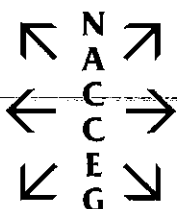


The Learning Society

The Role of Adult Guidance



Report on a CRAC/NICEC conference held on 11 June 1996 at the Commonwealth Conference and Events Centre, London

sponsored by the Department for Education and Employment, and supported by the Guidance Council (NACCEG)

NICEC

The National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling is a network organisation sponsored by CRAC. It conducts applied research and development work related to guidance in educational institutions and in work and community settings. Its aim is to develop theory, inform policy and enhance practice through staff development, organisation development, curriculum development, consultancy and research.

CRAC

The Careers Research and Advisory Centre is a registered educational charity and independent development agency founded in 1964. Its education and training programmes, publications and sponsored projects provide links between the worlds of education and employment.

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This conference was held to review and inform developments in adult guidance. It came at a pivotal moment: the government response to the consultation paper on lifetime learning was about to be published and the Guidance Council's consultation paper on a national strategy for adult guidance had recently been issued. The event was designed at a strategic level, aiming to influence the policy and direction of existing practice and procedure and to suggest realistic possibilities for the future.

The conference was attended by 98 people representing careers services, TECs, further education, universities, the DFEE, and other agencies and organisations. It was addressed by James Paice MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, DFEE, and by Graham Hoyle, Chief Executive, Gloucestershire TEC, speaking as an Executive Committee member of the Guidance Council. There were two panels. The first represented the views of three key providers of adult guidance: Allister McGowan, President of the Institute of Careers Guidance; Ruth Gee, Chief Executive of the Association for Colleges; and Stephen Holt, Head of the Jobseeker Advice and Adjudication Division of the Employment Service. The second panel aimed to draw together the threads of the conference and consisted of: Felicity Everiss, Divisional Manager of Individual Commitment Division, DFEE; Sue Slipman, Director of the London TEC Council and Chair of the Advice, Guidance, Counselling and Psychotherapy Lead Body (AGCPLB); Stephen McNair, Associate Director of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE); and Lennie Gilham, Chair of the National Association for Educational Guidance for Adults (NAEGA). In workshops, participants focused on particular themes stimulated by presentations on innovative provision in adult guidance.

This report highlights and illustrates the key issues raised by the presenters and participants in plenary and workshop sessions, with pointers for future attention.

The report is written by Tricia Sharpe, CRAC. It does not necessarily represent the views of the project sponsor.

THE GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVE

The initial points made by James Paice, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, DFEE, connected adult guidance with lifelong learning. He reminded participants of the 1996 Adult Learners Week. In total 10,300 callers were helped, mostly by information on courses or on sources of possible funding support. Those who had *'more specific needs'* were put in touch with guidance services in their own areas – thus demonstrating the intimate and productive connection between learning and guidance. He highlighted that in the responses to the Department's consultation document on lifetime learning *'almost everyone felt that the universal availability of high quality, objective information, advice and guidance was a crucial factor in getting more people into learning, and to ensuring the subsequent effectiveness of that learning by, for example, helping to reduce drop-out'*.

The Minister pointed out that the economic case for guidance has been difficult to establish but that a study carried out by NICEC and the University of Hertfordshire shows that guidance has a significant impact on the likelihood of unemployed people taking up learning. This may be as a prelude to moving into employment or, once they are in work, as a means to open up more job opportunities.

The Minister supported a model which he described as *'comprising two distinct elements. First, we would have a core national service. This would deliver information and advice to agreed standards of service. It would be free to all. Secondly, there would be an extended service, offering additional facilities – with appropriate charging for those able to pay.'*

The foundation or core service would easily be accessible to all. It would provide information about learning and work opportunities including support facilities. It would offer people basic advice and support and 'diagnose' any further guidance needs they might have. It would provide 'signposting' to the full range of extended guidance services available in the area.

This core service would be supported by an extended guidance provision. This could offer the traditional one-to-one counselling, psychometric testing and possible help on the production of CVs.

These services would be charged for those in employment and able to pay. Special targeted groups, such as women returners, might receive some of these services free of charge or at subsidised rates.'

The Minister impressed that *'there is little prospect of a publicly funded universal entitlement to guidance'*. He mentioned that some provision managed by TECs operates on the *'free to enter, pay to stay'* basis and that he would like to see more examples of different charging models that work.

Key points from the Minister's speech

- Future economic, social and cultural benefits depend on lifetime learning
- Information, advice and guidance are central to participation in learning
- There needs to be a more coherent and consistent provision of adult guidance services, and not just for the unemployed
- Key areas to consider are funding, access and quality standards
- Quality standards are essential: the Guidance Council may help the government to facilitate this work
- The government supports the proposed two-tier model

ISSUES

▼ Guidance and lifelong learning

The title of the conference signalled an emerging shift in the role of guidance: away from the traditional model, which focused on transition from full-time education into employment, to a new approach where guidance underpins on-going personal and professional development. We have *'to construct our own careers'*. Success depends on our own initiative to grow our skills, knowledge and understanding and on external support to provide help both at critical moments and with the processes of career-related and lifelong learning. Guidance occupies a pivotal position.

It was pointed out that *'lifelong equals the length of life'* and perhaps we should be talking about all-age guidance, not adult guidance. The skills of career planning are now needed by all and our aim must be to weaken the distinction between work with young people and work with adults. The statutory system of entitlement for (mainly) young people tends to reinforce a split approach.

Questions were asked about what guidance is for. The final panel illustrated the complexity. Guidance was advocated with a mission to challenge economic exclusion – *'getting people out of ghettoised provision'* – and thus a vital strand of initiatives like the developing pan-London guidance network of public and private providers that is seeking to support lifelong learning through an integrated approach.

The same question could be asked of the outcomes of learning. The Department is looking at the evidence about what happens to those who are learning on benefits. There is also the possibility of looking at and piloting different ways of regulating what you can do while on benefit. The reassurance that connections are at last being made was warmly received.

▼ Demand for guidance

The 'pull' is being exerted by the competitiveness agenda: flexibility and high skill must characterise the labour market. Little reference was made to the wider policy context by participants. Their concerns were local and client-centred and focused on meeting the *'huge and growing market for adult guidance: the demand is self developing'*. A recent OECD study suggests an average of 5 or 6 job changes in a working life. In the UK, over 5 million people have a changed employment status annually. In addition, the demand for learning from adults is increasing. There is no longer a single point of guidance intervention between education and work: guidance has a role throughout.

Colleges and careers services are both juggling the difficulties of supply and demand. Adults are more demanding; if there is an inadequate response, providers can look ineffective. Clients who have had positive experiences of guidance are acting as marketeers for the service and are themselves coming back for more. Where promotional activity is undertaken, it is proving more successful at attracting women than men. One problem is to articulate what is being marketed: people do not understand or value guidance until they have experienced it. However, they do value information: where this is free, they can be drawn into enquiring about other services, including charged ones.

▼ A national strategy: the proposed model

The proposed model builds on that outlined in a consultation paper produced by the Guidance Council, which in turn builds on the model developed by NICEC with the TEC National Council.

The funding of the model was raised by many as a major concern. There is no doubt that charging will have to be *'grasped firmly'*. There were questions about the adequacy of the £10 million per annum estimated by the Guidance Council to fund the foundation level, as compared with the £200 million required to fund the Careers Service, for example. Some careers services counselled caution in going for the minimal model as, if it is funded through piecing together current disparate pockets of monies, it could actually reduce what is presently available.

There was debate about where the drive should be in the balance between national and local. Several participants asked if we are too far down the road for a uniform national model. Examples were given of successful TEC and careers service activity that has been up to three years in development. Others pointed out that it was highly likely that this provision would fit under the proposed strategic umbrella and would benefit from being seen to be aligned to it. The task will be to ensure that it meets whatever quality standards are agreed in order to be 'branded' or 'kitemarked'.

One focus of this discussion was the concept of the proposed helpline. Which should come first: local or national? Some preference was expressed for *'building the patchwork up from the bottom'* provided that the local service was founded on shared understanding and coherence. Others felt strongly that the start place is national because of the potential frustration of inventing *'one wheel to network all the local ones together'*. We were reminded of the example of Adult Learners Week where the helpline was national with effective referral to local resources.

It was pointed out that the Guidance Council consultation document is regarded as '*non-controversial*' but that we should not underestimate this as an achievement. It has required enormous effort over several years to reach this level of consensus. All participants were urged to make a written response to the Guidance Council, to endorse the proposals and to state their suggestions and concerns.

▼ Access and the 'front-line'

A complex set of issues was indicated by all presenters and many participants. Central was a concern about public perception. People do not respond when 'guidance' is advertised as they do not understand what it can do for them. Labels like 'adult guidance' can imply exclusiveness and have an alienating impact. One workshop leader neatly illustrated one result of mixed perception. When her guidance centre moved into a building that had a different whole function, she was visited by much the same people, but their questions, their talk and the way they used the facility were different. There was a plea for a national promotional campaign in plain English.

There were several illustrations of access being made as easy as possible. Some colleges, for example, have set up community access points that are open into the evenings and at weekends to provide materials and human support. One critical point here is the relationship of access to impartiality: it could be argued that colleges have incentives to recruit through outreach operations (see later).

It was felt that promotion is also needed to internal college customers. According to FEDA research into progression, their main sources of information were printed matter, followed by tutors and, at about 10%, the admissions/guidance unit. In the area of advice or guidance received, tutors gained the highest rating at 37%, with the admissions/guidance unit at 17%. Availability is clearly not the whole story.

A key question was the nature of the initial information and advice services provided to clients prior to in-depth specialist guidance provision. What should this 'front-line' consist of, and what should it be seeking to supply? Where does information and advice end and guidance begin, and who should be performing the diagnostic activity which assists clients with the identification of next steps? The Department is currently funding the development of a learning resource pack for staff in a range of organisations involved in front-line services to adults making enquiries about their learning, work or career options. It identifies two tiers of front-line activity, tier 1 being enquiry handling only, and tier 2 being initial diagnosis of client needs and responsibilities within this front-line activity to ensure effective transition for the client between different stages of the process.

The Employment Service believes it can make a significant contribution to the front-end aspects. It deals with over 8 million adults a year, around two-thirds of whom are claimants and one-third non-claimants, including the employed. It is embracing the changes required through the new Jobseekers' Allowance which will double the time able to be spent on advice and guidance. A new 'Labour Market System' will provide a database of clients and opportunities, initially focused on jobs and training opportunities but capable of encompassing other learning opportunities. Careers services and others have already expressed a wish to be given access to the system. The Employment Service is not underestimating the changes that the system will require in staff skills, and advisers are being retrained.

▼ Funding guidance

This issue is integral to the discussion of the proposed model as already illustrated. Currently the picture is of a patchwork, with some pieces well stitched and others tending to part at the seams. Sources accessed at present are listed in the box. They are varied and unstable; they limit future planning and securing them consumes management time; some rely on a match from somewhere else. Moreover, some funding available, for example to TECs, seems to be falling.

Careers services have been encouraged to offer and charge for additional services. Some use vouchers; others are paid on triggers such as completed action plans. There was debate about costs and clients: the cost that clients feel is reasonable (estimated at about £30), the marginal cost (about £60) and the real full cost (between £75-£100). It is in the careers services' advantage to retain the '*fuzzy edges*' around who does what and who pays for what, and to trade on the benefit of having infrastructure and fixed costs paid for under other headings.

Sources of funding (group brainstorm)

FEFC/HEFC funding
Local Authorities
Employment Service
Training for Work
DFEE Individual Commitment
Division (Gateways etc.)
National Development
Funding
DFEE Careers Service
contracts
College contracts
European Social Fund
Rural Challenge
Single Regeneration Budget
TEC discretionary funding/
surpluses
Libraries
Training Access Points
National Lottery
Clients: individuals and
companies
Charities and voluntary
organisations

The point was made that guidance needs to be part of a general learning strategy which therefore should be on the table at each bidding round, for example with the Single Regeneration Budget. It should identify target groups and also include imaginative approaches to encourage individuals to fund themselves.

▼ Quality standards

National standards in a quality framework were seen as pivotal to national recognition. We are at a crucial point. The Guidance Council is planning, hopefully with the support from DFEE funding, to commission development work to devise standards for each kind of guidance. Seven have been identified so far and the aim is to complete the work in the next year or so. All presenters and participants endorsed the importance of progress here.

Local groups are also working in this area, and there was a plea to share and build upon what has been done. In addition, other national organisations are putting frameworks in place to ensure client satisfaction. The Employment Service is making explicit what clients can expect, documenting processes, setting delivery standards, identifying and developing staff competences and setting in place a framework for continuous improvement. This too could potentially slot together with the work of the Guidance Council.

Concerns were expressed about implementation. How will it be done? Will 'enforcement' be by a TEC or a local provider? How will standards be used across networks? How can the credibility of standards be raised with employers?

The key point expressed in the final panel reinforced how central standards are to triggering funding. Investment is only likely where the 'punter' knows they are going to get the appropriate product. This applies to government just as much as to an individual.

▼ Impartiality

This is a thorny area and provoked the most dispute. College representatives particularly became heated and offered polarised views. Some believed that colleges can never be truly impartial and would not be perceived as such. The pressure of market forces precludes this happening and colleges are fooling themselves if they think they can evade it. Others felt deeply that impartiality is possible, though perhaps with a different interpretation: that guidance services could 'act as a college conscience' through maintaining a neutral position amongst own-college provision. Another group asserted that total impartiality was a reality with them, particularly those who are operating community 'one-stop shops'. They pointed to evidence of diverse action plans, for example audited by their TECs. They were sure this could be a strength and act as a marketing tool, as one person will recommend the service to another.

The question of 'guidance into what' was raised in relation to college provision. At what stage does impartiality cease to be a relevant concept? It was acknowledged that the situation is complex. It can be unfair in subtle ways, particularly if people are unsure and open to influence. In contrast, the Employment Service is explicit in its partiality, although it has no vested interests. It is about getting clients into work and they all understand this.

One of the final panel helpfully picked up this issue. He asked us to check 'what we mean and understand it properly'. The moral argument which impartiality used to represent is no longer applicable and the classification which we tend to employ of 'impartial' and 'partial' is 'the wrong division'. Others felt that 'independent' was the more useful term. There is more to uncover here.

▼ Providers and players

The point was made many times of the variety of needs reflected in the adult market. If guidance is genuinely about client-centredness, flexible responses are essential. Guidance has the benefit of being 'a tribe of activity' and so is well placed to operate through diversity.

The first panel presented three key suppliers: the careers service, colleges and the Employment Service. Employers were not represented, although their guidance role was referred to.

A 1995 ICG survey found from an 86% response that 93 out of 125 careers services offered some adult guidance outside their core contract, with 250,000 adults assisted annually. One in seven had withdrawn for financial or contractual reasons, with 41% experiencing a funding decrease and 40% a staffing decrease over the last two years. 37% charge some client groups and more plan to. A recent DFEE phone-around indicates that all but three careers services are now delivering some adult guidance.

Research into further education reveals that many people are turning to colleges because of the decrease in community provision. Colleges have increased their resources in this area to reflect better the needs of their students: over 70% are adults, the majority of whom are women, a mix of employed and unemployed, with a significant number part-time. However, there is inequality of provision across the country, particularly pre-entry and on-programme.

Adult guidance in colleges is supported by elements such as FEFC inspection, funding methodology and audit requirements and the entitlements of adults on vocational courses (although students are not always informed about this). But it could be hindered by the funding methodology which may inhibit impartiality, and also by service-level agreements which prioritise young people.

The Employment Service is the biggest provider of information, advice and guidance in the UK: in 1995, it conducted 8 million advice interviews, had 140 million client contacts and was successful at placing 2 million in jobs. Its preparations to become more effective in its enhanced role in delivering JSA were noted earlier.

In the final panel, a question was asked about guaranteeing coverage of provision. Do we need to have criteria and standards that specify what should be available in any location and therefore what a guidance partnership needs to comprise? Quality frameworks can ensure the standards of each of these providers, but who is taking a macro view? And what should it be?

▼ Networks

The DFEE has produced a national register of who is in the adult guidance business and has commissioned NICEC to map existing provision in a number of local areas against the two-level model. Networks were presented as the key to moving out of current polarities. They will be particularly important in relation to new 'front-end' development to ensure truly comprehensive provision of detailed information and effective signposting.

Several definitions and structures were discussed as examples, encompassing bottom-up and top-down models. The key factors that determine success include clear and explicit role, purpose and membership; commitment with agreement on ownership and management; a focus on client access and choice; action plans with resources; communication inside and with others; and vigilance related to quality.

TECs were identified as having several possible roles. Their value as local 'champions' was indicated, with suggestions that they could lobby their Boards for support. They were also recommended to *'leave providers to get on with what they are good at – and give security and strategic lead to the network'*. They may be able to facilitate co-operation between agencies presently operating as competitors.

Comment during the final panel pointed out how little we actually know about the life-cycle of networks. What happens when they run out of steam and discover – or rediscover – their separate competitive interests?

TO CONCLUDE

The conference demonstrated that currently there is much common ground on adult guidance. Everyone believes that action is urgently needed, and feasible. Contributors are enthusiastic about progress through trying to resolve the issues raised here. The concluding remarks identified three broad themes on which there is a growing consensus: the endorsement of a framework, support for quality standards, and the need for greater coherence on funding.