This group comprised IAG coordinators, local LSC IAG contract managers and national LSC staff. The group met in September 2002 (Bristol), December 2002 (Gloucester) and January 2003 (Central London), revolving the chairship according to location. The project team is extremely grateful for the group's support and advice as the project has progressed.

Development Work

32 Work began in earnest in December 2002 once the main research had been completed. The skills and knowledge matrices and the first draft of the proposed framework were presented to the steering group at its January 2003 meeting. The proposal to base the framework on the skills and knowledge checklists was unanimously approved, but the steering group also requested that the checklists incorporate a competence unit approach for those who wanted accreditation for their learning. Development work to complete the framework, mapping skills and knowledge to units of competence from a number of different awarding bodies, and to produce the supporting materials continued thereafter until the end of the project.

Dissemination

33 The consultants presented the outcomes of the research and unveiled the model framework at the National IAG Conference in Blackpool in February 2003. The outcomes were well received by the audience and feedback was sought to help improve the final outcomes. To date, no formal feedback has been received.

Outcomes

34 The staff development framework has now been presented to the LSC and the steering group. It comprises:

- an introduction to the framework, its origins and how to use it;
- a brief résumé of the IAG initiative;
- a list of job roles and accompanying definitions;
- a skills framework;
- a knowledge framework;
- a training needs analysis or personal development plan forms;
- skills development tables;
- knowledge development tables; and
- a development directory.

The introduction of the continuous professional development (CPD) pilot is welcomed as a means of demonstrating current competence and encouraging continuous improvement through reflective practice.

Section 3: Project Outcomes

Issues from the Surveys

35 The surveys highlighted a number of important issues.

36 There are no agreed national benchmarks for delivery of IAG, and the wide variety of training offered by IAG partnerships confirms this.

37 There are high levels of duplication across the whole range of topic areas being provided.

38 There are some worrying gaps in the national picture; for example, not every IAG partnership offers basic skills development or awareness raising about key agencies such as JobCentre Plus and Connexions.

39 One of the most notable gaps is in the lack of provision of opportunities for coordinators and managers, yet these are the groups of people who are in charge of directing and leading the development of IAG provision.

40 Furthermore, the lack of qualified vocational assessors could seriously inhibit efforts to train through a competence-based route enough practitioners to deliver increased volumes.

Solutions

41 The survey results led the consultants to conclude that a staff development framework should be based on a number of work areas and functions:

- IAG coordination;
- IAG management;
- front-line;
- information;
- advice;
- guidance;
- outreach development;
- training and development; and

- LSC IAG contract management.

42 Outreach development is included as a discrete area on the advice of a number of staff, including those operating local QDF projects dealing with staff development, who have identified aspects of this work that do not fit neatly into any box. In this framework, outreach development does not simply refer to delivery of IAG somewhere other than a main base, but brings in a host of other activities, such as community development, liaison with other agencies and looking after premises, that outreach work involves. Many IAG partnerships appeared to have someone with responsibility for training and development, and the consultants therefore felt this was worth including as a discrete work area.

Skills and Knowledge

43 When looking at the competences that are desirable for each work area, the consultant team and steering group agreed that using NVQs or units was not particularly helpful as a self assessment tool. Instead, the team devised lists of skills and knowledge – based entirely on the skills and knowledge areas identified by IAG partnerships and local LSCs as essential or desirable and on the development opportunities IAG partnerships said they offered – and assigned them to specific work areas. Sample skills include:

- action-planning;
- appraisal;
- assertiveness;
- budgeting;
- communication;
- counselling;
- enabling;
- facilitating groups;
- identifying client needs;
- liaising with other agencies;
- managing contracts;
- managing meetings;

- mentoring;
- promoting services;
- providing information;
- referral;
- setting objectives;
- using labour market information; and
- writing reports.

44 For example, topics such as assertiveness and communication are to be found across most categories, while writing reports could apply to coordinators, managers, training staff and outreach workers, and several work categories – such as coordinators, managers and outreach and training staff – may get involved in managing meetings.

45 A similar picture emerged when consultants looked at knowledge requirements. Staff in all categories need to know the basics of employment legislation and health and safety regulations, as well as equal opportunities, but mainly practitioners should be required to know such things as funding for learning, guidance theories and characteristics of difficult clients. Someone involved in facilitating groups needs to know about learning styles, as do practitioners responsible for in-depth interventions. Sample knowledge topics include:

- basic skills;
- career development loans;
- contract management;
- funding for learning;
- Deaf awareness;
- difficult clients;
- employment laws;
- equal opportunities;

- guidance theories;
- health and safety;
- higher education;
- jobsearch techniques;
- labour market information;
- **learndirect**;
- learning difficulties;
- learning styles;
- quality standards;
- sight impairment;
- substance abuse; and
- welfare rights.

Units of Competence Linked to Skills and Knowledge

46 The LSC West of England undertook a comprehensive mapping exercise of the IAG team against a range of NVQs. While the consultants and steering group do not feel that this exercise is completely transferable, concentrating as it does on very specific job roles, they felt it would be useful to provide guidelines within the framework and a mechanism for individuals to identify which NVQ units correlate with particular skills and knowledge.

Staff Development Framework

47 In the staff development framework, each work area is defined, so that individuals can identify where their job role fits, and is analysed as to the skills and knowledge required. Individuals can then use this information to carry out a self assessment and training needs analysis.

48 If some gaps in skills or knowledge are identified through this process, and the individual decides they need some form of training, they can use the framework to identify the type of NVQ units that would correlate to their development needs.

49 Units from a number of different awards are included in the framework:

- advice, guidance and advocacy;
- learning and development;
- personnel;
- management;
- customer service; and
- administration.

50 In the framework, skills are mapped to individual units, while knowledge is mapped to the appropriate standard as a whole, in recognition that underpinning knowledge permeates the entire award.

51 If the user prefers not to adopt the accredited route option, they can identify less formal development that might meet their needs.

52 The contents of the CD are rooted in the outcomes of the research into what IAG partnerships and others are actually doing. The idea was not to develop an idealistic model based on theory or good intentions, but to reflect and make the best use of what people are actually doing.

53 The aim of the CD is not to meet every possible training need, nor to include comprehensive training materials, but rather to act as a signposting and referral guide to development opportunities that might be appropriate for staff as they identify gaps in their skills and knowledge, whether for carrying out their current roles or to prepare them for another role within the IAG partnership.

54 The fact is that IAG partnerships throughout England have developed a very wide range of staff development opportunities in a huge variety of topics, and the aim is to help reduce 'wheel reinvention' by providing a comprehensive catalogue of development programmes around the country.

55 It is also important to note that the CD does not have a quality assurance purpose – the development opportunities referred to have not been evaluated or ranked in order of merit, value for money or otherwise. The idea is for staff or IAG coordinators to contact the provider or relevant IAG partnership and discuss the opportunity to decide whether it is appropriate for them, their staff or their network.

The staff development framework (published as a CD-ROM) allows individuals to identify where their job role fits and analyse the skills and knowledge required.

Section 4: Conclusions

56 The project has shown that the original rationale was soundly based.

Information Advice and Guidance Staff

57 One of the clear outcomes has been the need to provide IAG partnership managers and coordinators with a steer on staff competences and appropriate training and qualifications. Many coordinators commented on the difficulty of advising employers and organisations on the preferred route for their staff and that at the sharp end there is 'much ambiguity and uncertainty'.

58 The absence of a prescribed IAG staff development and competence model has meant that local IAG partnerships have been empowered to come up with their own definitions of 'competence' and 'experience' locally. This flexibility has been enhanced by the promulgation of the **matrix** Standard and the Guidance Council Quality Standards, which state that 'staff competence and the support they are given are sufficient to deliver the service' but intentionally does not define what competences are required to deliver IAG.

59 The result of this flexible stance is that IAG partnership coordinators have either:

- taken their partnership down a traditional NVQ at Level 2, Level 3 and Level 4 route with progression links built in and encouraged; or
- sought out customised solutions with a flexible bite-sized delivery mechanism of talk and chalk delivery coupled with distance-learning materials.

60 The project has provided the LSC with a national picture made up of local and, in some cases, regional staff development models. This may seem appropriate under the 'local is best' approach, but in reality results in a wide disparity amongst IAG partnerships in approach, development offered and staff to whom it is available.

61 The survey also confirmed the suspected lack of development opportunities for IAG coordinators, particularly in key areas such as project management and business-planning.

Local Learning and Skills Council Staff

62 The survey of 34 local LSC contract managers highlighted a serious situation with regard to people in this role and the development they had received for undertaking their role as contract managers for the IAG initiative. Indeed, none of the respondents had received any training for this specific task, although

it is fair to say that for significant numbers their background and experience had served them well enough in helping them to carry out certain aspects of their job. For example, 20 respondents referred to experience in contract or project management, and nine came from a Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) background, which probably had furnished them with expertise in this area. A further 15 respondents referred to having experience in IAG, in one form or another, and two or three responses suggest backgrounds more or less likely to provide some kind of helpful contribution to the skills and knowledge needs identified in the survey.

63 However, the probable impact of this somewhat mixed-bag of experiences is a highly variable approach to the management of the IAG initiative between different local LSCs, including a range of different perceptions amongst contract managers of precisely what their role entails.

64 As the DfES and the LSC tighten the requirements of IAG partnerships to deliver to targets across a range of output categories, the role of the local LSC contract manager as promoter, supporter, advocate, planner and so on, will become increasingly important if the LSC is to meet its targets for the initiative at national level.

65 Local LSC respondents to the survey have recognised this and have produced a comprehensive list of skills and knowledge considered essential, and a somewhat shorter list of skills and knowledge thought to be desirable, for them to carry out their roles.

66 As with IAG coordinators, it is important to identify appropriate development opportunities for local LSC IAG contract managers, in line with the skills and knowledge they have identified, and to ensure that everyone in this role has access to those opportunities.

Future Needs

67 The sector needs several things. These are:

- direction from the DfES and LSC on the advice and guidance qualification framework, and its role in the delivery of IAG;
- harmonisation of professional qualifications or training in IAG
- pooling of the vast range of materials that exists so they become streamlined and rationalised;
- increased flexibility and responsiveness from learning suppliers offering units of NVQs that are customised to job roles, something that will become more of an issue as we work with industry to the **matrix** Standard and

employers expect the flexibility to develop skills quickly for a short-term goal;

- address the national shortage of qualified IAG practitioners through competency-based training, which will imply a need for an increase in the availability of qualified assessors;
- increased development opportunities for IAG coordinators to meet the growing demands that individuals face in their evolving job roles;
- urgent action to address the significant gaps in training opportunities for IAG staff;
- development opportunities to fill the apparent gaps in provision, including those in key knowledge areas, such as **matrix** Standard accreditation, disability awareness, Connexions, workforce development, further education and higher education.

Recommendations

68 The staff development framework that has resulted from this project offers a good basis for improved harmonisation, and therefore staff quality, and the CD should be a useful tool for all involved in the initiative. However, more development work is needed to make further improvements, detailed in the following recommendations.

Recommendation 1

69 Before being universally distributed, the CD should be briefly piloted amongst a limited number of local LSCs and IAG partnerships, to test its value, relevance and effectiveness, and for them to propose improvements if necessary.

Recommendation 2

70 Consideration should be given to enhancing the CD from its current 'flat' status to full interactivity, once the pilot work recommended above has been carried out. The interactive CD should be launched formally and distributed through local LSCs and IAG coordinators to IAG partnership members for widespread use and evaluation, and mechanisms should be established to capture feedback and proposals for improvement, updating and so on.

Recommendation 3

71 The local QDF projects have produced useful outcomes, and these outputs are to be brought together and published in 2003. Local LSCs and IAG

partnerships should be strongly encouraged to take heed of the aggregated outcomes in relation to staff development and to construct robust and valid staff development programmes for IAG partnership members and others.

Recommendation 4

72 Compatibility between the staff development framework and other frameworks, such as TANGO, should be explored. (TANGO, a software programme developed by Leicestershire Careers and Connexions, is a training needs analysis (TNA) tool aimed at guidance practitioners. It allows the user to explore their job role, identify appropriate competence units to support the role and enable them to carry out a TNA and to decide whether development is required or if immediate accreditation is feasible. Its approach is not dissimilar to the LSC staff development framework in concept, but it relates solely to accredited units.) Specifically, the staff development framework must take cognisance of the work currently being undertaken for the DfES to map IAG competences and numbers of staff qualified, and of the outcomes of the current consultation exercise on a national policy framework for IAG for adults, which includes proposals for a national staff development centre.

Recommendation 5

73 The surveys showed that while there is a wealth of provision in circulation, there may be gaps in meeting certain skill and knowledge needs, and these must be identified and appropriate materials developed to meet them.

Recommendation 6

74 The LSC should consider establishing a short-term reference group, which would have the task of progressing the harmonisation issue, with particular reference to:

- the importance of not reinventing or duplicating the development of training opportunities and materials;
- the quality and fitness for purpose of provision;
- issues of access and physical availability, including arrangements for good practice sharing between IAG partnerships; and
- the development of a more responsive supply market.

Recommendation 7

75 The LSC should consider urgently commissioning an induction programme for local LSC IAG managers, covering the range of responsibilities, skills and knowledge requirements identified by LSC respondents.

Recommendation 8

76 Local LSCs should be encouraged to take a particular interest in the staff development plans included in partnership business plans, to ensure development is in accordance with identified need and the competence requirements set out in the LSC's Funding Guidance, and to encourage proactivity by IAG partnerships in selecting and delivering development opportunities for staff at all levels of the partnership.

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