

The Role of Intermediary Agencies in Promoting Information Advice and Guidance in the Workplace

Research report

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Summary

This report was commissioned to explore how the use of intermediaries might be utilised to increase the profile and use of information advice and guidance (IAG) services by employers and their employees. The report's findings can support joint planning by local Learning and Skills Councils (local LSCs), IAG partnerships and Business Links to enhance the coordination of IAG services to employers and their employees.

The report provides signposts to links that can be made at an operational level with many of the agencies operating in this field, including some which are not publicly funded.

This report is of interest to staff involved in the planning and delivery of LSC-funded IAG services (LSC IAG contract managers, workforce development managers and IAG partnership coordinators).

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Executive Summary

This report was commissioned to explore how the use of intermediaries might be utilised to increase the profile and use of information advice and guidance (IAG) services by employers and their employees.

Currently, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) contracts with local Information Advice and Guidance partnerships (IAG partnerships) serving specific geographic areas to deliver free and impartial information and advice to adults over 20 years of age. Information on learning opportunities is also available through a national helpline offering mediated or web-based information on learning opportunities operated by **learnirect**. Currently, this service is primarily aimed at individuals.

At the time this report was commissioned, there was little evidence of involvement of IAG partnerships with agencies or organisations that support and advise employers. However, this picture has altered considerably. Local Learning and Skills Councils (local LSCs), IAG partnerships and Business Links are now becoming involved in collaborative working, although the picture is not consistent nationally.

The research for the report aimed to support the implementation of the LSC Workforce Development Strategy in terms of how IAG could be introduced appropriately, and effectively, through the use of intermediaries into smaller businesses – in particular, to enhance local working arrangements. The findings from this report can also support joint planning by local LSCs, IAG partnerships and Business Links to enhance the coordination of IAG services to employers and their employees.

The report provides signposts to links that can be made at an operational level with many of the agencies operating in this field, including some which are not publicly funded.

It emerged during the course of the research that there need to be two strands to the strategy to develop the role of IAG services for fuller integration with workforce development, which are:

- > to increase employer awareness of the need and benefits of effective IAG services in the workplace; and
- > to increase the awareness and take-up of IAG services by individuals in the workforce.

There has already been some success in joining up services at a local level. However, the wider remit of working with employers is, for some partnerships, new work for staff trained to support the needs of the individual. The need to build the capacity of IAG partnership provision to provide a service for employers and employees is an important consideration.

The report also reviews employer training pilots (ETPs), a project led by the LSC to reimburse a wide range of employers who agree to give low-skilled employees paid time off work to take education and training courses. The project is designed to evaluate whether employers will be encouraged to train employees if they are subsidised for the cost of giving them paid time off work to study. Each pilot area has developed a strategy to provide IAG services for individuals participating in the activity. Firms and other organisations from the private, public and voluntary sectors are being encouraged to join the scheme. The pilots are aimed at small employers with fewer than 50 employees, medium-sized employers with between 50 and 249 employees and larger employers with over 250 staff.

Project work supported by the Quality Development Fund (QDF) and the ETPs are all supporting an increased broadening of relationships. For reference, a list and brief description of these projects can be found in Annex A of this report.

Intended recipients:

Staff involved in the planning and delivery of LSC-funded IAG services (LSC IAG contract managers, workforce development managers and IAG partnership coordinators).

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Section 1: Background

Context

- 1 In November 2001 the Performance Innovation Unit (PIU) of the Cabinet Office published a report on the reasons for low skill levels in the UK workforce. This report, and the later Strategy Unit Report (PIU 2) published in November 2002, both reinforce that it is essential that people in work are aware of learning opportunities on offer and know which choices would be the most appropriate and effective for them to access their chosen course or programme.
- 2 This report was commissioned to explore how the use of intermediaries might be utilised to increase the profile and use of information advice and guidance (IAG) services by employers and their employees.
- 3 Currently, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) contracts with local Information Advice and Guidance partnerships (IAG partnerships) serving specific geographic areas to deliver free and impartial information and advice to all adults over 20 years of age. Information on learning opportunities is also available through a national helpline offering mediated or web-based information on learning opportunities operated by **learnirect**. Currently, this service is primarily aimed at individuals.
- 4 Local helplines and websites aimed at individuals and employers are also being developed in local LSC areas, but there is no direct funding line to support these initiatives and they were, in the main, funded through the LSC Local Initiative Fund, allocation of which is contingent on local priorities. This has resulted in coverage that is not consistent either geographically or by organisational lead. Users cannot always link into all other relevant sources of information through a portal to assist their search through whichever route they may choose. Diverse branding can exacerbate this situation.
- 5 At the time this report was commissioned, there was little evidence of involvement of IAG partnerships with agencies or organisations that support and advise employers. However, this picture has altered considerably since September 2002. Local LSCs, IAG partnerships and Business Links are now becoming involved in collaborative working, although the picture is not consistent nationally. Project work supported by the Quality Development Fund (QDF) and the employer training pilots (ETPs) are all supporting an increased broadening of relationships. For reference, a list and brief description of these projects can be found in Annex A of this report.
- 6 It should also be borne in mind when considering the conclusions and recommendations of this report that the emphasis on workforce development was the major driver of this particular project brief. However, supporting people in employment does not displace the role of IAG providers to meet the needs of individuals, some of whom are at a disadvantage, and this particular group remains the highest priority for the LSC.
- 7 Also emerging are examples of IAG providers working directly to support employee development initiatives with public and large private-sector employers. However, this is very much dependent on local conditions and relationships and should not be seen as the norm.
- 8 The workforce in England is the area where the growth in demand for learning is now vital for our economic performance and this should now be a major consideration for the planning of the provision of IAG for the LSC, local LSCs, IAG partnerships and Business Links.
- 9 The use of language has an important part to play in helping organisations work together and although not a direct element of the project brief, it became obvious that there was confusion around the term 'IAG' among some business support agencies and employers. Conversely, IAG practitioners are not always aware of the 'fit' for the service within business development activities. There is no current 'translation' or glossary of terms developed around IAG services and their fit with workforce development activity. In Annex C of this report there are some descriptors which may help those unfamiliar with some of the terminology in this area.

It is essential that people in work are aware of learning opportunities on offer and know which choices would be the most appropriate and effective for them to access their chosen course or programme.

The Research

- 10 The aim of the research is to support the implementation of the LSC Workforce Development Strategy in terms of how IAG could be introduced appropriately, and effectively, through the use of intermediaries into smaller businesses – in particular, to enhance local working arrangements.
- 11 The findings from this report can also support joint planning by local LSCs, IAG partnerships and Business Links to enhance the coordination of IAG services to employers and their employees.
- 12 The report does not purport to be a toolkit, but provides signposts to links that can be made at an operational level with many of the agencies operating in this field, including some which are not publicly funded.

Methodology

- 13 The project methodology consisted of both desktop research using policy documents from the Department of Education and Skills (DfES) and the LSC, and face-to-face interviews with contract managers from some local LSCs and Business Links. Views of existing networks, sector groups and trade organisations were used to explore where links might be made. Conferences and involvement in steering and working groups were also invaluable in providing information and good practice.
- 14 Further insights were gained through working with local LSC IAG contract managers whose areas had been awarded an ETP and a short description of this initiative is contained later in the report. Contact names for these projects are listed in Annex A.

Section 2: Working with Employers

Introduction

- 15 The LSC has a remit to create a demand-led system that supports workforce development.
- 16 It has emerged during the course of this research that there needs to be two strands to the strategy to develop the role of IAG services for fuller integration with workforce development, which are:
 - > to increase employer awareness of the need and benefits of effective IAG services in the workplace; and
 - > to increase the awareness and take-up of IAG services by individuals in the workforce.
- 17 There has already been some success in joining up services at a local level. However, the wider remit of working with employers is, for some partnerships, new work for staff trained to support the needs of the individual. The need to build the capacity of IAG partnership provision to provide a service for employers and employees is an important consideration.
- 18 However, It should also be recognised that the existing knowledge and expertise of staff in the partnerships, which are quality assured by the **matrix** Standard for information advice and guidance (the **matrix** Standard) are transferable to help individuals choose their learning, within the context of achieving company objectives. The issue appears to be more around how this type of work can or should be introduced into companies. It is in this context that the role of the intermediary and the scope of the activity need to be defined.
- 19 Services offered by IAG providers that support learning and development from an individual's perspective should be viewed as one of many tools that can be engaged on behalf of an individual (in employment or not) and this reinforces the position that IAG partnerships should be viewed principally as providers of a service, not as a direct interface with employers.
- 20 Labour market intelligence (LMI) and the benefits of effective interpretation for the use of those advising employers and their workforce should not be underestimated and building capacity in this area should be a high priority.

- 21 Training by employers to employees at or below Level 2 is, in the main, 'job-specific' and designed to meet the direct needs of the business. However, for many individuals it can be a route into learning which they might not have instigated independently. This is the type of situation where initial IAG for the individual, in the traditional sense, may not take place, but should still be regarded as a legitimate entry to learning. Within the ETPs, IAG provision is also being used to support retention and progression of the learner.

Employer Training Pilots

Introduction

- 22 The LSC is leading a pilot project to reimburse a wide range of employers who agree to give low-skilled employees paid time off work to take education and training courses.
- 23 The project is designed to evaluate whether employers will be encouraged to train employees if they are subsidised for the cost of giving them paid time off work to study. The project will also examine whether employees are more likely to train if they can take courses during working hours. Each pilot area has developed a strategy to provide IAG services for individuals participating in the activity.
- 24 Firms and other organisations from the private, public and voluntary sectors are being encouraged to join the scheme. The pilots are aimed at small employers with fewer than 50 employees, medium-sized employers with between 50 and 249 employees and larger employers with over 250 staff.
- 25 A particular focus is to encourage participation by small employers not currently engaged in training their employees. They are more likely to have more poorly qualified employees and are considered 'hardest-to-reach' by conventional training programmes. The pilots are also likely to involve a higher proportion of mature workers as young people generally have better access to training.

Intermediaries, information advice and guidance and the employer training pilots

- 26 This report does not intend to evaluate the role of IAG within the pilots, as this area is being covered in the full evaluation of the pilots due in December 2003. Rather, it considers some of the aspects that have emerged around the introduction of IAG to the workplace during the first phase of the pilots.
- 27 Initial approaches are usually through Business Link advisers working directly with an employer but also connected with the local LSC Workforce Development Team, learning providers and IAG partnerships.
- 28 Each pilot has a different method of introducing the IAG element with some involved in training needs analysis and others introducing IAG as a support mechanism once a training need has been established. The principal focus of IAG activity will be at the back end of the learning programme. The role of IAG is presented as supporting the employer as well as the individual employee.
- 29 Initiatives that have a prime focus on workforce development, such as Investors in People (IiP) and the ETPs, may result in the perception that the needs of the individual are being overridden by the objectives of the business. These perceptions can cause tensions between agencies with different local priorities and/or targets.
- 30 However, as some of the ETPs are beginning to demonstrate, intervention by IAG workers and/or training advisers can support learners, not necessarily at the start of training where the needs identified are organisational, but during training where an individual may be in danger of dropping out or basic skills needs have been identified. Advice and/or guidance can play a major role on completion of the training when most people are motivated to progress to further learning.
- 31 Helping employers to recognise the different learning styles of their employees can also be a role fulfilled in smaller companies by IAG services.
- 32 The ETPs are just nearing the completion of phase one. Although still in the early stages of development, there is evidence of the benefits of close collaborative working between Business Links and the IAG partnerships in these local areas. This has been a very positive achievement of the pilots and reinforces how Business Links and IAG providers can work productively together in the employer arena when the referral process is not competitive, but complementary.
- 33 It is still too early to say if the concern of employers – that involvement by IAG providers will make employees dissatisfied, leading them to look elsewhere for employment – will be borne out, but it is hoped that the evaluation of the ETPs by the Institute of Employment Studies, due in October 2003, will provide some answers. Clarity of local working arrangements between IAG partnerships and Business Links should be a form of reassurance to employers that appropriate support for the business is being provided.
- 34 As a counter to this perception by employers, there has been a universal offer of information and advice services, supported by the local IAG partnerships, to both employed and unemployed individuals since inception in 1999, so this is not a new activity, but an increased profile for an existing offer to individuals.
- 35 Short summaries of the six phase one ETPs are included with the summary of the QDF projects in Annex A of this report. Evaluation of the phase one pilots is due to be published in December 2003.

Section 3: Intermediaries

Introduction

36 In the terms of this project, an intermediary is viewed as an organisation or individual who does not have a vested interest when providing information or advice.

Who Might the Appropriate Intermediaries Be?

37 One source of potential intermediaries may include agencies or organisations that are currently funded and/or may be directly influenced by the LSC through the DfES, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and other government departments. There are other, many and varied, organisations which are not in the public sector but are still used by employers as a first stop for information and advice.

38 The list of potential intermediaries contained in this report is certainly not exhaustive. Some of the suggested advisory services may fit the agenda well, others – owing to methods of working, government departmental constraints, targets or confidentiality issues and so on – may not be a viable option. A few examples of departments whose staff might be able to raise awareness of how IAG can support the workforce of the businesses they are in contact with are:

- > the Small Business Service;
- > HM Customs and Excise;
- > the Inland Revenue; and
- > the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

39 Potential intermediaries from the private sector may be:

- > banks;
- > accountants;
- > legal representatives;
- > Chambers of Commerce;
- > trade organisations and publications; and
- > recruitment agencies.

40 The following organisations also have direct contact with employers and involvement in learning in the workplace and are within the sphere of influence of the LSC, although not all will have contractual arrangements:

- > colleges of further education;
- > institutions offering higher education;
- > private providers delivering work-based learning;
- > Jobcentre Plus (local account managers); and
- > Business Links.

41 The size of a company, the sector and local economic climate are all factors that need to be taken into account when looking at who the intermediary may be. Existing working relationships and practices in local LSC areas, capacity to deliver, and the targets that different organisations are required to meet in order to access funding should also be recognised as influencing or inhibiting activity.

42 There are many types of organisation that could fit the role of intermediary, but it is important to recognise that the most effective will be those respected by the customer.

43 Existing local arrangements may already be in place or emerging, and this report may confirm existing working practices that are already effective for employers, their employees and the local organisations that serve them.

44 The following part of the report segments potential intermediaries into those that are publicly funded, those that may have several sources of funding (including public) and those that are operating solely in the marketplace.

Potential Intermediaries which are Publicly Funded

Business Link

- 45 Business Link is the service brand for services offered to small businesses. In supporting the priority for workforce development they are contracted in most areas to deliver liP, Small Firms Initiative and Business Start Up. Business Link has a target of 25% penetration of the small- and medium-sized enterprise (SME) market by 2005.
- 46 One of the main complaints of small employers is the number of people who come through their door with offers of help with training or how to access public funds to support that activity.
- 47 Added to this, there are many 'initiative' burdens placed on smaller employers. A 'single point of contact' with the capacity and knowledge to introduce appropriate help is the preference of many.
- 48 If Business Links are to manage the relationship with the client and promote the benefits of IAG to employers, complementary working could be a mutually beneficial arrangement, but adviser capacity and knowledge of IAG and its benefits would need to be built within the agency.

learndirect

- 49 Premier Business Centres are **learndirect** centres that have achieved a set of standards developed by the Small Firms Enterprise Development Initiative (SFEDI) to provide a service to small business. People working within these centres will have a good understanding of the issues facing SMEs, but do not deliver straightforward business advice. Where appropriate a 'signposting' role may involve directing clients to specialist business support. However, **learndirect** Premier Business Centres hold their own portfolio of products and should be considered as a provider, as well as an intermediary.

Other government departments or agencies

- 50 Advisers from other departments or agencies have contacts with employers, and collaborative working by using these contacts could be an effective means of raising awareness of IAG with employers.

- 51 The Skills Strategy, which has been issued jointly by the DfES, the DTI, the Treasury and the Department for Work and Pensions, promotes the integration of the key government departments involved with economic and skills issues.
- 52 The issue of how the capacity needs of these advisers will be met and who will deliver that training will have an impact on resources for all the agencies involved. The development of a common toolkit would be a useful aid to business support advisers from other departments.

Jobcentre Plus

- 53 Jobcentre Plus has a high profile with many employers and is already aware of the need for workforce development for its clients, but advisers do not retain contact with the individual beyond the start of employment.
- 54 However, there is continuing contact with the employers when they require recruitment services. With many Jobcentres already members of IAG partnerships, this would appear to be a good link where the local account managers could be termed as intermediaries.
- 55 If local employers are experiencing difficulties with recruitment or staff retention, referral to a Business Link diagnostic service through this route could also help to increase the profile of local IAG provision.

Centres of Vocational Excellence

- 56 As employer-focused providers of learning, Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) should be able to play a major role in providing employer links and IAG services with a sector bias and, as such, membership of local partnerships should be encouraged.

Providers

- 57 Learning providers, particularly those involved in work-based learning, could have significant impact as intermediaries. Many have strong and continuous contact with employers, but awareness and understanding of local IAG provision is necessary to utilise this contact to its best advantage.

- 58 IAG services currently offered by IAG partnerships are available to those over 20 years of age and, with the increase in the age limit for those pursuing a modern apprenticeship, this is another area where increased knowledge of this type of initiative would be a useful asset to a partnership.
- 59 The emergent role of apprenticeship agents may also be an element that can have an impact on employers' focus in this area.
- 60 Providers of learning in many instances provide IAG to both individuals and employers and many are already members of local IAG partnerships.

Other Potential Intermediaries

Chambers of Commerce

- 61 Chambers of Commerce are member organisations that often offer training and business advice and support services to their members and may in some instances be co-located or work closely with a local Business Link. As regards the role of intermediary, they may be better viewed as a provider of services, although network meetings attended by employers could be effective in promoting a particular message in terms of raising awareness of the benefits of IAG.

Trade associations

- 62 This type of organisation can be a major source of information and advice and, in some cases, specialist training for small businesses. They usually have high credibility with employers and may be affiliated to the newly emerging sector skills councils (SSCs) or existing national training organisations (NTOs).
- 63 As an example, during the course of this research a generalised search on the Internet 'trade associations' resulted in a web page that listed over 100 trade associations serving specific interests (in retail). Trade magazines are also used for information and advice in the same vein. Both of these sources of information are highly credible and can be very influential with smaller companies.
- 64 These organisations are already aware of the need to keep skills current; indeed their members pay for, and expect, an up-to-date service and high quality information. They have to be proactive in

finding out about current initiatives and learning opportunities for their sector and as such should be considered highly credible as intermediaries.

- 65 However, if they are providers of training as well, the offer of information or referral process may not always be impartial.

Trade unions

- 66 Within the remit of this project, the role of trade unions and trade union learning representatives (ULRs) in terms of IAG services is more focused on the individual than the employer. The nature of trade unions is such that their focus is on the needs of the individual member and their development rather than on the achievement of business objectives.
- 67 What needs to be considered is what is the most appropriate means of raising the profile of IAG in a workplace, and ULRs can be a powerful force here. Where the role of the ULR is already embedded, the employer may be aware of the benefits already.
- 68 ULRs, in having a focus on their own area of employment and individual employees, are not likely to refer to the wider audience of SMEs and with many smaller employers having no trade union representation, other intermediary routes will need to be used.

Banks and the professions

- 69 Banks (of which the four major clearing banks have 70% of the market) offer a comprehensive range of business advice services but mainly in terms of financial management for small companies. As an intermediary, an adviser in a bank would not offer 'in-depth' advice on workforce development but could steer an employer to the appropriate local IAG provision.
- 70 In a highly competitive and incentivised environment this type of adviser would, in all probability, be actively promoting a full portfolio of the bank's own services and there would be the need for a continuous development programme to ensure any promotion of IAG to the employer. There is also the issue of time for bank staff to take up this development activity and consideration must be given to the effect of commercial priorities in these situations.

- 71 Accountants are probably among the closest advisers, as the accounts of companies of all sizes have to be certified by a qualified accountant annually. As with banks, an accountant would, in all probability, only be signposting to the most appropriate organisation for employers to access information about learning.
- 72 Solicitors probably rank with accountants as trusted intermediaries and may offer advice in many areas of business, but their potential as an intermediary would be similar to that of the other professions, that is, a general awareness of where their clients could access information, if required.
- 73 The advantage of the professions in the role of intermediary is that they will be impartial and should appreciate the benefits of staff development in a variety of situations. Being aware of and holding information on this type of support could also be viewed as an extra service that could be offered to their clients.
- 74 It would not be useful to incentivise this type of activity as the accompanying bureaucracy of 'defining a referral' or making a return of some sort would probably only serve to deter this type of organisation from participation.
- 75 The implication of meeting the cost of a 'professional' commercial hourly rate for in-depth advice on workforce development is plainly neither value for money nor appropriate.
- 76 It is how the awareness is raised that needs to be thought through if an intermediary role is required of these businesses. There will be resource implications for the companies (through training and extra time spent with clients) and a definition is required for the appropriate level of intervention.
- 77 A basic understanding of how the local business support and learning infrastructure works will be the minimum knowledge that these organisations would need if they are to signpost effectively, but even that basic knowledge has to be reviewed and updated on a regular basis and this requires a fairly high level of commitment from those involved.

Private recruitment agencies

- 78 The role of commercial recruitment agencies as intermediaries may be one that would bear a little more exploration. Working with a sizeable employer base, some agencies are already delivering Jobcentre Plus contracts and their contact with employers is, of necessity, continuous in meeting the needs of their commercial clients.
- 79 They have, as an industry, produced many web-based resources that provide information about employment opportunities and learning requirements. Recruitment services also offer a considerable amount of IAG to those who pass through their organisations, although there was no way of formally quantifying this during the research.
- 80 With regard to quality, many of these agencies may be members of the Recruitment and Employment Confederation, which is the body that represents the private recruitment industry in the UK. The Confederation maintains a code of practice that covers information given and held, documentation, confidentiality, equality and diversity, complaints procedures, representation of vacancies and requirements for suitably qualified staff only to deliver assessment and testing procedures.
- 81 There are some recruitment agencies dealing with employers that could be termed as 'hard-to-reach' in terms of culture and ethnicity. Linkage with local IAG services may give IAG partnerships access to some priority groups previously not reached.

Employers as intermediaries

- 82 Employers who have benefited from IAG in the workplace may be the most credible intermediaries of all, particularly those who have become accredited to the **matrix** Standard or have had the activities of URLs impacting on the skill base of their workforce. Findings from the **matrix** Standard employer pilot will be available later this year.

Using the term 'IAG' can reinforce the separateness of the activity, but IAG should be viewed in the same terms as equality and diversity, basic skills or health and safety, that is, as a requirement that supports individuals in all LSC-funded programmes.

Section 4: Language

Introduction

- 83 This section of the report considers how language can sometimes be a barrier for IAG and business advisers working together to promote the benefits of IAG to their clients.
- 84 The Market and Opinion Research International (MORI) report Demand for Information Advice and Guidance (May 2001) states:
- Professionals have their own language and that is perfectly reasonable for internal use. But when services interface with the public, unless the language is plain and simple, there will always be confusion and barriers created.
- 85 The mention of IAG and its role in workforce development can still cause some confusion and it is important that terminology is clarified so that it is understood by all.
- 86 Using 'IAG' as 'internal shorthand' to identify a programme and funding stream can sometimes, even within the LSC, reinforce the separateness of the activity, but IAG should be viewed in the same terms as equality and diversity, basic skills or health and safety, that is as a requirement that supports individuals in all LSC-funded programme areas.
- 87 However, jargon is very difficult to avoid in a sector where specific terms have technical definitions. This section of the report touches on issues surrounding IAG terminology and workforce or business development language in an attempt to make comparisons between functions and explain unfamiliar terms for the benefit of readers from a variety of backgrounds. Specific descriptors are located in Annex C.
- 88 The inclusion of the term 'IAG' and its importance in workforce development in the LSC Workforce Development Strategy may have added slightly to confusion on the ground. While being effective as a catalyst to focus minds on the role of IAG in the workplace, there was no accompanying explanation of how the function might 'fit' for local working relationships between business support advice agencies, employers and their employees and IAG partnerships.

Section 5: Quality Standards

Introduction

- 89 Although consideration around accreditation against quality standards was not part of the original brief for this project, discussions with representatives from local LSCs and Business Link have shown that there may be some issues and misunderstandings around which standards are relevant to which role or organisation. This is particularly the case in relation to discrete IAG services that require organisations in receipt of LSC funding for the purposes of delivering IAG to individuals to have accreditation to the **matrix** Standard.
- 90 Work is currently in progress by the Employment NTO to look at the **matrix** Standard in relation to other standards such as:
- > IIP;
 - > ISO 9000;
 - > Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations;
 - > the European Federation for Quality Management Excellence Model; and
 - > the SFEDI Standard.
- 91 The SFEDI Standard is achieved by individual business advisers while the **matrix** Standard is an organisational award, but both standards assure quality in information and advice.
- 92 A pilot project looking at the role of the **matrix** Standard and its relevance to employers was completed by the Guidance Council in December 2002.

What is the **matrix** Standard?

- 93 The **matrix** Standard assists organisations to:
- > identify and follow best practice in the delivery of IAG services;
 - > define the outcomes of a quality service aimed at assisting individuals to make use of information; and
 - > explore issues and plan courses of action in relation to learning.
- 94 Further information can be obtained from the **matrix** website (www.matrix-quality-standard.com).

Intermediaries and Standards

- 95 It would be unrealistic to expect organisations such as accountants, banks, legal firms and so on, all of which have strict codes of professional conduct and standards, to work towards another standard in order to play a role in IAG which is not core business for them. If there is a requirement to achieve the **matrix** Standard to perform the intermediary role, then this would form a considerable stumbling block, unless they were to pursue the standard as exemplar employers themselves.
- 96 If Business Links maintained the role of intermediary and introduced **matrix** Standard-accredited provision to provide IAG in the workplace, this would be a workable model. However, if business advisers themselves became involved in IAG activity for individuals – for example, in training needs analysis for employees, as opposed to business support advice – then accreditation in the **matrix** Standard could be considered a requirement for that organisation.

Section 6: Summary and Recommendations

- 97 One of the major complaints by employers remains the plethora of contacts they are asked to deal with about workforce development and how they can access relevant information in order to make the 'best choice'.
- 98 A major challenge to increasing the market for IAG is how to promote and implement the concept that IAG can have a positive effect on employees and help meet business objectives. To make this happen, the door needs to be opened by an intermediary who is credible and appropriate to businesses by:
- > having a single point of contact for SMEs through Business Link or other business support agencies managing the client relationship;
 - > ensuring that the appropriate business advisers have an awareness of IAG provision in an area and the necessary knowledge, skills and will to refer to the most appropriate support available for employers and their employees;
 - > building awareness of the considerable range of services that local IAG partnerships can offer in the workplace;
 - > clearly defining the scope and level of intervention through intermediary activity;
 - > demonstrating how cross-referral between Business Links and IAG partnerships can be mutually beneficial; and
 - > using simple and common terminology across agencies and initiatives to help employers enhance their understanding the role of IAG in supporting employees to take up learning.

Local Coherence

- 99 While there are some emerging local arrangements, it cannot be assumed that there are consistent and effective working relationships between local LSCs, Business Links and IAG partnerships in all areas. The following considerations could enhance these arrangements.
- > It is much easier to spot emerging links and synchronicity between initiatives and policies from a national perspective. Clear direction from the centre may ease working solutions at a local level.
 - > There are existing employer-based initiatives, such as CoVEs, the National Contracting Service, adult modern apprenticeships and Union Learning Fund projects that should be considering how IAG services might benefit their participants.
 - > There is a need for a national information service fed by local sources.
 - > There is a need to ensure that impetus from lessons learned by local QDF projects is sustained to help inform the development of local working practices for intermediaries with employers.
 - > IAG partnerships should look to increase the partnership to include employers and business support agencies.
 - > Clarity on the complementary nature of standards for ensuring the quality of IAG, from whatever source, is much needed.

While there are some emerging local arrangements, it cannot be assumed that there are consistent and effective working arrangements between local LSCs, Business Links and IAG Partnerships in all areas.

A major challenge in increasing the market for IAG is how to promote and implement the concept that IAG can have a positive effect on employees and still support business objectives.

Building Capacity

100 In all areas of new work there is always an urgent need to inform and develop those on the front line helped by:

- > widening partnership membership to include Business Links, other business support agencies and employers;
- > developing a toolkit to assist working with employers by partners or intermediaries which will help maintain consistency in local arrangements;
- > developing a continuous professional development programme for advisers from other organisations and agencies, so that as intermediaries they can be effective in promoting IAG in the workplace and to the workforce;
- > utilising the transferable skills and expertise held by existing partnership provision to support workplace IAG;

- > mapping the skill set required by advisers working with employers and employees to help 'tie down' the relationship between the SFEDI standards and the **matrix** Standard; and
- > defining the term 'learning champion' and its role within the many initiatives that use it and developing a common accreditation route for learning champions involved in any initiative, so helping to raise the profile of the role and increase participation.

101 Finally, there are two findings which, although common to many other reports, may still need to be confirmed.

- > One size does not fit all and messages and services have to be apposite to size, sector and local priorities.
- > The employer and employee perspective, as customers, should not be lost.

Annexes

Annex A: Pilot Projects

- 1 The following tables are a summary of those pilot projects supported by the QDF that have a focus on work with employers and the workforce. Also included is a summary of the ETPs, all of which have an emphasis on how high-quality information and advice can impact on workforce development.
- 2 Evaluations of the QDF projects are available from the local participant offices. Those of the ETPs will be available in October 2003.

Table 1: Summary of pilot projects.

| Title of pilot project | Contact details | Description |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Berkshire and Wiltshire: Information and Advice on Learning and Workforce Development</p> | <p>IAG Contract Manager Jon Thompson 0118 908 2190</p> | <p>HR Service is improving the service capability to provide employers with better access to information and advice on learning, helping to audit workforce skill needs, motivate workplace learners and give support to workforce development.</p> |
| <p>LSC Swindon and Wiltshire: Employer Training Pilot</p> <p>Note: this area has both QDF and ETP projects</p> | <p>IAG Contract Manager Brian Gibbs 01793 608021</p> | <p>Capacity building through training workplace intermediaries or learning champions working in a similar way to ULRs as first-line signposters to other provision at Levels 2 and 3.</p> <p>Employer-focused website to encompass employment law, funding for training, recruitment training practices linked to 'Steps to learning' local IAG web page and then provide additional links.</p> <p>Resource development to support Free2Learn programme advisers.</p> <p>Capacity building for employers and managers to support enhanced career development discussions.</p> <p>Training for providers to deliver effective and impartial information and advice.</p> <p>Support for providers and employers to work towards the matrix Standard.</p> |
| <p>Greater Manchester: Employer Training Partnership – Business Link and TUC Learning Services</p> | <p>IAG Contract Manager Sheila Sharrock 0161 261 0421</p> | <p>Referrals through training adviser or training providers.</p> <p>Training adviser undertakes training needs analysis for employer.</p> <p>Training adviser brokerage training for employer.</p> <p>Referral to IAG element can result if employee drops out.</p> |

Annex A: Pilot Projects

Table 1: Summary of pilot projects (continued).

| Title of pilot project | Contact details | Description |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Derbyshire: Valuable Skills Employer Training Pilot</p> | <p>IAG Contract Manager Alan Lygo 01332 868367</p> | <p>Supporting capacity building for front-line secondees to work with employers, basic skills element.</p> <p>Workforce adviser works with local LSC and Business Link staff to assess and support organisational training needs.</p> <p>Continuous access to training in diagnosis and referral to support quality improvement.</p> <p>If required, referral for in-depth impartial guidance, for example extra support needed for individuals.</p> <p>Exit interviews are coordinated, carried out by staff qualified to Level 3 minimum.</p> |
| <p>Essex: Employer Training Pilot</p> | <p>IAG Contract Manager Jennifer Rolph 01245 550085</p> | <p>Employers offered services of IAG providers if they choose as part of overall offer.</p> <p>Training providers are the source of IAG for beneficiaries supported by Essex Learning Link – a free helpline, paper-based materials and IAG website.</p> |
| <p>Tyne and Wear: Employer Training Pilot</p> | <p>IAG Contract Manager Gill Forth 0191 492 6413</p> | <p>Four learning champions working directly with employers to identify needs in the workplace and brokerage to appropriate training provider.</p> <p>Provider has lead function to decide IAG element.</p> <p>Two TUC Learning Services staff in local authorities, health trusts and larger unionised private sector employers. Role same as learning champions.</p> <p>Individual decision on IAG if required and not a blanket offer.</p> <p>Providers identify and deliver IAG in the workplace.</p> |
| <p>Birmingham and Solihull: Employer Training Partnership</p> | <p>IAG Contract Manager Dawn McCracken 0121 345 4645</p> | <p>All learners receive advice at the conclusion of training to produce an action plan or offer for full guidance interview.</p> <p>Training offered to employers for learning advocates and ULRs.</p> <p>'Buddy' type support for 'learning champions'.</p> <p>Offer development of IAG competencies within other partners if required.</p> |

Annex A: Pilot Projects

Table 1: Summary of QDF projects (continued).

| Title of pilot project | Contact details | Description |
|--|--|--|
| Improving employer links in Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole | IAG Contract Manager Sue Farrell 01202 652644 | Appointment of five outreach workers who will target major employers, with the help of intermediaries, informing them of opportunities and benefits of IAG. |
| Cambridgeshire: Learning Partners United | IAG Contract Manager Stephanie Luke 01733 895228 | Development of major regional conference 2003 to bring together work undertaken between IAG partnerships and local LSCs and trade unions to share good practice and develop joint working. |
| Cumbria: Mentoring Support System | IAG Contract Manager Adrian Adcock 07786 703401 | Aims to increase the participation of employers and trade unions by the development of a partnership mentoring system. The infrastructure to support partners must enable partners to sustain the matrix Standard – part of national employer and matrix Standard trial. |
| Cumbria: Development of an advocate system (in non-union companies) | IAG Contract Manager Adrian Adcock 07786 703401 | Utilise the good practice currently being implemented by the TUC Learning Services. Looking to increase individual participation in learning and promoting work–life balance framework to employers and collaboration between providers. |
| Devon and Cornwall: IAG in the workplace | IAG Contract Manager Clive Ansell 01752 754174 | Establish supported information access in collaboration with ULRs, and 12 employers across Devon and Cornwall including basic skills assessment and support as part of package. Mentoring support for ULRs helps reinforce remit and gives resources to deliver the service. |
| East of England Region: Bedfordshire and Luton: IAG Website Learning Link | IAG Contract Manager June Shimmin 01234 420029 | Develop local IAG website to assist learners, particularly remote and/or independent learners, to gain access to impartial information and advice, facilitated referral and improve retention in learning. |
| Gloucestershire: Enhancing work with employers | IAG Contract Manager John Joyce 01452 450055 | To develop the potential for IAG partnerships to undertake partnership working with employers – particularly with SMEs and unionised companies. |
| Hertfordshire: Working with Employers | IAG Contract Manager Sally Creedy 01727 733574 | Engaging Hertfordshire employers in adult IAG. |

Annex A: Pilot Projects

Table 1: Summary of QDF projects (continued).

| Title of pilot project | Contact details | Description |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Lancashire: Leadership Development and IAG Norming</p> | <p>IAG Contract Manager Aaron Dempsey 01772 443073</p> | <p>A project designed to train leaders within network members to promote and manage IAG more effectively in their organisation. Key to the project will be activities to develop and define a common understanding of what the components of IAG services mean, and observe competence at the point of delivery.</p> |
| <p>Lincolnshire and Rutland: Basic Skills Awareness</p> | <p>IAG Contract Manager Di Pudney 01522 508547</p> | <p>Raising awareness of basic skills provision availability with learners, employers and providers of advice services and learning opportunities including delivery of basic skills assessment training to staff involved in IAG.</p> |
| <p>London East: ICT enhancements to partners in IAG</p> | <p>IAG Contract Manager Garth Taylor 020 8929 3882</p> | <p>A combination bid introducing on-line employers' guide to qualifications, funded project database covering East London, online advice, message and discussion forum for IAG clients and pan-East London IAG website.</p> |
| <p>London South: Branding IAG Helpline</p> | <p>IAG Contract Manager Linda Innes 020 8929 4753</p> | <p>Linkage between learndirect helpline and South London IAG partnership to develop a local helpline with a single branding open to both personal advisers and the general public to reduce number of callers lost to current diverse methods of accessing information.</p> |
| <p>London West: Routes into Skill Development</p> | <p>IAG Contract Manager Teresa Sarmiento 020 8929 8511</p> | <p>Screening and initial assessment for target adults with literacy, numeracy and language needs.</p> |
| <p>Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire: Widening IAG Participation</p> | <p>IAG Contract Manager Susan Cheetham 01235 556134</p> | <p>Three-pronged approach to develop quality including activities with client, employers and the partnerships.</p> |
| <p>North Yorkshire: learndirect Ideal Model</p> | <p>IAG Contract Manager Joan Palmer 01904 385508</p> | <p>To determine an ideal model that incorporates local and national data collection and input.</p> |

Annex A: Pilot Projects

Table 1: Summary of QDF projects (continued).

| Title of pilot project | Contact details | Description |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Northamptonshire: Web-based IAG link for post-16 learning opportunities</p> | <p>IAG Contract Manager Lynn Finn 01604 533087</p> | <p>To create a single web-based point of information for post-16 learning opportunities. Cover all publicly funded opportunities for young people, employers, employees, the business community and the unemployed. The system will be developed as a joint venture and innovative ways of developing cluster advice networks and issues of accessibility will also be addressed.</p> |
| <p>Nottinghamshire: Newsletter</p> | <p>IAG Contract Manager Lynnette Chettle 0115 872 0090</p> | <p>To produce a 'Link up to Learning' newsletter in a manufacturing company to engage employees in the development of the newsletter, to highlight benefits of lifelong learning and to signpost employees to IAG service if they want to discuss their individual learning need.</p> |
| <p>Shropshire: Integrated Model for the Public Sector</p> | <p>IAG Contract Manager Sue Marston 01952 235517</p> | <p>Development of an employer-based IAG model that could be mainstreamed in the long term and offer an integrated approach for IAG in the public sector, exploring how to engage employees in broadening and raising skills, research and build an IAG delivery model based on current health sector best practice.</p> |
| <p>Somerset: Basic Skills Awareness</p> | <p>IAG Contract Manager Marion Lewis 01823 226071</p> | <p>To look at awareness of basic skills provision to line managers in local and public-sector employers and to train above groups to identify and effectively signpost potential learners with low basic skills to appropriate providers.</p> |
| <p>Somerset: Pocket Directories for the Network</p> | <p>IAG Contract Manager Marion Lewis 01823 226071</p> | <p>To pilot several differently designed pocket-sized directories to be easily carried by front-line staff and network members, ULRs and employers.</p> |
| <p>Somerset: IAG and Employers</p> | <p>IAG Contract Manager Marion Lewis 01823 226071</p> | <p>Working directly with employers to determine how IAG can best add value to their workforce development activity and to develop a business argument for involvement with IAG.</p> |

Annex B: Resources

- 1 Desk research for this project used information from the following policy and strategy documents, reports and other web-based sources.
 - > SU2
 - > Learning and Skills Council Corporate Plan
 - > LSC Workforce Development Strategy
 - > Skills Strategy (including Review of Funding for Adult Learning)
 - > Skills in England 2002
 - > Small Business Service Strategy
 - > Working or Steering Groups
 - > Discussions on the emergent LSC IAG Strategy
 - > OECD Conference on Co-financing Learning (November 2002)
 - > Plenary Sessions and Workshops at National IAG and Workforce Development Conferences
 - > Quality Development Fund Projects
 - > Discussions with IAG and workforce development contacts at local LSCs, contacts from trade associations, FE colleges, private training organisations, Centre for Enterprise Leicester, the Ufi, banks, Premier Business Centre, private employment agencies, Business Link
 - > Attendance at Steering or Working Group Meetings for ETPs, Small Firm Development Accounts, and the European Learning Account Partnership.

Annex C: How Language is Used

- 1 It may be useful at this point to refer to the Standing Conference of Associations for Guidance in Educational Settings (1993) to clarify some of the terminology around IAG services. Although these definitions were developed for work in an educational setting, the activity can be equally relevant to people in employed situations.

Informing

Providing information about opportunities available, without any discussion of the relative merits for particular individuals.

- 2 This function can usefully be provided for employees and employers, jobseekers or people who are not economically active. It is available from a variety of sources as demonstrated by the list below and is available to both the individual and the employer.
- 3 The provision or request for information may be used as an opportunity for steering or signposting by some of the organisations listed below, in which case they could be termed 'intermediaries', for example, even a website can provide signposting through links to other sites or pages within the visited site:
 - > IAG partnership providers;
 - > providers of learning;
 - > Business Links (websites, local employer helplines);
 - > Chambers of Commerce;
 - > **learnirect** – helpline and database;
 - > trade associations;
 - > publications;
 - > websites;
 - > DfES, Small Business Service and DTI websites and innumerable other sources;
 - > other intermediaries such as banks, accountants, lawyers;
 - > other government departmental advisers;
 - > learning champions;
 - > trade union learning representatives;
 - > libraries; and
 - > employers.

Advising

Helping learners to interpret information and choose the most appropriate option. To benefit from advice, individuals must already have a fairly clear idea of what their needs are.

- 4 It is at this stage that the needs of employers and employees may diverge although, it could be argued, not interests. For employers looking for advice and possibly recommendations about the learning needs of their workforce, a professional service is needed. However, workforce development needs may only come to light once a diagnostic service has been provided to a business by a business adviser. For those organisations offering advice, or a diagnostic service, to businesses, in these circumstances, this could provide an opportunity to build a more 'in-depth' relationship so that other services could be introduced including, if appropriate, a referral to local IAG providers.
- 5 For the employee, the service could mean mediated information services or advice and could be provided by the existing IAG provider in an area, a trade union learning representative (ULR) or an employer. The employer may offer the service as part of a staff appraisal or staff development scheme, as part of liP or the Small Firms Initiative. Alternatively, a learning champion or ULR could offer advice.
- 6 Many larger employers have processes in place to deliver IAG to their employees but it is in smaller companies, with no personnel function, where the service offered by IAG providers could be utilised. They have access to information from many sources and are able to translate that information effectively. Experienced practitioners can also recognise that help is needed but not always articulated, such as a lack of essential skills.
- 7 There are several areas that could come under the classification of 'guidance'.

Counselling

Working with learners as individuals to help them discover, clarify, assess and understand their own experience and to explore alternatives and their possible implementation. This is purposeful activity, deliberately entered into by both learner and counsellor, and is learner-led and may involve a series of regular contacts.

- 8 This service would be offered by either a qualified adviser to individuals or by a business adviser to an employer. Accreditation in the **matrix** Standard would be appropriate to those offering this service.

Assessing

Helping learners, by formal or informal means, to obtain a structured understanding of their personal, educational and vocational development, in order to enable them to make informed judgements about the appropriateness of particular opportunities.

- 9 Within a workforce development situation this role could encompass training needs analysis and may be offered by the employer, a provider of learning or an IAG provider. In some situations within the ETPs, initial IAG for individuals may not have taken place before learning starts, but an organisational need will have been identified by the company itself. It may be that the employer, at this stage, needs to be able to make an 'informed judgement' about the type of learning and a provider. An IAG provider referred to the company by a Business Link adviser could provide the necessary expertise for the employer, having local knowledge about training and learning opportunities and also the quality of the provision.

Enabling

Supporting learners in dealing with agencies providing or influencing learning/employment opportunities. This may for example involve helping learners with making applications, or negotiating changes in arrangements.

- 10 An intermediaries role could support 'enabling' and might cover instances where basic skills had been identified or, at the other end of the spectrum, high level technical or specialist training. IAG providers hold the knowledge and expertise to perform this role. Within the ETPs advisers are supporting retention of learners who may be in danger of dropping out of learning. ULRs could also support learners in this situation.

Feeding Back

Gathering and collating information on the unmet needs of learners, and encouraging providers of opportunities to adapt or develop their provision.

- 11 This function is essential within the role of IAG for individuals and is no different in terms of workforce development. Evaluation of the effectiveness of learning for both the individual and the employer is one of the four major elements of IIP. There is also a requirement of accreditation to the **matrix** Standard referred to in Section 5 of this report.
- 12 Feeding back should be considered an essential element of effective client account management, which is made up of many activities but is centred around a client having a single point of contact to access services to meet their need.
- 13 This can be true in the context of the employer or individual. In-depth knowledge of client need and ability to provide solutions are essential, as is 'following up' to confirm that a good service has been delivered and suitable choices made. Ensuring continuation of the relationship can, in some cases, obtain repeat business or help with progression for individuals.
- 14 The organisation or adviser that follows up with the customer would also have a part to play in the quality assurance of all aspects of IAG and learning provision in an area as relationships are built with employers and the workforce. For example, was the information current; was the training or learning effective and relevant?

Networking

Establishing specific links with a range of individuals and agencies to support and enhance guidance work. These links may be formal or informal but will include regular contact with learners including regular information exchange, client referral and feedback, and other joint activities such as staff development, monitoring and review, and outreach work.

- 15 Although a supporting function to activities listed in this section of the report, both IAG partnerships and Business Links and other business support agencies would be involved in networking to enhance their services to their clients, be they individuals or businesses. It is an essential element in supporting an effective client management role.

Annex D: Acknowledgements

With thanks to all those who have contributed thoughts to support the work of the project with information, views and examples of both effective practice and instances where issues may be emerging.

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- | | |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|
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