Evaluation of Local Adult Information, Advice and Guidance Services

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.   INTRODUCTION

In 1999, the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) announced its strategic aim of establishing information, advice and guidance (IAG) as a public service in order to widen adults' participation in learning and enhance their employability. This included a commitment to providing comprehensive information and advice of reliable quality throughout England.   The IAG programme was based on two principles: it should aim to be available to all free of charge, and be responsive to people's needs, including those related to disadvantage. The DfEE made available £54 million over a three-year period to local partnerships in order to enhance information and advice services for adults. There were two types of partnerships: six pathfinder partnerships that received a higher level of funding to take forward aspects of IAG policy by carrying out priority development work, and non-pathfinder partnerships whose main role was to lay the foundations for IAG delivery. All partnerships were required to support IAG providers in working towards the Guidance Council quality standards.

This report summarises the findings of an evaluation undertaken by the NFER of the first year of the DfEE's adult IAG policy and programme. The project was carried out between July 1999 and July 2000.

2.   MAIN FINDINGS

The evaluation found that the IAG programme:

♦ was helping to develop a more strategic approach to the provision of services to adults through a more concentrated and collaborative identification of priority groups and their needs;

♦ was enhancing contact between providers and helping them to gain a clearer and more informed understanding of the range of services provided in the local area;

♦ was helping to stimulate outreach activity focused on disadvantaged groups;

♦ was supporting organisations to work towards the Guidance Council quality standards through funding briefing and training sessions for providers.

Partnership coordinators were found to play a significant leadership and development role in securing different organisations' cooperation and involvement.

3.   SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

The overall aim of the project was to provide information and evidence to inform the further development of IAG policy and practice. The main objectives were to:

♦ identify the range of adult activity currently taking place;

♦ document the development experiences of the pathfinders and non-pathfinders;

♦ record early indicators of the effectiveness of the six pathfinder partnerships at delivering local IAG services for adults;

♦ assess the outcomes of the additional development funding on non-pathfinder partnerships in terms of the added value of coordinating existing providers.

4.   RESEARCH METHODS

Qualitative research methods were used to carry out the evaluation. Two rounds of case study visits were undertaken to the six pathfinder partnerships and to six non-pathfinder partnerships. Strategic level interviews were conducted with senior managers in Training and Enterprise Councils and Careers Services who were leading and coordinating the IAG partnerships. Operational level interviews were carried out with staff in five IAG providers in each of the six pathfinder partnerships. These included colleges, voluntary and community organisations, and training organisations. The views of 50 clients were gathered through telephone interviews and group discussions. The evaluation also made use of partnership documentation, including funding bids, business plans, and monitoring and evaluation reports. Additional information on the range of IAG activities being undertaken and on the costs of providing IAG services was collected by postal pro forma from partnerships and a sample of providers.

5.   PATHFINDER PARTNERSHIPS AND NETWORKS

5.1   Strategic approaches

Pathfinder partnerships aimed to build on and enhance existing ways of providing information and advice and develop a more coordinated approach which would offer a more coherent service, planned and delivered by collaboration between local organisations and agencies. This strategic aim was to be achieved through the development of a partnership approach, including consultation with lifelong learning partnership representatives.

Pathfinders indicated that the IAG programme had stimulated multi-agency cooperation in the planning and provision of services. The partnerships were said to have enhanced contact between providers and increased their awareness of each other's services. Providers were beginning to look collaboratively to see how best to work together to meet adults' needs. This

included joint identification of the most disadvantaged groups in the local community and exploration of different ways of responding to their needs.

Pathfinders drew on a range of existing information to assess local needs including data provided by economic reviews, business surveys and household surveys. This information was used to identify the size and location of priority groups such as the unemployed, ethnic minorities, and refugees. All of the pathfinders identified gaps in IAG provision and were working towards extending services to adults.

5.2   Partnership Models

Two partnership models were identified. In the **centralised model**, the lead partner allocated funding through a contract system directly to providers for the delivery of IAG services. In the **devolved model**, the lead partner deployed area-based agencies or community-based staff to undertake outreach work and stimulate demand for IAG services. Both models were working satisfactorily in practice. Members of centralised partnerships valued the coordinated approach to planning IAG delivery and the structure and systems provided. Members of devolved partnerships valued the encouragement and flexibility they were given to develop a range of community contacts and work with disadvantaged groups.

5.3   Partnership Coordination and Management

Lead partners provided senior managers to coordinate the IAG programme at the local level. They played a pivotal role in establishing and maintaining the partnerships through liaising with a variety of organisations. An important part of their role was to create the infrastructure to support multi-agency working, including setting up systems for communication and collective decision making. The coordinators chaired partnership steering or management groups that developed the overall approach to implementing the IAG programme, took decisions about resource deployment, and reviewed progress. Some partnerships had established sub-groups or task groups whose role was to develop particular aspects of the programme such as the delivery of training to support organisations working towards the Guidance Council quality standards.

5.4   Partnership Development

Pathfinders varied in the extent to which their partnerships built on existing networks of IAG providers. Coordinators made contact with a variety of local organisations and invited them to participate in the programme as IAG providers or as signposters who gave clients information on the providers. The emerging partnerships comprised a range of providers including TECs, careers services, local authority adult education services, colleges, universities, schools, voluntary and community organisations, and training organisations. Signposters included libraries, medical centres and solicitors. The research evidence suggested that the IAG programme had improved the links between providers and signposters.

The inclusion of the voluntary and community sectors was considered to be essential for the success of the IAG programme as they had vital experience and expertise in understanding the needs of, and making contact and working with, particular groups such as the disabled, refugees, and people from different ethnic minority communities.

5.5   Resource Deployment

Pathfinders deployed IAG programme resources to fund the development of partnership infrastructure and to support a variety of activities. The resources were used to fund partnership coordination and management, the printing and distribution of information (e.g. leaflets, newsletters, and directories), the organisation of conferences and seminars, training, and the provision of information and advice to clients.

5.6   Progress and Outcomes

Pathfinders indicated that the IAG programme had raised the awareness of the provision of information and advice for adults, with one coordinator commenting that it had made services '*visible for the first time*'. Pathfinders also stated that the IAG programme had given an impetus to examine and review current practice in organising and providing information and advice, one coordinator remarking that it had '*shown that there are ways of doing things better*'. It was generally acknowledged that progress had been made in establishing new or strengthened ways of partnership working.

6.   NON-PATHFINDER PARTNERSHIPS AND NETWORKS

6.1   Strategic Approaches

Non-pathfinder partnerships' strategic aims, which were comparable to pathfinders', included the promotion of a learning culture and economic regeneration by helping to develop adults' skills. Partnerships identified several challenges to taking a strategic approach, such as maintaining the motivation of different providers, and deploying resources across large and complex geographical areas. The evaluation found that non-pathfinders considered that the IAG programme had provided the impetus to take a wider perspective on the provision of information and advice services to adults, which they thought would help them to develop a more strategic approach in the future. The development work undertaken by partnerships, including carrying out local needs analyses, had enhanced understanding of the characteristics and location of priority disadvantaged groups in local communities.

6.2   Partnership Development

Non-pathfinders had put in place or were in the process of building structures, such as steering, management, or network member groups, in order to bring providers together and develop a more coordinated approach to IAG delivery.

Partnership membership was similar to pathfinders', though some had not yet decided which voluntary and community organisations to recruit.

6.3   Progress and Outcomes

The non-pathfinders reported that the IAG programme had enhanced understanding of adults' needs and the local resources available to address them. They considered that it had built on and extended existing partnerships, and had created or strengthened networks through which information, experience and expertise could be shared. Partnerships had made progress in supporting the adoption of the Guidance Council quality standards by delivering briefing and training sessions for providers.

7.   PROVIDERS' PERSPECTIVES

The 30 providers interviewed in the six pathfinder partnerships indicated that the IAG programme had raised the profile and increased awareness of adult information and advice. They reported that, as a result of the programme, they had received resources and materials which enabled them to provide a greater range and more up-to-date information for clients. Communication between partners was said to have improved and this was extending networking and strengthening the referral process. Some providers said that the IAG programme had enhanced outreach work targeted on disadvantaged adults by providing a clearer focus, resources, and the stimulus to try out different methods. Several providers had identified staff development needs and some of their staff had started working towards National Vocational Qualifications. Providers revealed that their participation in the IAG programme had encouraged them to reflect on and review the quality of their services. They valued the briefings provided by lead partners on the Guidance Council quality standards and some were now working towards them.

8.   CLIENTS' PERSPECTIVES

The majority of the 50 clients interviewed were satisfied with the information and advice that they had received through the IAG programme. They considered that the agencies providing the services were friendly, helpful and flexible. Thirty-five of the clients had acted on the information and advice given, mostly by enrolling on education or training courses. Some clients suggested that the services should be marketed more vigorously and had already recommended the services to family and friends.

9.   OVERALL PROGRESS AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

The evaluation found that pathfinder and non-pathfinder partnerships had made progress in laying the foundations for the provision of IAG services aimed at widening participation in learning. The partnerships were providing a clearer focus through targeting resources in a more informed way and were beginning to develop a more coherent approach by providing direction and

infrastructure to support and sustain multi-agency working. The challenges for the future will include maintaining momentum and building on the foundations that have been put in place. This will involve reviewing, and where necessary modifying, the systems that have been developed for partnership coordination and management, resource allocation, communication, delivery, and client monitoring.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In common with many other European Community countries, Britain has declared its commitment to lifelong learning, emphasising the important social and economic role of education in the Government's consultation paper, *The Learning Age* (GB. Parliament. HoC, 1998):

Learning is the key to prosperity – for each of us as individuals, as well as for the nation as a whole. Investment in human capital will be the foundation of success in the knowledge-based global economy of the twenty-first century.

Given the serious problem of social exclusion, which the Social Exclusion Unit (1999) and Howarth *et al*. (1998) have shown has complex links to poverty, deprivation and lack of educational achievement, encouraging and enabling more people to take up learning opportunities and improve their employability is a critical challenge. Acknowledging that '*those who are disadvantaged educationally are also disadvantaged economically and socially*', Kennedy (1997) made the case for widening as well as increasing participation in learning on the grounds that significant groups of people, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with few qualifications, are under-represented in post-16 education.

Fryer (1997) stressed the need for creating a strategic framework to promote lifelong learning which '*should indicate the role of lifelong learning in maintaining the country's competitiveness in a global economy and in the development of new skills, dignity, confidence and opportunities for all its people*'. In their review of the literature on lifelong learning, Edwards *et al*. (1998) highlighted the importance of individual counselling and guidance as a way of helping '*individuals construct themselves and their decisions as lifelong learners*'.

In its new framework for post-16 learning, announced in the White Paper, *Learning to Succeed* (1999), the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) set out its strategic aim of establishing information, advice and guidance (IAG) as a public service. It drew attention to the vital role that good quality IAG services can play in widening participation and reducing the barriers to learning. The White Paper indicated that there was a clear and increasing demand for these services as one in five adults know little about the type of learning opportunities that are available locally, and because individuals will need help to navigate the labour market as they change jobs more often than in previous times. It was noted that although there were excellent IAG services in some parts of the country, this was not the case in all areas.

The White Paper stated that: '*Once local services are fully established, they will ensure that in every part of the country, adults can access comprehensive information about the learning opportunities in their areas*'. It indicated that responsibility for planning and funding adult IAG services would transfer to the Learning and Skills Council from April 2001.

Proposals for more inclusive IAG services, providing 'a local information and advice service of reliable quality available to learners and potential learners in every part of England' were outlined in a consultation document, The Learning Age (GB. DfEE, 1998). It was envisaged that these services would be built upon existing public and private adult IAG services and would complement current provision. This approach would help to coordinate services and fill gaps in provision. In addition, the services were to be delivered through a partnership approach, in order to avoid wasteful competition between different local agencies and were to include 'substantial participation by community and voluntary groups'. The provision of information and advice to adults was based on two principles: firstly, it should be, or aimed to be, available to all free of charge, and secondly, it should be responsive to people's needs.

In order to provide adults with a fully-integrated service at local level, the IAG partnerships would be required to demonstrate effective links with other statutory organisations, including the Careers Service, the Employment Service, Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships and the **learndirect** national helpline. The partnerships could be built on one or more existing TEC, LEA, Learning Partnership or Careers Service areas, although contracts for the delivery of the services in each locality would be made with only a single organisation.

To ensure a reasonable standard of service, partnerships would be required to provide '*satisfactory evidence that they were working towards the relevant quality standards*'.

Since 1996, the Guidance Council has been developing quality standards to promote continuous quality improvement among providers. As the DfEE funded the development of the quality standards it maintains ownership of them.

The quality standards, which have been trialed in the IAG sector, specify the requirements for compliance including a statement of service which determines the quality standards that a provider should work to. Set up by the Guidance Council, the Guidance Accreditation Board (GAB) was established in 1999, to provide a national system of quality assurance and accreditation for career and educational providers. The accreditation process requires providers to submit an application and pay fees to the GAB, and to complete a self-assessment checklist. In addition, providers have to collect evidence of compliance with the quality standards, including gaining feedback from clients. The independent feedback given by 'mystery shoppers' who sample

the IAG services provided adds an element of objectivity to the assessment process.

Funding, amounting to £54 million over a three-year period, was made available to partnerships for local IAG services. In the first year the funding was for development, to help build partnerships, to begin delivering services, to work towards Guidance Council quality standards and to help prepare for 2000-2001 when they would be expected to deliver *'an agreed specification for a local information and advice service'*.

Following the consultation, the DfEE published detailed arrangements for the first year of operation of the new IAG Partnerships. Two types of partnerships were identified:

- There were six 'pathfinder partnerships' which would deliver a full IAG service from June 1999 whilst undertaking *'priority development work to take forward aspects of IAG policy'*. The pathfinders received a more substantial funding allocation for Year 1, the period June 1999 – March 2000. They were chosen to demonstrate a range of approaches to help provide a basis for a national specification for Year 2.

- The remaining partnerships were 'development partnerships' (called non-pathfinders throughout this report). Their funding was to be used to *'bring partners together to plan and develop networks and begin to deliver services so as to provide comprehensive, quality IAG services from April 2000'*.

As indicated in the consultation document, priority was to be given to the development of a basic information and advice service that was free of charge and focused on learning and employment. A key part of the strategy was aimed at helping disadvantaged and disabled adults and those needing help with basic skills to make informed choices about learning and their future.

The DfEE commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to carry out an evaluation of the first year of the IAG programme. The project was undertaken between July 1999 and July 2000.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of the project was to provide a first-year evaluation of the DfEE's adult IAG policy and programme. The scope of the research covered an examination of the development experiences and early indicators of effectiveness demonstrated by the pathfinder partnerships, with the aim of informing further development over the next two years.

More specifically, the main objectives of the project were to:

- identify the range of adult IAG activity currently taking place;
- document the development experiences of the pathfinders and non-pathfinders;

- record early indicators of the effectiveness of the six pathfinder partnerships at delivering local IAG services for adults;

- assess the outcomes of the additional development funding on non-pathfinder partnerships in terms of the added value of coordinating existing providers.

The research methods used to carry out the project are outlined in the next section.

1.3   Research Methods

Qualitative research methods were used to carry out the evaluation strand of the project. Two rounds of case study visits were undertaken to the six pathfinder partnerships and to six non-pathfinder partnerships. The latter were selected to be broadly comparable to the pathfinders in terms of socio-economic characteristics, industrial and employment structure, geographical location, and size of population. The first case-study visits were carried out between October and December 1999, when the partnerships were in the initial stages of becoming established. The second visits were undertaken between May and July 2000 to ascertain what progress had been made and what outcomes had been achieved.

The project aimed to gain a wide range of perspectives on the IAG programme. The pathfinder case studies comprised semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with staff at both strategic and operational level. In-depth interviews were carried out in each pathfinder with senior managers in lead partner organisations (Training and Enterprise Councils and Careers Services) and with staff in five IAG providers. The latter included colleges, voluntary and community organisations, and training organisations. The views of 50 clients were gathered through telephone interviews and group discussions. Face-to-face interviews were also conducted with the lead partners of six selected non-pathfinder partnerships. No provider or client interviews were undertaken in these partnerships because they primarily received funding for development, rather than service delivery.

The project was also informed by a review of partnership documentation, including IAG funding bids, business plans, monitoring data and evaluation reports. The study also sought to obtain additional background information on the range of activities being undertaken by a sample of IAG providers and information on the costs of providing IAG services from the lead partners.

1.4   Structure of the Report

Chapter 2 presents findings from the evaluation on the development of pathfinder partnerships and networks. It examines their strategic approaches, the development of infrastructure, and progress and outcomes. Issues relating to the sustainability of the partnerships are also explored, while Chapter 3 discusses the planning and development of non-pathfinder partnerships.

Chapter 4 presents findings on the impact and outcomes of the pathfinders at operational level. It covers the provision of information and advice, outreach work, staff development, quality assurance, and monitoring, evaluation and review. The final section of the chapter reports on other benefits from the partnerships.

Chapter 5 presents findings from the interviews with clients. It provides their views on marketing IAG services and their perceptions of the quality and value of the services provided. The outcomes from the information and advice received are also presented. The report concludes by examining several issues which are of potential influence on the future development of IAG for adults.

Key findings are presented at the end of each chapter.

The report includes two appendices. The first provides a summary of the questionnaire survey of IAG activities.   The second includes indicative information on the costs of providing adult IAG services.

2. DEVELOPMENT OF PATHFINDER PARTNERSHIPS AND NETWORKS

This chapter examines the progress made in the early development of pathfinder partnerships and networks. It examines what has been achieved as a result of the IAG programme in the first year of operation in terms of creating strategic approaches to identifying and meeting the needs of disadvantaged adults in local communities. The chapter also presents findings on what progress partnerships have made so far in developing an infrastructure to coordinate and support the provision of information and advice services. Drawing on the research data, observations are provided on issues relating to the sustainability of the partnerships beyond the three-year development programme.

2.1 Strategic Approaches

Pathfinder partnerships were set up to inform the development of more effective ways of providing appropriate information and advice to encourage more adults, particularly those experiencing disadvantage, to participate in learning. Pathfinders' strategic aims, which were decided through consultation with members of lifelong learning partnerships and IAG provider representatives, were to:

♦ facilitate access to learning opportunities;

♦ enhance social inclusion;

♦ improve adults' employability;

♦ support business performance, competitiveness and prosperity in the local area.

All of the pathfinders had identified gaps in provision and were committed to extending IAG services. They were working towards developing a more substantial range of services and increasing access to them. One of the pathfinders had used resources to fund an external consultant who had reviewed provision and procedures and advised on development.

It should be noted that DfEE's planning framework for 'partnerships wishing to operate fully fledged pathfinder services' included a requirement that partnerships provide details of:

♦ where the service was to be delivered;

♦ target client groups;

- how the pathfinders proposed to bring greater coherence and coverage to local IAG services;
- the rationale for the priorities that had been identified.

Each partnership included an assessment of local needs in its bid, based on existing data which, in many cases, had already been collected and analysed. They made use of local economic reviews, household surveys, TEC and FEFC surveys, annual business surveys, the DETR Local Deprivation Index, and surveys of specific groups (e.g. the gypsy population). This information and local intelligence informed the pathfinders' strategic approaches to meeting the IAG needs of adults in their local areas.

Three examples of how partnerships identified local needs are illustrated below.

One of the pathfinders conducted an initial analysis of economic and educational data such as unemployment levels, skills shortages, progress in achievement (as measured by the National Learning Targets), levels of literacy and numeracy, and factors contributing to the deprivation index. This information informed an evaluation of the extent to which existing provision matched local needs. Contracted deliverers were then required to complete standardised management information forms which allowed a scrutiny of coverage and use by clients, in terms of place of residence, age, sex, ethnicity, qualifications, economic status and how they became aware of the service. In addition to this, representatives from local government and community groups continue to check whether target groups receive their fair share of IAG.

A second pathfinder carried out a survey of all wards with a high unemployment rate and cross-referenced this with partnership agencies providing IAG in those areas. This information was used by the partnership to target areas where there was no provision, with the objective of setting up information points through community groups.

The identification of needs in another partnership was based on an appraisal of the work of the former consortium and a review of the aims of IAG in general. In order to draw in more education and training providers, a rationale for the working of the new partnership was developed by the guidance team of a further education college. Underlying this was the recognition that there were many unmet needs in terms of widening participation in education and training, owing to inaccessibility or unsuitability of provision, and reluctance to engage in learning. The work of the partnership was structured in such a way as to identify local needs of differing groups by the use of community-based project workers. In this way, needs were identified, information and advice were provided, and education and training opportunities were brokered.

Significantly, pathfinders aimed to build on and enhance existing ways of providing information and develop a more coordinated approach, which would offer a more coherent service, planned and delivered by collaboration between local organisations and agencies. This strategic aim was to be achieved

through the development of a partnership approach. All of the pathfinders reported that there had been some degree of collaboration between providers in the past, though in some areas there was no formal network and in others the need to revitalise networks was acknowledged, as one interviewee observed: *'The context and circumstances were right and it seemed time to draw the network together again'*.

Pathfinders indicated that the IAG programme had stimulated multi-agency working in the planning and provision of services for adults. They pointed out that the partnerships had enhanced contact between providers and, in some cases, had encouraged them to cooperate more than they had previously done. According to one lead partner, the main outcome of the pathfinder had been '*getting agencies to work together in a coordinated way for a common purpose*'. Where local partnerships already existed, they had been extended to bring in other members, including voluntary and community groups.

Through their involvement in partnership meetings and groups, providers were said to have gained a greater awareness of each other's services and were learning to trust each other and become partners. Furthermore, providers were beginning to look collaboratively to see how best to work together to meet the needs of adults. This included joint identification of the most disadvantaged groups in the local community and exploration of different ways of responding to their needs. Pathfinders drew attention to the partnerships' value in providing a forum for the generation and exchange of ideas on what IAG was required. It was noted that there was also a sharing of good practice through providers working together to achieve the Guidance Council quality standards.

Interestingly, one of the pathfinders reported that it had targeted outreach on groups and communities identified using economic data. IAG funding had paid for the analysis of this data, which had helped the partnership to make strategic decisions about where to invest resources in the local area.

The pathfinders identified several challenges to the development of a strategic approach. Maintaining partnerships – '*keeping the group together*' as one manager expressed it – was considered to be critical. In two of the pathfinders there was continuing competition between partners who were unwilling to participate fully in multi-agency working. Another challenge was identified as avoiding duplication of provision which involved finding out what was being provided by different agencies, '*because there is a lot happening under different types of funding*', as one manager pointed out. Achieving a fair representation of the voluntary and community sectors was cited as a further challenge.

2.2 Infrastructure Development

2.2.1 Partnerships

Lifelong learning partnerships, or subgroups drawn from their membership, provided the strategic direction of the pathfinders. Lead partners were responsible for managing the IAG contract with DfEE and for coordinating the programme at the local level. Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) were the lead partner in three of the pathfinders and careers services fulfilled this role in the other three.

The evaluation identified the following partnership models for the pathfinders:

♦ The first is a **centralised model** where the lead partner allocates funding through a contract system directly to providers for the delivery of IAG services. In some cases, providers are invited to submit bids for specific funding, for example to run outreach projects. The four pathfinder partnerships conforming to this model used local information and intelligence to varying degrees to identify and target priority client groups.

♦ The second was a **devolved model** where the lead partner deploys area-based agencies or community-based staff to undertake outreach work, which is the main focus of their IAG activities. In place of contracted delivery of IAG provision, resources are used to make contact and work with community groups in order to reach clients and stimulate demand for IAG services. In the devolved model, the take-up of services is more likely to be driven by clients' needs than the supply of services.

The evidence collected suggested that, to date, both models were working reasonably well in practice. Members of centralised partnerships valued the structure and systems provided which enabled them to gain a clear idea of their objectives and the contribution they were expected to make to the provision of IAG in the local community, and the way that this should be achieved. They thought that this approach gave them a strategic direction and was helping to develop a coordinated approach to managing innovation and planning the delivery of IAG in the locality. In addition, they felt that they benefited from opportunities to participate in joint training and marketing events.

The feedback from members of devolved partnerships was largely positive. Partners valued the flexibility and freedom to develop contacts with a wide range of organisations and individuals within a variety of community contexts. They noted that this approach encouraged them to reach and work with disengaged groups. The partnerships were said to listen and were open to new ideas. Some partners considered that greater clarity of roles was required; often the role of information giver merged with that of broker for local education and training opportunities. The view was expressed by members of one of the partnerships that mapping of provision and a partnership directory were needed to help providers work in a more coherent way.

The types of partnership that emerged were based on developing networks of IAG providers and signposter organisations, which disseminated information on the services available. One interviewee commented that the IAG programme '*adds credibility to the network*'. Secondly, they were based on providing support – materials and training – to facilitate change and improve delivery. Here it is worth noting that different interpretations of 'partnership' and 'network' were used. For example, whilst some lead partners used them interchangeably, others differentiated the partnership, whose members receive funding from the IAG programme, from the network, which comprises signposters who do not receive funding. Another observation was that in partnerships, members work mainly to an agreed agenda, whereas in networks, members work mainly to their own agendas.

The following illustration is an example of good practice of IAG funding enabling a partnership to formalise what already existed:

> In one partnership area, there was a well-established adult guidance network going back to the early 1990s. The lead partner (the TEC) had a good working relationship with the local authority, which viewed IAG provision as an integral element of community regeneration. At the time of achieving pathfinder status, the network comprised a diverse range of agencies delivering provision from 34 centres across the area. The agencies included the careers service, the Employment Service, libraries, training providers, colleges and community and voluntary organisations such as those helping the homeless, women returners, and the disabled. The IAG programme enabled the partnership to develop a common approach which specified a clear entitlement to services across a well-defined geographical area.

Reflecting on the strengths of their partnerships, some lead partners said that they were effective in targeting outreach work on priority groups and that they had improved the links between signposters and providers. Lead partners also identified weaknesses in their partnerships, mainly the lack of adequate time for partnership coordination as a result of investing resources in delivery of services, and being insufficiently inclusive in terms of fully engaging voluntary and community organisations. The evidence suggested that the situation was likely to be more positive in the longer term, given that partnerships were putting systems in place to recruit representatives from these organisations. Getting a few key voluntary and community providers involved initially, and building on this, was identified by some partnerships as the way forward to developing a greater representation of these sectors.

Three of the pathfinders had or were making changes to their partnerships. One pathfinder was contracting with four organisations to lead the coordination of delivery and develop ownership locally through lifelong learning partnerships, one was expanding to include representation of organisations in additional districts, and one was going to bring in voluntary and community organisations.

Pathfinders established **steering groups** whose role was to make decisions about the deployment of the IAG resources and oversee the progress of the programme. The membership of the steering groups included representatives of TECs, LEAs, careers services, schools, colleges, universities, voluntary and community organisations, and training providers. One partnership had devised written terms of reference for its steering group. Members said that steering group meetings offered useful opportunities to discuss issues such as the characteristics of disadvantaged groups, and the best ways of reaching them and meeting their needs. An illustration of good partnership working is presented below.

The pathfinder partnership was built on an existing network which had been maintained by the TEC using its reserve and SRB funding. The steering committee, which acts as the management group, has been extended for the pathfinder project to include some voluntary and community organisations (e.g. the county libraries). The careers service also has a major role to play in the management and delivery of the project, in particular in chairing the sub-committees which are leading the development. These sub-committees are made up of representatives of the partner organisations and their role is to discuss and agree ways of taking forward the pathfinder provision. Detail of the steering group and sub-committee meetings are published on a website set up for the pathfinder. An outside consultancy was engaged to help with setting quality standards and monitoring delivery. This shared approach has been useful in ensuring that all partners feel they are fully consulted and involved in decision-making, as well as enabling individuals from the partner organisations to communicate with other local providers. The sub-committees were instrumental in fostering this approach, which was largely 'bottom-up' and involved representatives of the partner organisations in planning for delivery. Through the planning process individuals learned more about each others' organisations and how to work in groups. It also gave opportunities for trust to be developed.

The composition of IAG partnerships had not changed radically since their inception, though some were giving consideration to how the Employment Service and Connexions could be involved. Whilst one pathfinder reported that two of its partners – a chamber of commerce and a training provider – were wavering in their commitment, another had lost a voluntary organisation, (which had been unsuccessful with a major funding bid) from its steering group but had recruited a member of a college consortium to join the partnership.

Lead partners provided senior managers to coordinate the IAG programme. Their roles included chairing steering groups, developing systems for resource allocation, communication and monitoring, and maintaining partnerships and networks. While in some projects coordinators were directly charged to the pathfinder, in others they were provided at only marginal cost by the lead body or management group. Coordinators' work involved explaining what the IAG programme entailed, finding out about what different agencies had to offer and

how they worked, and securing their participation. Advocating that '*you have to get out there and be available to build a solid foundation*', one coordinator noted that '*keeping everyone motivated*' was a challenge.

An illustration of how external support was used to help to lay the foundations for effective partnership working is provided below.

A consultant's evaluation indicated that, in setting up practitioner groups to take forward planning related to the achievement of the Guidance Council standards, this pathfinder had also found a way of '*building coherence and true networking*'.

To begin with, the consultant designed and circulated a proforma questionnaire, based on the criteria in the standards, to all members of the partnership. Once the proformas were completed they visited each partner and gave individual feedback on the questionnaires, highlighting areas for development and advising on how to progress towards the standards.

The self-assessment exercise provided the consultant with information on the areas that were in need of development, as well as those where there were weaknesses that needed addressing. For instance, while the organisations reported they had put in place systems that met with Guidance Council standards, it was clear that many of them fell short. The consultant also questioned whether the provider group, which had worked together for some years, could call themselves a 'network', since they lacked common, group-wide referral and follow-up systems.

As a result of the exercise, the consultant organised a series of practitioner workshops, designed to deal with the development areas identified. In the consultant's view, these workshops have enabled the practitioners to make '*major progress on specified topics relating to achievement of the standards*'. In addition, the discussions have enabled the group to understand how common approaches to the standards will assure quality, consistency and comparability.

As there had been an emphasis on the quality of adult IAG provision, lead bodies had arranged meetings or conferences to publicise the Guidance Council quality standards to partners. Pathfinder resources were also used to run training events, both in preparation for working towards the standards and to help staff from some of the smaller partners to gain guidance qualifications. Lead bodies indicated that they thought these publicity and training sessions were essential, both to ensure that partners were informed and to help prepare staff for adopting the standards.

2.2.2 Voluntary and community organisations

Pathfinders expressed their commitment to meeting the needs of local communities. They claimed to have an advocacy role by listening to people in the community and encouraging them to take up appropriate learning

opportunities. They were attempting to develop further the capacity of voluntary and community organisations to meet the needs of local people, especially disadvantaged adults.

Pathfinders varied in their success in recruiting voluntary and community organisations. Some explained that this took longer than expected and required considerable effort. For example, in one area, the lead partner had run workshops to inform community groups about the IAG programme and sign them up, and in another area the lead partner had given seminars at a volunteer forum conference.

Two of the pathfinders had used some of their funding to appoint staff to support the work of community groups. In one case, the staff were recruited from ethnic minority groups and worked with clients in these communities. The other pathfinder had introduced community learning advisers whose role was community capacity building. This involved identifying groups of clients and alerting providers, and providing practical support for community organisations. They had helped to organise and deliver services for the unemployed, Asian women and young mothers in various community locations. The pathfinder was planning to train staff in local agencies to become community workers.

An illustration of provision for Asian women is provided below.

A Muslim organisation was contracted by a pathfinder to deliver 60 information and advice interviews. This was found to be an attractive service to Asian women who preferred to make contact with this community provision rather than approach the local careers company. Some Pakistani families are reluctant to send their daughters to local further education colleges and the service has been involved in offering information and advice to mothers for their daughters. Further outreach work is said to be needed to attract more women to use the service. One of the IAG workers is an Asian woman, who facilitates access to groups and individuals in the community.

All of the pathfinders attested to the value of having voluntary and community organisations in the partnership. The view expressed by one lead partner that *'they are in touch with particular client groups and understand their needs'*, was echoed across the pathfinders. The point was made that disadvantaged adults often required specialist help which voluntary and community organisations were best placed to provide because of their particular experience and expertise.

Referring to voluntary and community groups as *'the front line'*, a lead partner observed that they were capable of getting business for the main providers. He identified a difficulty in working with libraries which charged people for access to the internet and was considering providing clients with vouchers which could be exchanged for internet access.

2.2.3 Communication and liaison

Pathfinders reported that the IAG programme had helped to set up mechanisms to support improved communication and liaison between providers. The funding of coordinators was regarded as critical because they were said to be drivers in developing these mechanisms and proactive in communicating and liaising with different partners and the wider community.

The evaluation found that the main characteristics of an effective partnership coordinator were that s/he was:

- A strategic thinker who clearly articulated the partnership's vision and aims.

- A proactive leader who identified priorities for the continuing development of the partnership.

- A good communicator who consulted with partners and endeavoured to make sure that decisions were transparent.

- A manager who set up appropriate infrastructure and systems to support and sustain partnership working.

- A person with appropriate experience and local knowledge which gave them credibility in the eyes of partner organisations.

- Accessible and in regular touch with providers through meetings, telephone, e-mail and visits.

Steering and management groups, that met every four to six weeks, were cited as an important forum for communication between different providers. Most of the providers participating in these groups said, when interviewed, that they were offered valuable opportunities for getting to know in more detail, and discussing ideas and issues with, other organisations and agencies working in similar or related fields. Three of the pathfinders had established local network groups or formed partnership task groups or sub-groups. The latter focused on areas such as quality standards and training.

Some pathfinders had progressed further than others in developing a culture of multi-agency working through partnership groups. Whilst a few members of steering and management groups said that they felt remote from the decision-making process, others revealed that they were fully consulted about partnership decisions when they attended meetings. In some cases, partners reported that they were actively involved in pioneering the work of the partnership and believed that they were influencing the shape of IAG provision.

The IAG programme was said to have improved communication and liaison through funding the production of leaflets, newsletters and partnership directories, the organisation of conferences, seminars and workshops, and the creation of websites. Two pathfinders were planning to produce newsletters, one was going to develop a partnership directory, and one was considering setting up a website in the future. Another pathfinder was making

arrangements for an additional senior manager to supplement the work of the coordinator by going out to visit partners. One pathfinder indicated that, as it could afford to employ fewer network staff in the future, this was likely to weaken communication.

The evidence gathered for this evaluation indicated that some progress was being made towards the development of genuine partnerships. It was apparent that partnerships were moving towards creating a shared vision of how best to work together to meet the IAG needs of the population and to contribute to local regeneration. Furthermore, partnerships were attempting to be more inclusive in terms of incorporating representatives of a wider range of groups. The IAG programme was beginning to enable partners to share ideas, exchange information, and jointly plan the delivery of a more coherent information and advice service for adults.

2.3   Progress and Outcomes

Pathfinders indicated that the IAG programme had raised the awareness of the aims of learning partnerships and had highlighted the provision of information and advice services for adults. Indeed, one network coordinator remarked that the programme had made services '*visible for the first time*'. Furthermore, pathfinders noted that the programme was helping to improve the planning of provision through a more considered targeting of resources, and was increasing outreach work with disadvantaged groups. Some reported that the IAG programme was promoting referrals between agencies as a result of stimulating the development of partnerships through which providers increased their awareness of what services others could offer.

Pathfinders stated that the IAG programme had given an impetus to examine and review current practice in organising and providing information and advice for adults. This view was articulated by one lead partner when he pointed out that the programme had '*shown that there are ways of doing things better*'. Whilst pathfinders acknowledged the progress made in establishing new or strengthened ways of partnership working, they made it clear that the provision of IAG services required continued development if their strategic aims were going to be achieved.

The evaluation found that pathfinders' strategies for reaching disadvantaged adults were being developed or were in their early implementation stage. The data collected indicated that dealing effectively with this client group requires a considerable investment of time in order to:

♦   Identify and differentiate the specific needs of different groups and individuals.

♦   Gain the trust of people who may be apprehensive, suspicious and lacking in confidence.

♦   Raise people's awareness of the opportunities for education and training available in the locality.

- ♦ Identify barriers which inhibit or prevent people from participating in learning.
- ♦ Raise people's awareness of the benefits of learning and gaining qualifications.

2.4 Sustainability of Partnerships

The message from pathfinders was that partnerships were more likely to be sustained if participants were not overburdened by unnecessary administration. This was said to be particularly important in keeping small voluntary and community organisations involved in partnerships.

An example of where sound foundations had been laid to support continuing partnership development is illustrated next.

> A pathfinder had created a partnership comprising 16 organisations which had gradually learned to trust each other. They looked to see how best to work together to meet the needs of adults in the local community. Partnership members had a shared aim and saw that it was in their interests to be involved. The lead partner attributed the progress made in multi-agency working to the strategic approach which he said had been *'transparent, simple, within the capabilities of the agencies, and including support'*. This had encouraged and enabled agencies to concentrate on the needs of different client groups and to use each others' expertise as appropriate. Owing to the IAG programme, partners were more aware of the range of IAG and learning opportunities available in the locality and were more aware of how to access them for their clients. As a result more client referrals were taking place. Members of the partnership steering group reported that they were fully consulted about and had a say in all key decisions, with one interviewee emphasising that *'my time has been used to good effect'*.

The pathfinders reported some difficulties in developing sustainable partnerships. Although they did not claim that these difficulties were insurmountable, they considered them to be major challenges. The time and cost to organisations were identified by one lead partner who remarked that *'they question what they are getting out of it'* and drew attention to their circumspection, revealing that *'within the group there is the inevitable suspicion of what is in it for us and is anybody stealing a march on us*?' Observing that *'partnership is tension,'* another lead partner was attempting to encourage local colleges to work together more effectively. Another difficulty was identified as the different organisational cultures of providers. In one area, this had been brought into sharp relief because some providers were better than others at contract compliance.

To what extent was the level of funding considered to be adequate for sustaining IAG partnerships? Partnerships had allocated resources in different ways, to meet the needs of their clients and partners. While they acknowledged the desire to spend as much as possible on delivering

information and advice to clients, project coordination, training for partners' staff, communications and marketing and publicity materials were also financed by the partnership funding. Lead partners indicated that the funding received as pathfinders was adequate for achieving their milestones for development, including setting up partnership infrastructure, outreach work, and training. They thought that, on the whole, their systems for allocating the IAG funding had worked well, though some acknowledged that not all organisations had been satisfied.

Lead partners were adamant that continued central funding was the key to the sustainability of IAG partnerships. It was stressed how important it was for the post of coordinator to be funded as this was critical to maintaining communication and cooperation between partners. At the time of interview, none of the pathfinders had made bids to the lottery or other potential sources of funding. One lead partner doubted whether his partnership could continue with funding '*leading edge developments and delivery*' given the reduction in its resource allocation for the second year of operation.

It is clear that the contribution of coordinators was going to be instrumental in sustaining IAG partnerships. The evaluation found that their role was pivotal in maintaining the motivation and commitment of providers. Coordinators also played a crucial role in ensuring that partnership infrastructure was both flexible and robust enough to support and sustain multi-agency working.

KEY FINDINGS

♦ There was evidence that the IAG programme was helping to develop a more strategic approach to the provision of services to adults through a more concentrated and collaborative identification of priority disadvantaged groups and their needs. The pathfinders have begun to improve the planning and provision of IAG services by targeting delivery and resources.

♦ Partnership coordinators played a significant leadership and development role in securing different organisations' and agencies' cooperation and involvement. They have continued to facilitate and maintain the IAG partnerships.

♦ Two partnership models were identified. In the centralised model funding is allocated through a contract system directly to providers for the delivery of IAG services. The devolved model uses resources to work with community groups to stimulate client demand for IAG services.

♦ The IAG programme was enhancing contact between providers and helping them to gain a clearer and more informed understanding of the services that each other provided. Pathfinders had also improved the links between providers and signposters.

♦ The inclusion of the voluntary and community sectors and their representation on steering and management committees was considered to be essential for the success of the partnerships. Personal contact and inclusion in training sessions had provided effective ways of recruiting voluntary and community organisations whose experience of and expertise in working with disadvantaged groups was greatly valued.

- ♦ Each pathfinder had used the additional funding in different ways. While they acknowledged that the majority ought to be spent on providing information and advice to clients, putting in place the procedures to ensure delivery also had to be financed.

3. DEVELOPMENT OF NON-PATHFINDER PARTNERSHIPS AND NETWORKS

This chapter examines the progress made by non-pathfinder partnerships, in the first year of the adult IAG programme. It examines the strategic approaches adopted and the work undertaken by partnerships in developing infrastructure, including communication and liaison. The chapter concludes by investigating the foundations being put in place to support the future development of the partnerships.

3.1 Strategic Approaches

The investigations that non-pathfinder partnerships had organised into adults' needs and IAG provision in their areas were said by most of the lead partners to have yielded information, which was contributing to some degree to their strategic thinking. For example, one lead partner remarked that the intelligence gathered had amplified the knowledge of local needs, which had underpinned the original bid and produced a clearer picture of issues linked to social deprivation.

The aims of the non-pathfinder partnerships, which were comparable to those of the pathfinders, as stated in bids and interviews were to:

- promote a learning culture;
- widen participation;
- promote economic regeneration by developing the local skills base;
- achieve consistency of service.

The research, audits and needs analyses undertaken helped partnerships to identify the location and needs of priority groups such as refugees, travellers, and people living in pockets of rural isolation. This information was used by partnerships to establish potential markets for IAG services and identify where provision should be targeted. For example, the needs analysis carried out by one partnership revealed that there was a widespread lack of basic skills among the local adult population, including those in employment. Another partnership discovered high concentrations of single parents living in the local area.

Partnerships noted that this work had provided other useful insights. In one area, the lead partner said that the research had uncovered a lot of voluntary and community groups who were working with adults. Another finding was that in some rural areas there was a heavy dependence on funding from the

European Social Fund (ESF) to resource provision, which made it difficult to plan in the long term. The point was also made by one lead partner that the information collected underlined the need for IAG to be linked with other initiatives in the process of forging a role for itself.

Some lead partners thought that the IAG partnership was helping to develop a strategic approach to providing adults with appropriate information and advice. In one area, a broader vision – '*it makes you take a wider perspective*' – was identified as the main value of the partnership. In another area, the arrangement whereby partnership meetings were hosted in rotation by members was said to be supporting strategic thinking, because organisations were developing a far clearer and more rounded picture of what each had to offer. Two of the partnerships had contrasting experiences and views of the IAG partnership links with lifelong learning partnerships. Whilst one indicated that the linkage offered a major advantage in the form of contact with lifelong learning partnership sub-groups, which focused on specific issues such as exclusion and provided information to support the development of a strategic approach, the other was disappointed that the lifelong learning partnerships in the area were still in the process of formation and therefore not in a position to assist IAG developments.

An analysis of need produced through the IAG programme was said to be making a contribution to strategic development in one partnership. Another lead partner pointed out that a sub-regional approach was being taken which involved developing interest sub-groups working to examine areas such as marketing IAG services.

Partnerships identified several challenges in attempting to develop a strategic approach. These included the following:

♦   Maintaining impetus and the motivation of different providers.

♦   Deploying resources across large and complex geographical areas.

♦   The logistics of organising meetings which most partners could attend.

♦   Working with several lifelong learning partnerships.

♦   Supporting a large number of providers through accreditation.

♦   Developing an approach which was shared by all partners.

A lead partner made the telling observation that achieving ownership and acceptance of the strategic approach was '*all to do with developing trust and respect between agencies*'.

3.2   Infrastructure Development

3.2.1   Partnerships

As for the pathfinders, the structures of non-pathfinder partnerships varied. They were coordinated and managed by steering groups, management groups or partner groups which were chaired by lead partners and included representatives of key providers, and in some cases, members of lifelong learning partnerships. In addition, the partnerships had other groups, which were generally concerned with the operational issues. For example, one partnership had area sub-groups, which were responsible for organising the delivery of services for adults. In another partnership, area managers were assisted by designated specialists who worked on particular cross-network developments such as quality assurance and accreditation.

The evaluation found that some partnerships were continuing to develop their structures. For example, the network members' group in one partnership was considering setting up specialist interest sub-groups.

The lead partners provided senior staff who coordinated and managed the partnerships, all of whom were directly charged to IAG programme funding. Where appropriate, area or sub-group representatives reported to them on progress and emerging issues. Lead partners held responsibility for IAG budgets. Some noted that managing the allocation and tracking the use of this funding was especially challenging, as one manager remarked: *'Keeping tabs on it all is still difficult ... and we want to make sure there is no underspend'*. One lead partner was going to appoint a contract manager to manage agreements with organisations for the delivery of information and advice. It was too early to identify the effect of different approaches to delivery, which were still being developed, on the services provided for adults.

Different priorities guided the allocation of IAG funding. For example, while all non-pathfinders were making training on quality standards available to all partners, one partnership was focusing on funding the professional development of IAG staff. The lead partners were generally happy with the progress of staff training, although there was a great deal more to be done and, as one remarked, the cost is already mounting.   Another partnership's priorities were coordination and stimulating delivery, though the latter had not yet taken place. Careers and skills assessment materials were being provided for organisations in another partnership.

Partnerships were identifying target groups which included the following:

- unemployed and redundant workers, especially those aged over 50;
- women who wanted to return to learning and the labour market;
- people from ethnic minority communities;
- disabled people;
- single parents;
- people who dwell in rural communities.

Some partnerships were currently considering which contact strategies were appropriate for piloting with different target groups. One lead partner reported that his partnership had no overall strategy for targeting particular groups, instead the emphasis was going to be on working through existing organisations which had well-established approaches for reaching specific client groups.

3.2.2 Voluntary and community organisations

Non-pathfinder partnerships had taken different approaches to making contact with and recruiting representatives from these groups. Whilst one partnership reported that personal contact had proved a successful recruitment method, another indicated that the provision of training courses was '*the best possible carrot*' in gaining the participation of voluntary and community organisations. Including voluntary and community organisations in partnerships required enthusiasm and determination.

Elsewhere, a partnership had developed links with an umbrella group for local community groups. This contact was ongoing and was said to involve '*delicate negotiations*' around what the partnership wanted from the community groups and what it could offer in return. The partnership's business plan aimed to recruit major groups such as the Citizens' Advice Bureau, and the lead partner hoped to forge links between voluntary and community organisations which offer information and advice and the Employment Service and Careers Service which can provide guidance. Two partnerships were recruiting voluntary and community organisations from lifelong learning partnerships, though one lead partner pointed out that not all of the groups he was interested in recruiting wanted to be members of the lifelong learning partnership.

Most partnerships stated that voluntary and community organisations were valuable because they offered access to clients. The advantage of working with them was said to be enhanced channels for making contact with potential clients who were the hardest to reach and help. It was also pointed out that voluntary and community organisations offered a non-institutional image, informality and an individual approach which was particularly appropriate for many adult clients.

Voluntary and community groups were becoming involved in the delivery of IAG services in different ways. Three lead partners explained that their main involvement to date was through participating in staff development and training sessions in preparation for providing information and advice as part of the IAG programme. Two partnerships reported that it had not yet been decided which voluntary and community organisations they wanted to work with to deliver services. One lead partner pointed out that this decision depended on the identification of priority client groups, adding that a system of bidding for funding would not be used for fear of destroying the trust which had been built up with voluntary and community organisations, many of which

did not have the time to prepare and submit a bid. In contrast, another partnership provided funding for resource materials through a bidding system.

3.2.3 Communication and liaison

The evaluation found that the partnerships were in the process of developing strategies and systems for communication and liaison. Coordinators played a pivotal role in communicating progress to partnership and network members. This was best illustrated where coordinators talked to people at different levels in the partnership, including core partners, area managers, and sub-group members.

A range of methods was used to disseminate information and keep in touch with providers, including partnership meetings, newsletters, written correspondence, and e-mail. Partnerships were using some of the IAG funding to take forward communications strategies, although these were not always in place. Two of the partnerships indicated that they were setting up websites and three were going to produce partnership or network directories. One lead partner was planning to provide written reports on progress every six months. All but one of the partnerships expressed satisfaction with the development of communications with partners. Some partnerships were aiming to enhance communication and liaison with providers through organising and funding annual conferences and network events.

3.3 Progress and Outcomes

Overall, the non-pathfinders reported that the IAG programme had enhanced understanding of need and the resources available. They considered that it had built on and extended existing partnerships, and had created or strengthened networks through which information, experience and expertise could be shared. Furthermore, they thought that the programme was helping to develop a coordinated response to the need for information and advice for adults.

The evaluation found that partnerships were facing challenges in working towards the milestones in their business plans. Improving and harmonising client data recording systems was a major challenge. Indeed, one lead partner asserted that it was not possible to set realistic performance targets because not all partners kept reliable client data. Another partnership was aiming to develop systems to describe client throughput, for example by gender, postcode, and special need group. Progress had been made in one partnership whose members were now using the same definitions of information and advice.

The provision of IAG services had not increased since the non-pathfinder partnerships had been established. It is important to note that they were preoccupied with establishing partnership infrastructures, which was their brief. One lead partner observed that IAG provision had decreased in his region owing to reductions or delays in ESF and SRB funding.

All of the non-pathfinders had included in their budget for the provision of marketing resources. Some partnerships reported that progress was being made in producing and distributing information to outlets such as libraries. For example, one partnership had agreed a local logo and had produced leaflets for clients. Another partnership had put in place employer contact strategies, and was piloting strategies for reaching specific groups. Non-pathfinders were giving consideration to the balance between reaching clients through established outlets and outreach work. Whilst one was planning to use outreach for specific projects such as a single parent initiative, another indicated that the success of its shopfront careers centres was limiting the expansion of outreach work. A number of the partnerships were planning to expand outreach work and had invested resources in laptop computers and guidance software for the outreach workers.

The evidence from pathfinder partnerships indicated that, although outreach was labour intensive, its value lay in making contact with individuals who were unlikely to use IAG services of their own volition. Partnership representatives viewed outreach work as a vital component in helping to identify and address barriers to learning, though they acknowledged that it sometimes took quite a long time for the outcomes to be achieved in terms of individuals developing the confidence and motivation to make use of provision and take up opportunities.

Partnerships had made progress in adopting the Guidance Council quality standards by organising and delivering briefing and training sessions for providers. In some cases, this included providing workshops for specific groups, such as librarians. Three partnerships reported that staff from different organisations had signed up for or started NVQ-related training. Two partnerships noted that the cost of accreditation was a major issue, saying that some voluntary and community organisations were unlikely to go for accreditation unless the cost was reduced.

Partnerships were giving thought to how the outcomes from the IAG programme would be measured. Client evaluation of provision and the number of organisations achieving quality accreditation were identified as possible measures. Some partnerships were exploring what type of information and data would enable them to measure outcomes, including client satisfaction. One was currently devising a client feedback form. Two partnerships mentioned that the mystery shopper exercise would present additional feedback on the services provided, and two were being evaluated by external consultants.

3.4   Sustainability

Lead partners indicated that progress had been made in laying the foundations to support the continuation of the IAG partnerships and the creation of a more coherent service for adults. The foundations included setting up partnership steering, management, delivery and interest groups, recruiting coordinators,

devising business plans, and encouraging network members to communicate with each other.

Partnerships identified benefits from the IAG programme which they felt would contribute significantly to their future development: identifying target groups, establishing links with voluntary and community organisations, and training providers and securing their commitment to work towards accreditation. Coordinators indicated that the future development of the work of their partnerships would benefit from drawing in additional partners, and from a better understanding of need in the local community. Furthermore, they observed that partners were gaining an enhanced understanding of the resources available for, and different approaches to, providing IAG services. They also noted that, through the IAG programme, providers were beginning to share information and expertise which they considered would help to develop a more coordinated response to meeting adults' information and advice needs in the future.

Four partnerships indicated that they had or were going to make further applications for funding. This included SRB and ESF funding for adult guidance workers.

The sustainability of the partnerships may be related to some extent to the links they form with external programmes and agencies. The non-pathfinders stated that they were giving thought to how to develop links with Connexions and some pointed out that they were already involved in consultations about this. Furthermore, partnerships were developing links with the Employment Service, including meeting with their district managers to set up a one-stop shop and participating in joint planning of New Deal delivery. The Employment Service was a full member of one of the partnerships.

KEY FINDINGS

♦ Non-pathfinders considered that the IAG programme had provided the impetus to take a wider perspective on the provision of information and advice services to adults which they thought would help them to take a more strategic approach in the future.

♦ The development work undertaken by partnerships, including carrying out local needs analyses, had enhanced understanding of the characteristics and location of priority disadvantaged groups.

♦ The IAG programme had strengthened networks and provided more opportunities for sharing information, experience and expertise amongst providers.

♦ Partnerships were in the process of developing communication and liaison systems, including setting up websites and producing partnership or network directories.

♦ Some of the partnerships were examining the extent to which common systems for recording and reporting client data were required and feasible.

- ♦ Voluntary and community organisations were considered to make a vital contribution to partnerships by increasing access to a range of disadvantaged clients whose needs they understood and had experience in addressing.

4. IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

This chapter presents findings on the impact of and outcomes from the IAG programme in pathfinder partnerships. The findings are based on in-depth interviews undertaken with a wide range of providers (30 in total) in both the statutory and voluntary sectors. It provides their views and assessment of how the IAG programme has impacted on their ways of working and on the services that they offer to clients.

The results of a questionnaire survey on the IAG activities undertaken by a sample of providers in the early stages of their involvement in pathfinder partnerships is presented in Appendix 1.

4.1 Information and Advice

Providers identified a range of effects of the IAG programme on the services that they offered. Several mentioned that they were able to provide clients with better information on learning and career opportunities as a result of receiving resources and materials through the pathfinder partnerships. These included books, directories, databases, videos, and computer software, including CD-ROMS. Staff remarked that this additional material enabled them to provide clients with a greater range of and/or more up-to-date information. For example, a student services director pointed out that she and her staff were able to offer refugees an enhanced service now that they had a copy of NARIC, which is a database of comparisons of international qualifications.

In one case, a provider said that there should have been a greater emphasis on providing updated information on local opportunities, and in another, a provider was disappointed at not receiving a resource pack for clients, which had been promised by the lead partner.

Improved marketing and publicity materials were another benefit identified by some providers. They indicated that these helped to furnish more communities and individuals with information about the services and help available to them. For example, a provider located in an area of industrial decline sent leaflets to staff who were facing redundancy in closing companies.

A few providers reported that the IAG programme had enhanced their capacity to provide information and advice by offering them resources to recruit or allocate additional staff for this purpose. The staff had been mainly used to strengthen community liaison and outreach work. Providers emphasised that this enabled them to be more proactive in making contact with different client groups.

The evaluation found that the range of services provided by organisations in pathfinder partnerships and networks remained largely the same as before the inception of the IAG programme. The exception to this was a training provider, which now offered clients information and advice in addition to job preparation services.

Some providers opined that the increased networking engendered by the IAG partnerships would help to improve client referral in the future. They claimed to have a greater awareness of other providers' services which had '*opened up ideas'*, as one senior training manager expressed it. Building up individual contacts was said to be particularly useful, and in a few cases, these had led to referrals taking place. For example, a training provider said that it was receiving more referrals from the local careers service.

The evaluation found that the IAG programme was leading to more informed referrals insofar as organisations were developing a greater awareness and understanding of what learning opportunities and support were available in the local community. Partnerships were aware that better information on clients would help to identify and meet their needs. As a result, some were endeavouring to improve client recording systems.

It should be noted that providers stressed that the IAG programme was helping them to devise and strengthen systems which underpinned the provision of information and advice. It appeared that local programmes were driven more by development work – '*we are keener on establishing systems and getting it right,'* as one college manager stated – than by targets.

Some providers observed that the IAG programme had made a significant contribution to the development of communication systems across partnerships and networks. In addition to the organisation of partnership meetings and e-mail contact, in some cases this had included the production and distribution of newsletters and directories giving key information on providers which could be used for signposting and to facilitate referrals. Providers in two areas reported that communication with the wider community was being enhanced through the creation of partnership computer websites.

There was some evidence that the IAG programme was strengthening local partnerships and networks by helping to develop a more coordinated approach to the provision of IAG across an area. Partners were beginning to work together towards shared goals within a common framework. They also had a clearer understanding of each other's contribution to the range of IAG services. Overall, it appeared that providers were participating in a more planned approach to identifying and meeting the needs of adults in the local community.

Other examples of development were the setting up or enhancement of management information systems and client referral and tracking procedures. Several providers pointed out that they had little or no intelligence on client outcomes from the information and advice that they had provided. Where

tracking data was available it indicated that the wide range of learning opportunities taken up by clients included interview techniques, confidence building, IT, ESOL, English, management, and nursing.

4.2   Reaching Disadvantaged Clients

The majority of the providers stated that the IAG programme had helped them to reach disadvantaged clients. It had provided opportunities to discuss and share experience with a range of other providers and had provided resources for undertaking outreach projects. As a result, providers were better equipped to implement strategies to make contact with hard-to-reach clients.

The IAG programme supported outreach in two ways: through funding specific outreach projects, and through enhancing this work in a more general way. Some providers disclosed that the programme had encouraged them to reflect on the process of reaching disadvantaged clients. This effect was illustrated by a senior manager in a training organisation who commented that involvement in the IAG partnership had '*made us think hard about how to extend our reach*'. Another manager said that the local authority now '*has clearly targeted groups*'.

The evaluation found that IAG funding was being used to enhance the organisation and delivery of outreach by expanding large providers' access to disadvantaged groups through increased links with smaller voluntary, community and specialist organisations (e.g. Mencap, housing associations and family support units) in addition to targeting more resources on these client groups.

An illustration of a successful outreach project is provided below.

According to an organisation specialising in working with refugees, the impact of the IAG programme had been '*enormous*' and helped staff to '*reach the really isolated, particularly women refugees*'. The resources had funded a range of outreach activities in mosques, supermarkets and shopping centres, community centres, hostels, schools, churches, and a health centre. Further information and advice was provided through home visits and dealing with telephone enquiries. The publicity materials for the outreach project were translated into seven refugee community languages. Contact was made with a total of 255 refugees. The initial outcomes from the project included the provision of community-based ESOL courses, 30 women starting ESOL classes, and seven women were referred to a local college to study an IT course.

Such outreach work was not confined to community organisations, but was also evident in the business context.

> This purpose of one business outreach project was to make a contribution both to tackling '*the low skills agenda*' and to '*the widening of participation of individuals as life long learners*'. It aimed to raise the awareness of businesses and their staff of the benefits of taking up learning opportunities, and through this to encourage the development of a learning culture. Targeting small and medium enterprises, one in three of which were run by people from ethnic minorities, the provider carried out visits to 100 companies, interviewing over 200 owners and staff about their learning and training needs, giving information about courses and supplying vouchers for college courses. Over two-thirds expressed an interest in taking up learning opportunities, particularly to enhance their IT, professional, and marketing skills.

Other providers reported that their involvement with the pathfinder partnerships had given them more time to work with groups such as adults with drug-related problems, ex-offenders and ex-prisoners, women returners, and redundant miners and textile workers. A senior training manager underlined the value of this contact reflecting that '*it is often confirmation of what they want to do. It's part of a process, which helps them to engage and make links*'. Several providers emphasised, however, that outreach work was costly and time consuming.

4.3   Staff Development

Most of the providers interviewed said that staff had been informed about the IAG programme at team meetings or training sessions. In some cases, managers had decided to target briefings on certain staff, such as basic skills and guidance workers. Some indicated that leading their organisation's involvement in the partnership and keeping their colleagues informed had enhanced their role. Managers in small providers often pointed out that this work was very demanding for them and, as this observation indicates, it had an opportunity cost: '*… it's developmental and we have had some really long meetings. When we are doing that, we can't be seeing the clients. But it has been worthwhile*'. Managers said that such an investment of time was beneficial because it enabled them and their staff to examine, in depth, their procedures and *modus operandi*, and explore better ways of providing services.

Partnership meetings were another arena of staff development identified by some of the providers. Acknowledging in the main the value of being consulted about partnership decisions, including those relating to the business plans, some explained that involvement in partnership management groups, working groups and practitioner groups had helped their staff to gain an up-to-date understanding of critical issues relating to the planning and delivery of IAG for adults.

Several providers reported that the IAG programme was helping to upgrade their staff. Nine providers indicated that some or all of their staff were working towards NVQs in advice and guidance at level 3 or 4 and some were attending training sessions provided by the lead partner. Providers noted that this upskilling of their staff would contribute to the continuing improvement of the quality of the services that they offered to clients.

4.4 Quality Assurance

Most of the providers interviewed stated that the IAG programme had helped to improve the quality of the services that they provided. One senior manager, for example, commented that the IAG programme '*has given us a clearer focus on what we do ... it has helped to make us more effective and efficient in terms of allocating staff time to clients' needs'*. Further examples of how the programme was helping providers to enhance quality are provided below. A minority of providers said that there had been no impact as yet on the quality of the services they offered, some pointing out that the standard of their provision was reviewed regularly through well-developed quality assurance systems.

The view articulated by a director of student services that the IAG programme had '*reminded us of quality standards'* was shared by several providers. Some pointed out that their participation in the IAG programme had forced them reflect on and review the quality of the services that they offered. They said that this involvement had made them examine in more depth what they did and what they provided. This included looking more closely at how they delivered information, advice and guidance to clients, or '*getting the detail right'*, as one college manager put it.

A college manager remarked that the IAG programme '*made us more reflective – we are more structured and more conscious of what each client receives'*. A guidance manager based in a chamber of commerce reported that the IAG programme had assisted staff in identifying clients' needs. Another provider said that IAG had made staff realise that they had to do more '*to satisfy clients better'*.

Some providers noted that they had made practical changes as a result of participating in the IAG programme. These included the following:

♦ developing a quality plan;

♦ drawing up or revising a statement of service;

♦ writing up operating procedures;

♦ improving front-of-house services.

Most IAG providers indicated that the IAG programme had supported their organisations in working towards the Guidance Council quality standards. Two main types of support were provided: briefings on the standards and the accreditation process, and NVQ–related training.

Providers valued the briefings on the Guidance Council quality standards and the accreditation process through which the Guidance Accreditation Board assesses whether organisations are complying with the standards. They considered that the standards were very detailed, and in some cases rather complicated, and welcomed explanations of what was required to achieve accreditation. Feedback from the interviews indicated that some partnerships valued the role of the Guidance Council in providing an infrastructure and clear direction for the continuing improvement of IAG services.

Several providers had sent staff to attend introductory sessions on NVQs in advice and guidance. As the previous section indicated, nine providers had reported that some or all of their staff had started to work towards NVQs as a result of the IAG programme.

4.5   Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

Most providers said that they had undertaken some form of client monitoring and had provided their IAG partnership with this data. The evaluation found that monitoring instruments and methods had not yet been standardised within every pathfinder. Consequently, most providers used their own systems for collecting and reporting client data, but some indicated that their partnerships were in the process of developing client monitoring systems and devising standard data collection forms.

An example of an effective monitoring system is provided below.

> A pathfinder had developed a computerised client record system which was used by partnership members. The system stores information about IAG clients, calculates invoice amounts, provides audit data of services provided, and is used for centralised monitoring and evaluation. Every month providers submit to the lead partner, on a floppy disk, data on the clients who have received information and advice. When interviewed, providers said that the system, which collects client data in a standardised form, was easy to use. Furthermore, they praised its efficiency, as it involved no paperwork for them.

Many providers reported that they gave feedback on trends in client information and advice episodes funded by the IAG programme at pathfinder steering group or subgroup meetings. This information, which included the age and sex of clients and the service provided in addition to client satisfaction survey data, was presented in monthly, quarterly and annual reports. They said that this enabled them to gain a bigger picture of the profile of clients using the services provided and that it was used to plan provision for the future.

In one pathfinder, providers who had received funding for running outreach projects had produced reports. These comprised an outline of the aims and methods of the project, statistics on the number and type of clients reached,

and a brief discussion of emerging issues, including the challenges involved in undertaking outreach with the particular client groups.

One important issue which emerged from the interviews conducted for this evaluation concerned the recording of client data in an outreach context. Providers pointed out that asking people for personal details, although often required by funders and useful for building up client databases, could be a barrier to winning the trust of adults in the community. According to one provider, establishing this trust was a major challenge as *'many clients don't have a sense of themselves as learners'*. Some providers reported that they were able to collect client data more effectively when they met and talked to people in 'safe' settings such as hostels.

Gathering client satisfaction data through written completion of forms was the main type of evaluation of services carried out. This was normal practice for a minority of the providers interviewed, though some pointed out that collecting and analysing this type of data had not been funded by their pathfinder partnership.

The providers who undertook evaluations revealed that the client satisfaction rates were generally high with 80 to 90 per cent of clients expressing satisfaction.

The evaluation found that some providers were going beyond the analysis of client satisfaction data to evaluate and review practice and provision. One provider had modified its form for collecting information from clients to include a question on barriers to learning which it wanted to review. A careers service operations manager reported that clients' action plans were monitored to ensure that the quality was good. An education and training advisory service evaluated the profile of the client group, especially their residential location, to ascertain if there was a need for further and targeted promotion of the services available. A training agency had evaluated how accessible its centres were for adults with disabilities, for those with children, and for those travelling by bus.

Providers were asked to identify what additional support, if any, their clients needed to make a successful transition. Four main types of support were suggested:

- **Information**: better reference materials and use of **learndirect** (public information service).
- **Continuing advice and support**: follow–up calls from careers advisers and access to mentors with whom they feel comfortable.
- **Practical/financial assistance**: help to overcome travel and childcare barriers.
- **Employability and life skills**: assertiveness training, confidence building, learning how to assess own abilities, job preparation (applications and interviews), basic skills (literacy and numeracy) training, health awareness and computing.

When discussing these types of additional support, providers drew attention to the broader needs of adults, especially those in the priority disadvantaged groups, who, according to their professional judgement and experience, found making educational, occupational and social transitions to be a major challenge. They indicated that they could provide some of this additional support either unilaterally or in collaboration with other organisations and agencies in their area.

4.6 Other Benefits and Outcomes from IAG Pathfinder Partnerships

Providers identified a range of other benefits and outcomes from their involvement in the IAG pathfinder partnerships.

Providers stated that the pathfinder partnerships had usefully raised the profile of IAG for adults which they thought was helping to increase awareness of the services available. In some areas joint events and publicity had assisted this process. Another outcome was the development of '*a group voice*' to articulate the case for IAG. The remark made by one provider that the main success of the pathfinder partnership had been '*recognition that this type of work is important and necessary in itself*' was echoed by others.

It was observed that the pathfinder partnerships had helped to stimulate a dialogue on the needs of different groups in the local community – what they were and how they were changing – and on the implications for the provision of IAG. Providers said that the partnerships had strengthened networking, and in some cases, were reducing the barriers between different agencies. It was also noted that the pathfinders were helping to develop common procedures which would increase the consistency of provision.

Involvement in the partnerships was said to have put IAG higher on organisational agendas. In some cases, membership increased practitioners' capacity to negotiate with senior managers about staff allocations to IAG work.

KEY FINDINGS

- Providers said that the IAG programme had usefully raised the profile and increased awareness of adult information and advice.

- Providers reported that as a result of the IAG programme they had received resources and materials which enabled them to provide a greater range and more up-to-date information for clients.

- Partnership working had led to an improvement in marketing and publicity materials.

- Communication between partners had improved with the establishment or enhancement of channels such as newsletters and websites. This was creating a dialogue on ways of meeting adults' needs and was leading to more networking.

- Greater awareness of other providers' services had already facilitated some referrals and it is anticipated that these will increase in the future.

- Providers indicated that the IAG programme had enhanced outreach work targeted on disadvantaged adults by providing a clearer focus, resources, and the stimulus to try out different methods.

- Several providers had identified staff development needs as a result of the IAG programme and some of their staff had started working towards NVQs.

- Providers reported that their participation in the IAG programme had encouraged them to reflect and review the quality of their services. Those who had attended the briefings provided by lead partners on the Guidance Council quality standards appreciated them and some were now working towards accreditation.

5. IMPACT AND OUTCOMES OF THE ADULT IAG SERVICE FROM THE CLIENTS' PERSPECTIVE

In order to assess the impact and outcomes of the adult IAG programme, clients' experiences and views were gathered in the pathfinder areas. In the second round of interview visits, a sample of providers was asked if they could either arrange for a group of adult IAG clients to be available for interview on the day of the researcher's visit, or to provide a list of client's names and addresses, so that telephone interviews could be carried out. Fifty clients were interviewed, 26 female and 24 male, in three focus groups or by telephone.

5.1. Marketing the Service

Clients heard about the service through a number of sources, including job centres and high street career shops, college reception staff, outreach workers, employers, business services and through advertising campaigns run by individual providers. One client had heard a presentation by a member of the careers service staff while attending a college course, while others mentioned 'word of mouth'. Two of the respondents had looked up careers guidance in telephone directories or yellow pages, while others had received leaflets at home, detailing the services.

Fewer than half of the clients had seen advertisements for the adult IAG service, either before or after they had received information or advice. Of those who had, most said the advertisements were informative, although sometimes the information was sketchy. Four of the respondents thought that the services should be marketed more vigorously, with one client commenting that:

> *'I didn't know they dealt with adults, or the other help they could give me'.*

It is worth noting that, in the early days of the pathfinder, partnerships had not put marketing strategies in place, in some cases because they were deliberating over whether to provider 'badging' (e.g. a partnership logo). At the same time, some providers voiced their reluctance to advertise their service too widely as they could not estimate the demand for adult IAG services and feared being inundated with requests for IAG. By the time of the second round of interviews, providers usually had marketing in place and were coping with the demand.

Nearly all of the clients interviewed expressed satisfaction with the ease in which they were able to make contact with the service, describing staff as generally helpful and efficient. Where adult IAG services were offered on a 'no appointment' system, some clients had to wait for ten or fifteen minutes for an advice worker to be free to help them. In one case the client thought the first worker he saw was 'new' and uninformed and he needed a second visit before he felt reassured.

5.2. Information and Advice Received

The majority of clients had received information or advice on training and courses, although there was a range of other services that had been taken up by a few, including help with CVs, letters of application and job search, and help with finding childcare. For example, one woman had wanted to enhance her professional nursing career and had received advice not only on courses but also on how she could fit the training alongside a full-time job.

What was particularly interesting was that nearly half (22) of the clients had been in contact with an advice worker at least twice, and often many more times. As one provider pointed out, the key is ongoing support, *'clients need to be able to confide in you and come back. You can actually keep people on courses by intervening and providing ongoing support'*. In some cases, particularly where outreach workers were involved, the providers would contact the client from time to time to ask if they needed further help with course and career choices. All of the focus group interviewees had received continuing support from the providers. Some were enrolled on basic skills courses with the provider organisation which gave the advice staff more opportunities to ensure that their clients were still on track and likely to achieve a successful outcome.

Clients were receiving help from the advice workers on a range of issues related to improving their qualifications and employment status, including information on child care, financial support for child care and transport, benefits and grants and funding for study. Support from some providers was described as 'ongoing' or 'continuous' and included regular telephone contact, as well as visits to providers' premises.

5.3 Clients' Perceptions of the Quality and Value of Services Provided

Most of the interviewees were satisfied with the information and advice they had received. It is worth bearing in mind that for most of them, this was their first opportunity to receive career information and advice since their school days, and they would have nothing with which to compare the service. Nevertheless, services which were described as *'really relaxed and approachable',* or *'marvellous, brilliant, covered everything,'* and *'above and beyond what would be expected,'* indicate a very high level of satisfaction. One woman, who was thinking of setting up a business with a friend remarked on the helpfulness of staff.

> *'We are 40 and 36. It is nice to have someone our age to advise us, they were on the same wavelength.'*

Two of the clients were rather more circumspect, saying that they thought they could have been told more about the range of services that they might access.

Few criticisms were made of the services provided but, where they were made, they tended to be about the currency or accuracy of information. Clients complained about being given information on courses that were already underway and which were not taking on more students, others found that the courses were not what they had expected, blaming a breakdown in communications between the advisers and the course team. In reality, these complaints served to indicate the unrealistic expectations of some clients, as well as the frustration that they feel at having to wait, when they have made up their minds to do a course which they hope will change their lives. Nevertheless, these criticisms need to be monitored and acted upon where possible. Could course information materials be more accurate? Could flexible enrolment dates be permitted on courses?

A further criticism came from a semi-retired man who was disappointed that the providers of language and computer courses, which he had phoned as a result of contact with outreach workers in a supermarket, had not got back to him with details of the courses.

A client, who had received help through IAG, looking back on her experiences said:

> *'I thought I was going to get stuck in a corner where you're too old to do it, you're 40 and you feel like you're past it, but you're not, far from it'.*

5.4 Client Outcomes

The majority of clients (35) had acted on the information or advice they had received, mostly by enrolling on education or training courses. A minority had used the service directly to help them get jobs, although some of them were already in employment. In some cases clients had been out of the work-force for some years, particularly, for example, mothers bringing up a family. These clients were often looking at long-term planning to provide them with the qualifications needed to return to work at some time in the future.

Examples of clients who had enrolled on courses as a result of getting information and advice are as follows. A woman who had picked up information from her local library, had recently completed a foundation course in accountancy and book keeping. After being contacted by outreach workers, an unemployed man had enrolled on a short computer course which offered a qualification in web page design. An unemployed housewife received information from a careers adviser and was now doing a secretarial course with business studies.

Of those clients who had not acted upon the information and advice they received, one had already completed a course and was seeking information on opportunities in her chosen career, two others were still considering their options and another was going to see the advice worker again, before deciding.

Elsewhere, an interviewee said she had considered training and higher education but had decided not to proceed because they were *'not financially viable, I couldn't afford to do it'*. Another stressed that she needed information on the availability of creche facilities before she could start a course.

Most of the interviewees said they would be happy to use the information and advice service again, if they needed further help. Many had already recommended the service to friends and family.

5.5   Observations

Clients were generally satisfied with their contact with the information and advice agencies, referring to them as friendly, helpful and flexible services. In some cases they had been surprised to learn of the help that was available to them in making choices about their future careers. It is precisely this change in access to information and advice that raises questions, since clients may be expected to welcome a service that they were unable to use before.

While most of the clients were content with the information or advice they had received, it was clear that many of them had multiple contacts with advisers, rather than a 'one-off' encounter. While the clients clearly felt they needed and valued this, it does have implications for the resourcing of this level of support.

Although some clients thought that the adult IAG services should be marketed more vigorously, is there a case for keeping advertising at a level which enables providers to keep up with demand, rather than creating long waiting lists? It was clear that, once people made up their minds to make a change in their life, they tended to want to take immediate action.

The findings from the programme of client interviews are comparable with those from pathfinders' own evaluations. For example, a survey of 191 clients by one partnership, indicated that the majority (89 per cent) were satisfied with the services they had received under the IAG programme. As a result of the information and advice, thirty-four (18 per cent) said that they had started a course, and 84 (44 per cent) were considering doing so. Clients in this survey wanted to see additional provision being offered, including on-line services, contacts for work experience, and training sessions on interviews and career planning. Furthermore, they suggested that customer care could be improved, especially among frontline staff. Some said that they would have valued more follow-up, with a named personal contact, after they had received a service.

In another pathfinder area, feedback from clients of a learning helpline indicated that 97 per cent had found the information they needed through the helpline and over 90 per cent said that staff were helpful, knowledgeable and '*had time for me*'.

KEY FINDINGS

- The majority of clients were satisfied with the information and advice that they had received through the IAG programme. Some suggested that the services should be marketed more vigorously and some thought that the information provided should be more up-to-date.

- Some clients needed additional help including coaching in job search skills.

- The majority of the clients interviewed had acted on the information and advice which they had received, mostly by enrolling on education and training courses.

- Some clients had already recommended the services to family and friends.

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6.   ISSUES AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

The report concludes by examining some key issues which have been identified by the evaluation. The issues are likely to have implications for future developments in the provision of quality IAG services for adults.

Partnerships

The common view which emerged from the evaluation was that laying the foundations for partnership and developing an infrastructure to sustain it was a major challenge. The point was made that the time required for building trust between different organisations, which is fundamental to collaboration, should not be underestimated and that partnership development was a continuing process. Another point was to recognise the importance of IAG services as an element of community development and regeneration.

Communications

Partnerships had invested considerable effort in network development. Effective communication was recognised as essential for disseminating key messages about the critical role of IAG and about the benefits of partnership and networking. The evaluation found that the development of websites, newsletters and directories was high on the agenda of several partnerships.

Systems development

Whilst the partnerships had made progress in developing an infrastructure, more work was required to develop partnership-wide management information systems. For example, lead partners noted that providers collected different types of data from clients which made it difficult to produce a clear and comprehensive client profile. This suggests that the development of common recording and monitoring systems is a challenge for the future.

Client-related issues

A related issue was what client information should be recorded during outreach activities. In the experience of some providers, asking for basic personal details in outreach encounters made it difficult to build up trust with people which was so critical in winning their commitment to try out learning opportunities, perhaps for the first time in many years. The evaluation indicates that this type of recording needs further consideration and examination. The question of tracking clients was also raised. It appeared that organisations and agencies which provided information and advice to adult clients did not always know how, if at all, they had used it and what the outcomes were in terms of progression to courses, training programmes or

jobs. This suggests that the most appropriate procedures for tracking clients require careful examination. The issues for consideration include:

♦ The extent to which the recording of client data should and could be standardised.

♦ The utility and cost of setting up and maintaining a centralised client database.

♦ The feasibility of devising a suitable procedure for checking and recording from which organisation, agency or service a client has been referred.

♦ The development of appropriate systems and confidentiality/disclosure protocols which enable organisations to transfer and exchange data on clients.

Partnership coordination

Coordinators have played a substantial role in facilitating partnership development and networking. If these networks of diverse groups are going to work together successfully in the future, it will be necessary to continue to have managers who coordinate and maintain them.

Inclusion of voluntary and community groups

The recruitment of voluntary and community groups is a challenge for some partnerships. They are generally valued because they understand the needs of, have access to, and know the most appropriate ways of working with, disadvantaged clients. An issue which emerged concerned how to gain a fair representation of the many voluntary and community groups which operate in an area.

Extending provision to people in employment

Few providers mentioned that they were providing information and advice for people in the workplace. Given current skills shortages in the economy, it is worth considering the extent to which providing information and advice services for business managers and their staff should be a higher priority.

Accreditation

Getting so many organisations and agencies through accreditation for achieving the Guidance Council quality standards was identified as another issue. Partnerships recognised that maintaining momentum and providing support for this was going to be a challenge for the future. Concern was also expressed in some quarters that the cost of, and work involved in, the accreditation process might deter some small voluntary and community organisations, whose value in reaching disadvantaged clients was generally acknowledged, from participating in IAG partnerships and networks.

Outreach

The evaluation found that the IAG programme had helped partnerships to identify priority client groups and had started to stimulate outreach activity. A common view was that there was a long way to go in reaching many of the disadvantaged adults who lived in local communities. Nevertheless, there were signs that partnerships were beginning to focus on harder-to-reach clients.
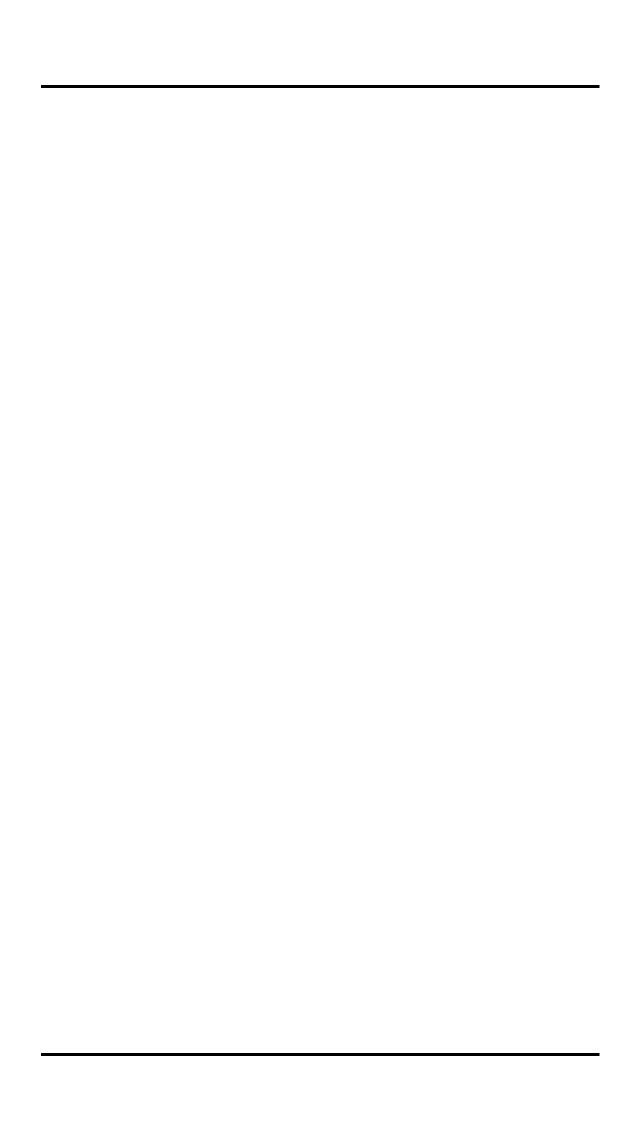
Additional support

The penultimate issue focuses on the social problems of deprivation and disadvantage. Some providers were of the opinion that clients' lack of resources, for example to pay for public transport or child care, were a barrier to their taking up learning opportunities. This suggests that however good the quality of the information and advice provided by local agencies, some people will not be able to take full advantage of it and sign up for courses unless they receive additional support.

Overall progress and future developments

The evidence collected for this evaluation indicated that the pathfinder and non-pathfinder partnerships had made progress in laying the foundations for the provision of IAG services which would help to achieve the overarching aim of widening participation in learning. The partnerships were providing a clearer focus through targeting IAG in a more informed way and were beginning to develop a more coherent approach by providing direction and infrastructure to support and sustain multi-agency working. Resources made available through the IAG programme were being used to develop and enhance outreach strategies and projects aimed at reaching disadvantaged adults and helping them to overcome barriers to taking up opportunities which would enable them to engage in learning and gain skills and qualifications and increase their employability.

The main challenge for the future will be to maintain momentum and build on the foundations which have been put in place. This will involve examining whether partnerships and networks continue to have fitness for purpose and making changes as appropriate, reviewing and where necessary modifying the systems that have been developed for management, communication, delivery and client monitoring, and assessing the method of allocating IAG funding and resources. Finally, an important further development will be the establishment of comprehensive evaluation procedures to measure the impact of IAG and demonstrate its worth.

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Appendix 1

PROVISION OF INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE SERVICES

The Providers

In November 1999 a short questionnaire was sent to a sample of IAG providers identified by the pathfinder and non-pathfinder partnerships in order to find out about the range of IAG activities which they were currently undertaking. These data were collected just as partnerships were planning the range of activities to be provided under the adult IAG programme and were not intended to include details of enhanced provision.

Size

Responses were received from 54 providers. As shown in Table 1, these ranged in size from very small community or voluntary organisations, employing only one full-time member of staff, to a college with 565 full-time staff.

Table 1.   Number of Full-time Staff Reported by IAG Providers

Number of staff	Number of responses
1-20	23
21-100	8
101-200	8
200+	7
No response	8
N =	54

Staff qualifications

Providers were asked to indicate how many of their staff had guidance qualifications but fewer than half responded to the two parts of this question. It was apparent, however, from the answers received, that the numbers of staff who were qualified to levels NVQ 3 and NVQ 4 also varied widely.

In all, 29 providers gave information on how many of their staff had NVQ 3 guidance qualifications at that time and of those, eight reported no staff qualified to that level, and the remainder said between one and six staff had those qualifications. The total number of NVQ 3 qualified staff identified in the survey was 41.

More providers said that they had staff with NVQ 4 guidance qualifications. Thirty-five responded to this question and six of them reported no staff

qualified at NVQ 4. The remaining providers had between one and 96 staff qualified at this level. The total number of NVQ 4 staff identified in the survey was 265.

Targeting

The providers were asked if they had focused on specific types of provision or on targeting particular clients and three-quarters gave a response to these questions. Most of those that mentioned provision were providing information in various forms, including that on job opportunities, job search and training, as well as for specific groups. In some cases their main area of expertise was in giving welfare, funding or financial advice.

Of the 45 respondents identifying their client groups, ten said that they were available to 'all client groups'. Others provided for more restricted client groups, often focusing on those who were socially isolated or excluded, including those with physical or learning disabilities, offenders and ex-offenders, ethnic minority groups and refugees and asylum seekers. Some college and university guidance services were dealing mainly with mature students and returners to learning, while one mentioned services for employers and employees.

Information, Advice and Guidance Services Provided

The providers were sent a form listing information, advice and guidance activities and asked to tick boxes showing which of the activities they were currently providing. As some partnerships were intending to provide an increased range of activities through outreach services, data was also collected on the activities which were presently being provided in this way. The data on outreach activities are discussed in a separate section.

Information

Nearly all of the respondents had been providing information leaflets and brochures for clients and more than three-quarters said they also provided a face-to-face and a telephone information service. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents reported that they provided labour market and occupational information. This is information for clients and not the collection and dissemination of labour market information, which is generally undertaken by careers services.

Information on computer databases had been made available in public and agency premises by more than half of the organisations. Some partnerships intended to make computerised information services available in local companies for the use of employees and Table 2 shows that this is a service which is not widely available at present.

Table 2.   Information Services Provided from Partners' Premises

Information Services	%
Provision of leaflets/brochures	94
Face-to-face enquiry service (no advice or guidance)	78
Telephone information service	78
Provision of labour market and occupational information	63
Computerised information service publicly available	57
Computerised information service in agency premises	56
Computerised information service in companies for employees	13
Other	6
None	4
N =	54

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100

Advice

As Table 3 shows, face-to-face advice services were being provided by 87 per cent of respondents to the survey, while around three-quarters of the respondents had provided telephone advice services. It was interesting to note that nearly two-fifths of respondents were already providing advice services through e-mail, as this had been identified as a means of extending services in a number of pathfinder bids. Those respondents ticking 'other' were providing advice through workshops and group sessions.

Table 3.   Advice Services Provided at Partners' Premises

Advice Services	%
Face-to-face advice service	87
Telephone advice service	76
Postal advice service	56
E-mail advice service	39
None	11
Other	2
N =	54

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100

Guidance

Fewer organisations had been involved in the provision of guidance services, with just over two-thirds providing face-to-face guidance. The detailed results are presented in Table 4. Interestingly, over half of the respondents (57 per

cent) provided initial assessments of basic skills and over a third (35 per cent) offered ESOL assessment and guidance. Psychometric, aptitude and personality testing were available only through a small number of providers (20 per cent or less) and further analysis showed that these were larger organisations, mainly careers services and colleges. Guidance providers responding to the 'other' category mentioned providing help with welfare benefits, employment rights and referrals to college.

Table 4. Guidance Services Provided at Partners' Premises

Guidance Services	%
In-depth face-to-face guidance services	69
Guidance followed by an action plan	67
Initial assessment of basic skills	57
In-depth face-to-face counselling services	43
ESOL assessment and guidance	35
None	26
Psychometric testing	20
Aptitude testing	19
Personality testing	11
Other	4
N =	54

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100

Promotion

Around four-fifths of the organisations (82 per cent) had produced posters advertising their services, and a further 80 per cent reported that clients had also learned about them through 'word of mouth'. Nearly two-thirds had organised information days to promote their activities, while over 60 per cent had promoted their services through newspapers. While few organisations had any promotion or advertising on television (probably because of prohibitive costs), 43 per cent mentioned local radio, which was possibly a useful way of contacting clients with poor literacy skills or disability.

Other Services

Two-thirds of the organisations were providing a range of other services to inform and support their clients. As Table 5 shows, over half (54 per cent) were collecting and disseminating vacancy information and the corresponding figure for local labour market information was 35 per cent.

Table 5.   Other Specialist Services Provided at Partners' Premises

Other Specialist Services	%
Collection/dissemination of vacancy information	54
Specialist provision for the disabled	44
Collection/dissemination of local labour market information	35
None	32
Collection/dissemination of national labour market information	20
N =	54

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100

Over two-fifths of the organisations surveyed were arranging specialist provision for the disabled which included assessment and support and advisers for disabled students.

Outreach activities

As Table 6 illustrates, over half of the respondents said they were already providing information leaflets and brochures through outreach, while 43 per cent had outreach face-to-face enquiry services and a third (33 per cent) had a telephone information service based in outreach premises.

Table 6.   Information Services Provided Through Outreach Activities

Information Services	%
Provision of leaflets/brochures	54
Face-to-face enquiry service (no advice or guidance)	43
Telephone information service	33
Provision of labour market and occupational information	17
Computerised information service publicly available	17
Computerised information service in agency premises	24
Computerised information service in companies for employees	6
Other	2
None	43
N =	54

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100

Advice services were also being offered through outreach services, as shown in Table 7. Half of the respondents said they had provided face-to-face advice

services through outreach and over a third (35 per cent) had telephone advice services in outreach premises.

Table 7.   Advice Services Provided Through Outreach Activities

Advice Services	%
Face-to-face advice service	50
Telephone advice service	35
Postal advice service	22
E-mail advice service	11
None	50
Other	2
N =	54

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100

At the time of the survey, fewer guidance services were available through outreach with just over a third of providers mentioning that they were providing in-depth guidance services (Table 8). Interestingly, 30 per cent of the providers surveyed said they were offering initial assessment of basic skills through an outreach approach.

Table 8.   Guidance Services Provided Through Outreach Activities

Guidance Services	%
In-depth face-to-face guidance services	37
Guidance followed by an action plan	34
Initial assessment of basic skills	30
In-depth face-to-face counselling services	13
ESOL assessment and guidance	17
Psychometric testing	9
Aptitude testing	9
Personality testing	7
Other	2
N =	54

More than one answer could be given so percentages do not sum to 100

Promotion services, such as advertising on posters and in the press and 'word of mouth' were provided through outreach services by just over 30 per cent of the providers surveyed, while 24 per cent had held 'information days'.

Appendix 2

INFORMATION ON THE COSTS OF PROVIDING IAG SERVICES

A further strand of the study was the collection of information on the costs of providing adult IAG. The data was collected using a proforma (with guidelines for completion) that was distributed to the lead partners in both pathfinder and non-pathfinder partnerships in November 1999. They consulted with a sample of partners to provide estimates of costs.

The first page of the proforma asked about the various sources of funding received and the estimated total amount spent on adult IAG by the partnership. It then asked for partners 'estimates' of the number of 'episodes' of IAG that they provide over the course of year and then about annual costs and margins.

Although the level of data required was simplified as much as possible, and after consultation with some of the partnerships, in the event some of them had difficulty in providing the information. In many cases partners' accounting procedures did not allow the breakdown in a way that made unit costs of IAG accessible, in others, their data collection on client numbers was incomplete, if it existed at all. A further drawback was the newness of the partnership arrangements. Lead partners were anxious not to ask partners for sensitive information so early in the new partnerships. Although many had worked together in networks for many years, it had often been in a climate of competition, not cooperation.

The information collected from the partnerships was entered onto a database, weighted and analysed. It should be noted that the figures provided by the projects were their best estimates of the annual costs of providing IAG and included overheads and other fixed costs.

Table 1 shows the various sources of funding identified by the lead partners. All pathfinder partnerships received DfEE IAG funding and Single Regeneration Budget funding, whilst all non-pathfinder partnerships received ESF and New Deal funding. It is interesting to note that only one of the partnerships received Lottery funding.

Table 1.   Percentage of Partnerships receiving funding from various sources

Sources of funding	All	Pathfinder	Non-pathfinder
DfEE IAG Funding	90.9	100.0	80.0
DfEE Careers Service Core Funding	54.5	50.0	60.0
European Social Fund	90.9	83.3	100.0
Single Regeneration Budget	81.8	100.0	60.0
Employment Service	54.5	66.7	40.0
New Deal	90.9	83.3	100.0
Lottery	9.1	16.7	0.0
Other	100.0	100.0	100.0

The costings study gathered pathfinder partnerships' best estimates of providing IAG services as gaining detailed information on costs is particularly difficult and commercially sensitive. It should be noted that the figures presented here are for background information only and should be treated with caution. The approximate average cost per episode for non-outreach services was £5 for information, £17 for advice, and £53 for guidance.

According to the estimates provided, both information and advice appear to be more expensive to deliver on an outreach basis: the approximate average cost per episode was £9 and £42 respectively.