
EVALUATION OF ADULT INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE PARTNERSHIPS: INTERIM FINDINGS

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Context and Methodology

In January 1999 the Government announced that additional funding (a total £54 million) was available for the period 1999 – 2002 to improve local adult information, advice and guidance (IAG) services. IAG services were seen as the next stage in providing support to adults following the publication of the Green Paper, *The Learning Age* in 1998, and the establishment of UfI and *learnirect*. The announcement acknowledged that IAG services were necessary to enable individuals, particularly those facing disadvantage in the labour market, to understand their learning options, participate in learning opportunities and improve their labour market prospects.

Seventy-six partnerships were announced in 1999. Six of these were considered to be pathfinder partnerships engaged in development and delivery with the remaining 70 initially concentrating on the partnership development.

Evaluation aims

The aims of the evaluation are as follows:

- ◆ to evaluate progress made by IAG partnerships on the priorities identified by the former Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) for 2000-2001, and the extent to which they address the particular needs of disadvantaged people in their local area;
- ◆ to identify examples of effective practice, particularly with regard to raising awareness of the services, ensuring equality of access, identifying and meeting the specific needs of disadvantaged people, and the co-ordination and coherence of local services;
- ◆ to evaluate whether the IAG programme is encouraging more people to become involved in learning and to improve their prospects in the labour market;
- ◆ to evaluate the extent to which the IAG programme is widening participation in learning, in particular whether it is encouraging socially disadvantaged people and people with disabilities to become involved in learning;
- ◆ to assess the extent to which clients require more in-depth support, in addition to information and advice, to achieve a satisfactory outcome.

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Evaluation methodology

The interim evaluation has been informed by the following key tasks:

1. A review of 48 IAG partnerships' 2000/01 business plans to establish: the outcomes of local audits- including strategies to widen access and achieve coherence within partnerships and with related services; methods of developing networks and building capacity - for example to meet national quality standards; and proposals for monitoring and evaluating impact.
2. An email survey of all IAG partnerships (53 responses received) which examined the profile of the partnership; partnership arrangements; client profile and monitoring arrangements; links with complementary services; quality assurance; and partnership impact.
3. Case-study research with nine IAG partnerships¹ to determine: the process of developing and consolidating partnerships; structures to support effective partnership working; how partnerships best deliver to priority groups in terms of developing/rationalising services and ensuring quality provision; evidence of impact of IAG services on participation in learning and work.

PARTNERSHIP PROCESS AND IMPLEMENTATION

By March 2000 IAG partnerships were expected to have:

- built capacity at organisational and partnership level to deliver quality IAG services through staff development and the development of a coherent network;
- developed and targeted services to match the identified local needs of priority groups;
- taken steps to ensure quality of provision in line with Guidance Council quality standards;
- developed and begun to deliver services.

In practice partnerships continue to work on all of these areas and progress is variable. Partnerships

have required more time to establish structures and develop capacity than was anticipated, particularly in relation to achieving GAB accreditation. As a result, the level of service delivery is considerably lower than anticipated.

Establishing partnerships

Fieldwork highlighted the prominent role of Careers Services, Further Education (FE) colleges, Higher Education (HE) institutions and Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) in setting up IAG partnerships. Not all partnerships were entirely new, Some evolved from existing partnerships delivering information, advice and guidance, and expanded to include a wider representation of sectors and geographical areas to reach their priority groups more effectively. Other IAG partnerships were newly established with the co-ordinator playing a central role.

All partnerships continue to increase membership. Emphasis has been placed on involving partners from a wide geographical spread and from all sectors, particularly organisations in direct contact with priority groups. The survey of IAG partnerships highlighted the importance of the voluntary/community sector involvement. From the establishment of networks until January 2001, the percentage of full members from the voluntary/community sector increased by 8%, and the number of associate members by 13% - the largest percentage increase of all sectors.

Partnership management

While there is variation amongst the case-study partnerships in how they manage activities, IAG partnerships typically employ a central co-ordinator and have established management group(s) at different levels to further partnership activities.

- *Steering groups* act as ultimate decision-making bodies and provide overall strategic direction - the majority of partnerships make use of these.
- *Management groups* address day-to-day issues and are dissemination forums - these often overlap with steering groups.
- *Thematic groups* address discrete focused tasks (e.g. marketing strategy, training, achievement of GAB accreditation) and provide an opportunity to involve partners according to strengths/ interests. Thematic/task-specific

¹ A total of ten case studies were originally selected. Within the timetable for the preparation of this report, it has not been possible to conduct fieldwork with one of the selected case studies.

groups appear to be more common in more-developed networks.

Co-ordinators play a key role in encouraging communication between partners. Providing opportunities for partners to meet (often informally) was important in terms of making contact and establishing an understanding between agencies. In addition to face-to-face meetings, email is an important communication tool, although access to appropriate IT was identified as an issue for some organisations, especially those from the voluntary sector.

Partnership structure

Three partnership models were identified from the case-study research:

- *The Hub and Spoke Model* - activities driven by a central co-ordinator; communication through the co-ordinator and decision-making within the steering group.
- *The Satellite Model* - groups at various levels with different roles and responsibilities. The satellite groups can be a constant feature or formed to deal with particular issues. They may range in size and have varying degrees of autonomy. Final decision-making remains with the central co-ordinator and steering group.
- *The Consortium Model* - The consortium model is egalitarian in nature as organisational responsibility for the partnership's meetings, communication, activities and direction are shared between partnership members with facilitation from the central co-ordinator. The steering group retains a ratifying role.

The case-study partnerships fit within the first two models. In the more established partnerships, communication patterns and relationships are developing to a level where elements of the third model can be identified.

Identifying partnership priorities

Partnerships were required to undertake needs analysis for IAG services within their local area in order to determine the priorities of their 2000-2001 Business Plan. The information gained, both in terms of labour market supply and demand, has provided valuable evidence in terms of determining partnership priorities, and labour market evidence

on which complementary bids for funding have been made. In identifying priorities, IAG partnerships were required to place particular emphasis on ensuring that services were available, accessible and appropriate to priority client groups. Although a broad range of disadvantaged groups were identified across partnerships, particular emphasis was given to those with basic skills difficulties and people living in disadvantaged areas.

Significant progress has been made in terms of setting up structures to deliver appropriate and effective IAG services. Structures facilitated the involvement of new partners with direct access to priority groups, and support for mainstream providers to prioritise and work effectively with these groups. Priorities have been addressed through a range of measures including funding of outreach workers, the development of advice points in community settings, staff training, and the provision of resource packs to build the capacity of existing information and advice agencies. The low levels of service delivery and lack of management information restricts drawing of conclusions on the effectiveness of priorities set.

Ensuring quality

Developing quality systems has been a key feature of IAG activities to date. In many cases this process has taken longer, and demanded a higher level of support, than originally planned. IAG funding has been used to support the registration and assessment costs for many voluntary and community sector organisations to undertake the GAB quality process. Although there is support for ensuring quality of services, concerns were raised during the case-study research about the relevance of GAB standards. Some interviewees felt that the GAB standards did not complement existing (HE and FE) quality systems, and that the work involved outweighed the benefits. Where achievement of NVQ3 was identified as inappropriate - for example because of time commitments within pressed services - steps were taken to identify an 'interim' solution. Two case-study partnerships have developed modular courses, accredited by the Open College Network, which could count towards NVQ 3 at a later date.

Increasing contact with priority groups

Partnerships placed emphasis on building links with organisations working directly with priority groups unlikely to be accessing information through mainstream provision. This is reflected in the increase in voluntary and community involvement in IAG partnerships and the emphasis placed on community-based provision. Both create an environment that supports the existence and importance of informal routes to learning.

Case-study research highlighted that steps were also taken to encourage more established IAG providers to target priority client groups. This is reflected in achievement targets, in some cases linked to resources. Delivery agencies in one case-study partnership have been able to claim 50% more for interviews with priority clients than interviews with mainstream clients.

Marketing has been identified as a key element in engaging priority groups. Overall strategies ranged from partnership-level strategies (including local branding), to organisational responsibility. In the case-study examples, the latter has been cited in cases where partnerships considered there to be a risk of generating demand that could not be met without compromising quality of service.

Monitoring throughput

The above strategies are examples of structures to support a wider sector of the community to make use of IAG services. In this report on interim findings it is not possible to draw firm conclusions on the impact the strategies have had. Poor or disparate management information systems and delays mean that impact cannot clearly be identified.

Client throughput information is not collected systematically across IAG partnerships. Although information may be collected, often in different formats, at an organisational level, it is not common practice for systems to be compatible within partnerships. This restricts the use of management information at partnership level.

There are concerns from providers that a balance should be struck between the desire to establish a full picture of client characteristics, and the need to ensure that the time spent collecting information is appropriate given the level of contact with the client. Organisations offering advice are in a better

position to collect monitoring information than those offering information services.

Systems for monitoring outputs are less developed than those recording information on clients accessing services. Few partnerships are in a position to monitor progression between services and effective referrals or to monitor progression onto learning and employment opportunities.

Where information about client throughput or output is collected, it is not common practice for this to be collated at partnership level (15% of those responding to the questionnaire). Discussions with partnership co-ordinators highlights marked differences in the reasons for collating, or not collating, client information.

It is unusual for client monitoring information to be viewed as actual management information. Providers generally appreciated the need to demonstrate to funders that activity had taken place. Wider application of the information is unusual and not commonly viewed as a tool for determining priorities for delivery. A further issue raised was the incentive for delivery organisations to provide management information. Comments from the questionnaires and interviews with case-study partnerships suggest that partnerships generally request and receive information where they pay for delivery of service. There are no clear examples of partnerships requesting MI where IAG funding was used for other purposes.

IMPACT

Given the delays in establishing partnerships, there is little evidence on which to base conclusions on impact of services on priority groups. The main areas of impact centre on the development of structures and systems intended to support provision in the next funding year.

Coherence of IAG provision across the partnership

Concerning the coherence of IAG provision, progress relates to the following areas:

- *Identifying and responding to local needs* – considerable development work has taken place to establish clients' needs, partnership priorities, and gaps and duplication in existing services.

- *Efficiency of provision* – IAG services have been rationalised to address duplicated provision, this has created tensions in some cases. Despite this, none of the partnerships reported that disagreements remained. This in itself is a good indicator of positive partnership working – i.e. the presence of active debate, but an environment in which conflicts can be overcome. Referrals have been facilitated by the creation of IAG service directories and referral protocols. Both approaches have encouraged some organisations to make referrals to ‘new’ providers.
- *Co-ordination of services across partnership* – IAG co-ordinators play a key role in ensuring that partnerships operate effectively. This encompasses developing structures of communication and joint working between organisations, and also maintaining momentum and enthusiasm for joint work. The rate of progress of partnership working and the extent to which the organisation act in partnership appears to be related directly to the existence of an active IAG co-ordinator. Where appointments were made relatively late, or where staff changes had an impact on co-ordinator posts, progress appeared to be less advanced than in partnerships with strong leadership and networking structures.

Coherence of IAG provision with complementary services

As well as exploring internal coherence within partnerships, coherence with complementary services was considered. The following findings have emerged:

- *learnirect* – there has been progress in relation to establishing effective links but significant work is still to be done to ensure coherence between services.
- *Employment Service* – the requirement for ES membership of IAG partnerships has had a positive impact on achieving coherence between ES mainstream services and IAG provision. There is evidence that both services are benefiting from links in terms of the services they are able to recommend and offer to clients.
- *Adult Guidance provision* – the majority of partnerships identified a high level of coherence between the services provided by

IAG partnerships and adult guidance provision. Some IAG partnerships have been able to fund guidance provision by using IAG funding to draw in other sources, for example from the European Social Fund.

- *Basic skills provision* – links with Basic Skills provision requires further work in relation to raising awareness of basic skills needs and how needs are assessed. Links with Learning Partnerships will prove important in planning coherent support.
- *Connexions* – emphasis has been placed by partnerships on ensuring coherence with Connexions, although given the newness of the service, work was limited to establishing appropriate structures for service development and referral mechanisms.
- *Careers Service* – over 75% of partnerships responding to the questionnaire indicated that there is clear coherence between IAG and the work of the Careers Service. The central role of Careers Services in many IAG partnerships has been a key factor.

Widening participation

The limited level of service delivery and paucity of comprehensive management information does not allow full consideration of impact on widening participation in learning opportunities.

Increasing participation in learning and work

The rate of progress made by IAG partnerships in terms of delivering IAG services was much slower than anticipated and where delivery was taking place, there is little centralised information to suggest whether services had had an impact on the number of people participating in learning and work.

Added value

Feedback from the survey suggests that IAG partnerships recognise that IAG funding is providing added value at the organisational level and for individuals, despite the delays in achieving full service delivery. Key aspects of added value are as follows.

For partnerships and for local IAG services:

- improved standards of IAG;

- forum for decision-making/raised profile of information, advice and guidance;
- advanced/expanded provision of IAG;
- forum for networking;
- links with networks of IAG providers outside IAG partnership area.

For organisations participating in IAG partnerships:

- raising standards/increasing capacity;
- experience of and commitment to working in partnership;
- raising organisations' profile in the lifelong learning agenda.

For individuals accessing IAG services:

- individual support;
- professional development.

CONCLUSIONS

The research for the interim report enables an analysis of progress relating to two of the five key research objectives:

- to evaluate progress made by the IAG partnerships on the key priorities identified by the Department for 2000-2001 and the extent to which they are addressing the particular needs of disadvantaged people in their local area; and
- to identify examples of effective practice, particularly with regard to raising awareness of the services, ensuring equality of access, identifying and meeting the specific needs of disadvantaged people and the co-ordination and coherence of local services.

In relation to the above objectives, the following conclusions can be drawn.

Progress made by the IAG partnerships relative to their key priorities

Provision of a co-ordinated local information, advice and guidance network

IAG funding has generated a co-ordinated information, advice and guidance network in each partnership area, but the rate of progress is variable, dependent on the following contributory factors:

- their relative starting points;
- whether IAG partnerships are built on existing structures and networks;
- where partner organisations have experience of partnership working; and
- where previous co-operation has eased the process of identifying local needs.

Developing partnerships has proved more time consuming than was originally anticipated and is still underway. Contributory factors are: identifying appropriate partners and the need to ensure quality, particularly of organisation without a tradition of providing information and advice services. There is clear evidence from both the survey and the case-study research that the voluntary/community sector are now well represented in partnerships as full or associate members.

Partnerships are using top-down and bottom-up approaches to identifying clients' needs in their local area. Partners have valued the inclusive bottom-up approach building on members' strengths, expertise and local knowledge.

There is evidence of 'streamlining' of services to ensure coherence and that partners have a commitment and willingness to address duplication and gaps in provision, even where issues of competition may have prevented this in the past.

Community members having access to information and advice free of charge

Networks have been put in place to deliver IAG services to adults in each of the partnership areas. Partnerships have widened to include organisations that work with particular communities or target groups to ensure that their clients gain access to IAG services. Information and advice services offered to IAG partners are free of charge, however should clients require professional guidance, this service might bear a cost. There is no evidence to suggest that this is not the case in each of the IAG partnerships.

IAG outlets have been established with a view to meeting the needs of priority client groups, and the wider adult community as appropriate. Networks have been widened to include those organisations already engaging priority groups. These organisations, mainly in the voluntary and community sector, have been supported to respond to the

learning and employment needs of their client groups.

Partnerships have adopted different approaches to marketing. Although local branding is a feature of only a small proportion, a co-ordinated approach to marketing is a feature of the case-study partnerships. Much work has been low key to avoid generating excess demand before quality has been assured. The success of marketing in terms of drawing in priority groups can not be assessed at this stage.

Ensuring IAG services meet quality standards

Whilst it has taken longer and a greater level of support than anticipated to establish quality systems, there is evidence that the need for quality is clearly embedded in partnerships with high priority afforded to the achievement of GAB accreditation.

For some GAB accreditation is perceived to be inappropriate (in terms of its complementarity with existing systems), or unachievable in the short-term. Where the latter is the case, alternative quality assurance mechanisms have been developed as an interim measure.

Ensuring coherence between local IAG services, and other related services

The following factors affect the extent to which IAG partnerships complement existing local and, in the case of *learnirect*, national services:

- the existence of IAG services and structures prior to IAG partnerships being established – e.g. the central role of Careers Services in many partnerships has had a positive impact on the coherence between these two services;
- the scale and scope of complementary provision (particularly in terms of specific client groups and/or geographical focus) – i.e. whether IAG services are embedded into programmes funded through other sources (e.g. ESF, SRB), or whether complementary services are fully developed – e.g. Connexions.

Complementarity between IAG partnership provision and external services is strongest where these services are provided by IAG members, for example the delivery of adult guidance. Further work is

required by IAG partnerships to ensure coherence between IAG partnerships and *learnirect* and Connexions.

Providing IAG services as a progression route to basic skills support, for clients with literacy, numeracy or ESOL support needs, has been identified in as a major issue for IAG partnerships. Emphasis has been placed on raising awareness of basic skills support needs. Organisations already in contact with those requiring basic skill support have played a key role in helping others understand how best to engage with this client group.

Examples of effective practice

Raising awareness of services

Awareness raising has been focused on partnership members, rather than service users. Partnership directories, referral protocols and opportunities to meet other service providers have proved to be essential and have contributed to widening referral options.

Equality of access

IAG partnerships have taken services to clients. Voluntary and community organisations have played a key role in providing the venues which give priority groups opportunities to access free information and advice services in non-threatening, community-based locations.

Co-ordination and coherence of local services

A central co-ordinator is essential to ensure coherent networks develop. Where networking is particularly well developed, co-ordinators are cited as an important catalyst and the impact of networking is seen in partners' knowledge of local services and confidence in making referrals to all types of organisations, in particular those new to partnerships.

Involving a wide representation in management has proven effective, although membership of these management groups must be appropriate. There is value in having a forum for strategic direction (e.g. a steering group comprising senior members of staff), but findings suggest that practitioner-based groups are more appropriate for operational decision-making.

Progress concerning other research objectives

Despite the monitoring requirements related to GAB accreditation feedback from the case study research and the survey of partnerships identifies that the systems in place to record client throughput and characteristics are poor or non-existent. There are few examples of information being collated at partnership level and being used strategically. With this in mind, all that can be identified in relation to the remaining conclusions are as follows:

Increasing/widening participation in learning

Although positive impacts are inferred, no firm conclusions can be drawn at this stage of the research regarding an increase in numbers and change in profile of adults participating in learning as a result of IAG services.

The need for in-depth support, in addition to information and advice.

As above, conclusions regarding the role of in-depth support in achieving satisfactory outcomes can best be drawn after further investigation in Phase Two.

Final conclusion

The review of IAG partnerships during 2000-2001 is essentially positive. The steps taken by partnerships to develop and embed systems to support coherent high quality services provide a firm basis from which services can develop. While they demonstrate that progress has been made in relation to the development of partnership structures and systems, delays in implementation limit evidence on which to base conclusions on service delivery.

Copies of this Research Brief (RBX13-01) are available free of charge from DfES Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ. Research Briefs and Research Reports can also be accessed at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/>

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