

OCCASIONAL PAPER



# Learning from Adult Guidance Practice: NAEGA Case Studies – England

VIVIENNE RIVIS

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GUIDANCE SERVICE CLIENT



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## Contents

Foreword	3
[1] Introduction	4
[2] The users of adult guidance	4
[3] The impact of guidance	4
[4] Reasons for seeking information, advice and guidance: common themes	5
[5] Barriers to effective guidance	10
[6] Achieving the infrastructure	13
[7] Characteristics of successful practice	13
[8] Principles of excellent practice	14
[9] A universally available service in England	14
[10] NAEGA's contribution	15

**Vivienne Ravis** became president of NAEGA (the National Association for Educational Guidance for Adults) in October 2004. A graduate of the London School of Economics, Goldsmiths' College and the University of Hull, she has worked in every sector of education as a teacher, manager and policy adviser. She managed a pioneering educational guidance service for adults in Bradford in the 1980s, then led the government-funded National Educational Guidance Initiative for England and Wales from 1988 to 1993. NEGI developed and supported a national infrastructure for adult guidance, including good practice guides, the first occupational standards and the first quality framework.

Her previous roles have included assistant director at the Higher Education Quality Council, where she developed national guidelines for quality assurance of guidance and learner support, assistant director, Academic Planning at Bradford College and policy adviser for Employability and Lifelong Learning at Universities UK, where her responsibilities covered vocational learning, the skills agenda, career guidance and teacher education. She is currently managing a new validation service for work-based higher education provision for the University Vocational Awards Council.



*This report is dedicated to Dorothy Eagleson who showed the way.*

## Foreword

### **Learning from Adult Guidance Practice: NAEGA Case Studies – England**

It gives me great pleasure to commend this occasional publication to all NAEGA members, not only to those who practise in England. Although the case studies were collected in England and were submitted to the English IAG Review, the voices here, both of clients and of their advisers, speak universally. I am sure that equivalent voices collected in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and outside the UK, distinguished by different accents, would tell a very similar story of the service they received. We are united by practice, only divided by policy and funding.

I am impressed both by the narratives themselves and by the skilful way Vivienne Ravis has presented them. She has selected with care and let the experiences talk for themselves. There is also in this occasional publication, testimony to careful and sensitive reflection by advisers and their managers. As practitioners, we are privileged to undertake stimulating, life enhancing work. We hone our skills over time through reflection and by continuing professional development (CPD). As adult guidance practitioners, we need to illustrate, explain and demonstrate what we do. We also all need to become reflective practitioners. These case studies are a model of such processes of illustration and reflection. I hope you find the occasional publication as exciting a read as I have.

The appearance of this report is particularly timely. The Leitch Review of Skills, published in December 2006, ahead of the English IAG Review, recommends: “*a new adult careers service, learning from those elsewhere in the UK, providing a universal source of labour-market focused and accessible careers advice for adults, including a free Skills Health Check.*” The case studies show just how flexible and responsive the proposed new service will have to be, in order to meet both the needs of adults seeking to improve their lives and the political and economic priority of improving the skills of the workforce. NAEGA looks forward to advising policy makers on how that challenge might be met.

Feedback on the publication is welcome: please forward to [Vivienne.Ravis@dsl.pipex.com](mailto:Vivienne.Ravis@dsl.pipex.com). If you need further copies for colleagues and friends you can download the document from the NAEGA website at [www.naega.org.uk](http://www.naega.org.uk).

Professor Jonathan Brown

Founder chair and past president of NAEGA

**Dr Dorothy Eagleson** was founder director of EGSA in Belfast from 1967 to her retirement in 1988. She was NAEGA president from 1982 till 1998.



## [1] Introduction

In March 2006, all NAEGA members in England were invited to submit feedback on current practice, including case studies, for a NAEGA submission to the government's cross-department Review of Information, Advice and Guidance in England, begun in September 2005. Substantive responses were received from practitioners and managers of *nextstep* and IAG networks, careers services, college guidance services and independent practitioners. They included over 40 case studies drawn from recent information, advice and guidance practice. These concise accounts reflect the very wide diversity of IAG clients and the range of settings in which IAG services are delivered. Some describe ongoing relationships with clients, whereas others report on completed interactions

with known outcomes. Those included in this report aim to illustrate the successful outcomes of adult guidance practice but also some of the complex barriers faced by clients. Respondents identified a range of critical issues they wished to put to the review team: some in fact submitted their own responses to the Review with permission to quote or edit. Although this report was intended primarily as a contribution to the Review, as both a source of evidence from practice and as a summary of issues arising from the experience of guidance clients and their advisers, it also forms part of a wider bank of qualitative evidence which guidance workers regularly collect and use for a variety of purposes, including their own reflective practice and professional development.

## [2] The users of adult guidance

NAEGA members were given no specific brief setting out the kinds of case studies required. All respondents provided some basic biographical details of the clients described, such as age, gender, ethnicity, employment status, educational background, but were careful to ensure confidentiality. The selection included here is in no way a statistically representative sample, but does exemplify the kinds of circumstances and challenges faced by guidance service users and their advisers. In doing so, the case studies provide vivid word pictures in a way that quantitative evidence cannot.

The clients described comprised 22 women and 21 men: ethnicity was only mentioned where relevant to their circumstances. Few were in full-time employment,

and although most were ultimately seeking paid work, a significant proportion (at least 12 out of 43) had been unable to work because of ill-health: mental health problems, often associated with bereavement, relationship breakdown, redundancy or serious illness were frequently cited as a trigger for seeking help and advice. A few had been dependent on alcohol or drugs and two had served prison sentences. Although most of the services that responded were funded to offer information and advice to people with who had not achieved Level 2 qualifications, about one third of the case studies focus on people with qualifications beyond Level 2, including a few with Level 3 or 4 qualifications which were out of date or of no relevance to their current circumstances and aspirations.

## [3] The impact of guidance

### The life-changing impact of guidance

Many guidance agencies can demonstrate the real, life-changing impact of guidance because they have made it possible for clients to seek advice and support over time, and so can track their progress, offering support and encouragement where needed. The importance of a sustained relationship with one or a team of guidance workers, in order to bring about life changes, is reported by clients themselves. One severely depressed woman was supported by a guidance team, which also offered a personal development course in their centre:

*"It's like no other, it's for everyone and anyone. You cannot come away from it unchanged. It is totally life changing and I loved it. Though it was sad to see it come to an end, it felt good at the end of the ten weeks to feel 'ready'. Ready to work again, even if only part-time. Ready to learn new skills and develop the ones I already have got. Ready to live again and enjoy my life rather than see it as something I have to endure."*



In other cases the impact took place over a much longer timescale, but with no less life-changing results:

J first visited a centre in the North East to find about IT courses. He was a fully-qualified electrician but unemployed. During the discussion, it emerged that J's dream was to become a primary teacher – but he had never done anything about it because he thought that he had the wrong background and experience and that it was traditionally a female-dominated occupation. The adviser challenged these assumptions and worked with J to identify his transferable skills, including coaching and presentation skills gained from voluntary work

with a junior football team. He then referred him to a local college to update his IT skills, take part in a teaching access course and get involved in the college's student shadowing programme. During the teaching access course, J came back to see the adviser several times: on one of these occasions he wanted to use the adviser's networks to look at alternative local childcare provision. He also worked with the adviser on his UCAS form and on intensive preparation for his university interview. He was accepted on to the BA in Primary Education at the local university. He has now completed the course and is teaching in his local area.

## [4] Reasons for seeking information, advice and guidance: common themes

Most of the case studies, however brief, reveal that adults bring a complex range of motivations and issues to any agency concerned with information, advice and guidance. However, it is possible to discern from the material submitted a number of recurring themes which illustrate the factors influencing adults seeking to bring about changes in their life and work.

### Changes in personal circumstances: making transitions

For a number of service users, a change in personal circumstances had prompted them to seek help, or occasionally led them to be referred by other agencies. These included redundancy or enforced early retirement, relationship breakdown, sudden health problems, or changes in arrangements for the care of their children or dependent adults.

D had been made redundant from industry more than once and decided to take the opportunity to change direction. The adviser helped D to identify his transferable skills and talked with him about various job ideas. To enhance his job prospects and develop his IT skills he enrolled with *learnirect* to study for the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL). Despite his dyslexia, he achieved a 100% pass in the word processing module. In addition to his ECDL success, D also took part in voluntary work, gaining useful work experience. The adviser then helped him to revise his CV to include his current activities and present himself positively.

His adviser commented: *"Because of D's hard work and perseverance and the various agencies working together he is now working in a job he enjoys using his IT skills, interests and activities with the opportunity for future development."*

In some cases, sudden economic change such as redundancy can trigger a cycle of ill-health and decline in people who have previously managed their life well. Though well-qualified and previously earning a reasonable salary, one young woman found herself without the resources to get her life back on track without expert help:

A had been working for a local authority for five years since leaving university. She agreed to take up a secondment to another department, but after several months, when due to return to her own section, she found her position had been 'restructured' and no longer existed. She was therefore made redundant, and was offered re-deployment. At interview after interview she failed to get chosen, and finally she was told she must leave at the end of the month. She lost her flat as she could not meet the rental, and had to go into temporary accommodation. After two months desperately writing for jobs, she became severely depressed, stopped eating and was on the verge of a mental collapse. She was extremely ill, lost weight and was going downhill, when a friend suggested she spoke to the IAG service.



The guidance officers gave her support and practical assistance in completing job application forms, and a lot of advice on interview skills. After several job interviews, she finally received not one but two job offers, and has found a much better position than she ever thought she would.

Her adviser commented: *“The change in her outlook and appearance within two weeks of coming to see us was amazing, with just a little support and confidence boosting, combined with practical help and advice, which was ongoing and available when she needed to contact us. This enabled her to go out and get those jobs. Self-confidence, self-development are called ‘soft skills’, but they should be called ‘essential’.”*

### Personal development

For some adults there had been a gradual process of realisation that they could get more out of life by bringing about changes themselves. The case studies provide good examples of how people had derived positive benefit from guidance in managing gradual life transitions.

K had a mild learning disability and, since she missed out on a lot of her school education, had struggled with English and maths for much of her adult life. From the age of 28 she began suffering from epilepsy, which added further challenges to her everyday situation. She had already worked hard to improve her literacy and numeracy and had gained some IT skills and done work experience in an office environment. K wanted information on improving her reading, writing and spelling and help to find more work experience. The adviser established that one of K's passions was her pet dog and that she had a keen interest in dogs and dog breeds. Although she didn't recognise that she had skills in this area, she demonstrated that she cared for her pet, and often other people's, to very high standards. They talked about working with animals and K was quite keen to look at the possibilities of working with dogs. The adviser made enquiries to Employment Services about work experience and through them found an NVQ 2 in Dog Grooming course at a local college. She accompanied K on the bus to meet the tutor. The course turned out to be ideal for K as it was very practical and had high ratios of staff to students so they were confident that they would be able to manage her epilepsy well. The fees for the course were high but the adviser encouraged K to

speak to her adviser at Jobcentre Plus and they were able to provide the necessary funding. K had great enthusiasm for her new course and was confident that she was going to achieve something she could use in the future.

### Economic and employment pressures

In some cases, economic factors were the prime motivation for seeking information, advice and guidance, although these were often associated with other more complex situations.

H had not worked for three years following a car accident, which had affected the mobility of his right arm and left him with depression and anxiety. Being in receipt of Incapacity Benefit meant that he would be eligible for Permitted Work and New Deal for Disabled People. His skills included design, communication and photography. He brought a portfolio of his work to the second interview and, following discussion, identified a range of options including voluntary work, work experience placements and self-employment, producing materials for sale in historic buildings and other tourist venues. He decided to pursue the self-employment option and was signposted to the local business enterprise programme. He calculated the cost of producing goods and estimated sale cost; he obtained quotes for printing and packaging of his work. His employment adviser continued to provide support and put him in touch with useful contacts. He followed up these contacts, arranged outlets for his products and his business started to develop. However his Incapacity Benefit was stopped following a personal capacity assessment; at his next appointment the adviser helped him to complete an appeal form. His appeal was turned down and he decided not to go to tribunal. Although this meant that he would no longer be eligible for PW and NDDP he continued to receive advice and support from the advisory service.

Sometimes, the adviser has to make a sensitive assessment of the client's real requirements:

M had served 27 years with the army and had skills in catering as a chef. Having recently come out of service, he was experiencing problems with basic skills and his current employers wanted him to improve his literacy and numeracy skills. He said he wanted to do a GCSE. He was asked to fill in a small form and seen to struggle a great deal: the



adviser then took another tack. Discussion led to the client acknowledging that his literacy skill needs were greater than he had indicated. The adviser referred M for basic skills screening with the aim of attending the courses in literacy and numeracy, which would be arranged to fit in with his rotating shift work.

### Social and family circumstances

For some adults, complex social factors may constrain their initial options. Guidance services work with such clients over time to maximise their opportunities. Two women, both recent arrivals to the UK, found themselves in very different circumstances. The guidance services they contacted responded by recognising their immediate needs and then provided support as they progressed at their own pace.

Z came to the UK from the Middle East with her husband. She had five children born here and was kept in the home to cook and clean and bring them up, and generally be a servant for her husband. He abandoned her and the family a year or so ago. The older children are now in their early teens and they have had a good education. Z wanted to go out and get a job, but she needed to speak better English and she could not read or write English. She could not read or write in her own country, never having been to school. She couldn't even get a cleaning job, as she could not understand the safety instructions on the chemicals she had to use. There are many women in this position, whose children are now reading, writing and speaking for them. The IAG service has encouraged women like Z to take ESOL courses. Z is now on a Level 1 New CLAIT course, and hopes to learn Internet and e-mail later this year. She can gain work experience at the women-only centre she is studying at, and is so much more confident and happy. The centre has a free creche where the younger children can go for the two three-hour sessions while she studies.

Her adviser commented: *"These courses not only give them a skill, they offer a social setting, a chance for such women to get together outside the home, and to chat, to exchange information on childcare, and just to be with each other. The women can also use the IAG service to locate other courses or to get help and support in job seeking skills."*

N, a bride newly arrived from the South Asian sub-continent to live in a rural English county, had been educated to degree level and wanted to utilise her graduate skills whilst maintaining her family obligations. The adviser helped her to explore opportunities for volunteering locally: she was able to find an outlet for her skills working as an ESOL volunteer. She was subsequently employed as a tutor, which led to further employment opportunities within the local authority where she has extended her skills and responsibilities. Most recently she has pursued the adviser's suggestion of gaining a part-time FE teaching qualification with a view on completion to undertake a post-graduate qualification to enable her to work as a full-time FE lecturer.

Another woman was juggling work and childcare responsibilities:

E met an advice worker at a parent support group. At the time, E was working in a supermarket and needed childcare to cover her shifts. Her real goal was to be a primary teacher but she lacked the confidence to pursue this aim. After initial discussion, the adviser sent her information about local childminders, and also information from Adult Directions about teaching, together with information about teaching courses at local colleges and universities. A month later, the adviser called E who had enrolled on a teaching course to commence the following September, and had meanwhile found a part-time job as a teaching assistant in her local school. Although initially she had been unable to find suitable childcare, another adviser conducted a more in-depth search of the Childcare Information Service database from which she managed to find a suitable childminder. When the adviser met her by chance six months later at the same parent support group, E was very appreciative of all the help she had received and felt that she was well on her way to achieving her aims.

### Health and disability issues

Many services provide support to people with a wide range of health and disability issues:

S initially came for guidance three years ago. He was married with children, in his early forties, had had a wide variety of jobs and no particular career focus.



He had recently been diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, and was just starting to come to terms with the implications of this and how it related to his learning, work and life experiences to date. He had very low self-esteem, little confidence and not much hope for the future. Through the process of the guidance interview, his love of art became apparent. He had not previously studied art and was very wary of exploring this subject further for a number of reasons, mainly the potential impact on his family and his capabilities with regard to his condition. Following the interview, he arranged to return for further guidance after speaking to his wife. S returned and decided to enrol for a full-time art course at Level 2. He excelled in this subject and after further guidance started the Level 3 programme. Whilst working towards Level 3, he discussed the possibility of progressing to higher education with his adviser. His confidence had increased immensely and he could now recognise this as a real possibility. S was supported throughout the UCAS application process and secured a place at university to study a degree in Fine Art. He is very appreciative of the support he has received through guidance.

## Rehabilitation

Some specialist agencies work with those trying to rebuild their lives after addiction or a prison sentence but many generalist services are rising to the challenge of providing support to those with very specific guidance requirements. For some this can be a fairly swift process whereas for others it may be a much more lengthy one:

G was an ex-offender who served time for the manslaughter of a close relative and, feeling that it was right that he was punished by a custodial sentence, he had only recently come to terms with his feelings about his actual grief. On release he was also coming to terms with trying to rebuild his relationship with his family. When he was referred to *nextstep* 'enhanced'\* provision, he said he felt it was the first time that someone had actually listened to him and wanted to help him rebuild his life and shown understanding that he had not taken up the opportunity to undertake further education in prison as he felt it would have been 'rewarding him'. The first 'enhanced' meeting was purely about this, building the rapport, listening to the client and agreeing what his first steps would be, in this case signposting to

a counselling service. This led to the client feeling confident to come back when he felt he was ready for the next stage of looking at realistic next steps, such as opportunities in FE, *learnirect* courses, help with his CV and applications forms. But this would all have to be at a pace appropriate to the stage the client was at.

The advisory service comments: *"It was very important to listen to this client, hear his concerns and what motivated and restricted him. A service which is funded to only provide 'one advice followed by one enhanced'\* would not meet the needs of this client and many like him and we would be very concerned if this path was taken."*

\* See Section 5 below.

Sometimes clients with long-term problems can be helped to get back on track more quickly with a series of appropriate interventions, including direct advocacy:

A young man, B, referred by a practice therapist, presented with low mood and lacking in confidence. He had recently stopped taking heroin, and had dissociated himself from the individuals who had encouraged him to start taking drugs. He insisted that, because he did not have anything to do with his day, his boredom and lack of self-belief were leading him back to the way of life that he had struggled to get away from.

The only job that he was interested in was plastering, a very difficult industry to enter without qualifications, and with a 12-month waiting list for a college place. However, B had already worked as a labourer and had done several plastering jobs for his relatives and friends. The adviser encouraged him to take photographs of his work and together they developed his CV. The adviser then contacted several plastering companies and asked them whether they would be interested in giving B some work experience. One agreed, and, after a one-week trial, B was offered full time paid employment, which he was reported to be thoroughly enjoying.

## Guidance as an ongoing process of change

Many of the case studies record a series of interactions which have had a clear impact in enabling the client to exert more control over their current circumstances but which are part of a much longer process:



W, aged 20, from a rural county, was referred by his father as a result of concerns about his emotional and behavioural problems (allegedly linked to drug abuse) and the family's dissatisfaction with the efficacy of help previously received from youth-focused services. During a series of structured interventions, made possible by a less stringent funding regime, W was encouraged to engage in action-planning for short, medium and long term goals. This helped rebuild his self-confidence and he began to explore paid work and his interest in music. Although he did not pursue this ambition, he did persist in seeking employment and gained steady work in a local supermarket. His behavioural problems have lessened, according to his parents, and they are supporting his efforts to learn to drive. They are extremely grateful to the service for helping their son to achieve this transformation.

In both this case, and the one which follows, the guidance workers needed to manage a complex set of relationships, not just with the client but also with their relatives and support workers, and other agencies providing services to them. Meeting the expectations of third parties as well as of the client, may be significant in determining in the perceived success or usefulness of the guidance process.

A, a 28 year old man with a visual impairment, contacted the service through his support worker who attended the first interview with him. He had Level 2 qualifications in Art and English. His initial enquiry was related to a foundation degree in Sports Management. After a very long, in-depth guidance interview, it became clear that he was not ready to enter higher education at this stage but was simply agreeing with any suggestions put forward by his support workers. Following a second guidance interview with his adviser, A is looking for employment in an office or retail environment. He intends to attend college in September to slowly add to his qualifications and increase his confidence with the longer-term aim of entering higher education.

Another college-based service reports on the importance of sustained support:

T accessed guidance through a referral from an organisation which works in partnership with the college. T had no previous work experience and had very little confidence and self-esteem. Through guidance, it emerged that she wanted to gain

qualifications to progress into employment on a part-time basis as T had home commitments. The adviser encouraged T to explore voluntary work to enable her to gain work experience to build on her confidence and enable her to undertake her first Level 2 qualification. Through guidance, T started voluntary work with a well-known advice agency and enrolled on to an NVQ Level 2 in Administration in September 2005. Whilst on the course, an opening within the agency became available. T accessed guidance once again for support in completing an application form and again when she secured an interview. She went on to secure employment in a part-time position and has now completed her NVQ Level 2 in Administration.

The adviser comments: *"Guidance has had a massive impact on T because she has come a long way. Her self-esteem and confidence has risen immensely and she has recently accessed guidance again to discuss further progression within her learning."*

Another manager highlights the benefits of being funded to offer fuller services to certain groups of clients:

*"We are seeing that because we have time through 'enhanced' services to see clients who are below Level 2 more than once, we are able to give them the on-going support many need. In terms of outcomes for clients, this can mean that as we are then able to build a rapport over time, clients will be happy to come back after initial consultation to get further help, such as getting a CV together, completing application forms, the 'outcome' being for some that they are getting a higher ratio of job interviews because of this help."*



## [5] Barriers to effective guidance

The evidence put forward by practitioners provides in-depth qualitative testimony of the impact and benefits of guidance. Yet virtually all respondents submitted material demonstrating that, in addition to the huge challenges facing individual clients which they are working successfully to overcome, there are a number of specific structural factors that work in opposition to their efforts. There is a strong current of opinion, supported by case-study evidence, about the restrictive and often unworkable constraints imposed by the regulations surrounding the current funding of key areas of provision. This is reported to be particularly acute in respect of information and advice provided through *nextstep*. It should be noted that these case studies were generated during the 2005/06 financial year when targets set by the Learning and Skills Council for the *nextstep* service consisted of an interview for each client with qualifications below Level 2, with the opportunity for some to receive an 'enhanced' service. Some of the comments made by practitioners refer to the perceived impact of this funding system, which was adjusted in the next round of contracting.

A manager of a service sets out the issues very clearly:

*"We understand the 'targeting' of clients below Level 2 if it is because there are limited funds, but we are very concerned about clients who have Level 2 and above who equally need these free services and are not being able to access them in the same way as those with qualifications below Level 2. There will be many situations where these qualifications are of no relevance to the client progressing, e.g. they may be qualifications they gained abroad which may not be viewed by UK employers in same light, even though they are often equivalent to Level 3/4. The qualifications may be in a field the client no longer wishes to pursue because of lack of opportunities in that field, e.g. engineering. Or the qualifications were taken so long ago, and the client has had such a long break from work, due to bringing up their children, illness etc, that the prospective employer does not see them as relevant. In these circumstances the client does need help with strategies on CV, application forms, job interviews etc, that go beyond 'advice' and are thus more time consuming, needing skills from the practitioner more in line with those who will provide 'enhanced' services."*

This reflects the most recurrent comment of the practitioners and managers who provided the case studies: that the current focus on achievement of Level 2 has left significant numbers and groups of adults not provided for, such as those whose notionally Level 2 qualifications are now out of date, minimal or were gained overseas. They stress that their capacity to make positive life transitions is often determined by chance or personal networks rather than access to guidance.

C left school with good GCSEs but had to drop out of A levels because of mental health problems. He worked in catering as a chef but always wanted to do work related to the environment, especially something to do with water. He is now well but because he had Level 2 qualifications he was not eligible for guidance from *nextstep* and because he was employed could not get help from Jobcentre Plus through New Deal or other programmes. Fortunately for him, a friend who was a careers adviser suggested that he look for administrative work with a water company or the Environment Agency. He followed this advice and he has now progressed to a job at technician level.

### Juggling the funding

Again and again, providers explain how they have had to find ways of funding the services needed by clients with complex requirements, either by cross-subsidy or simply by extra unfunded work. Their professional commitment to the client, whilst always within appropriate boundaries, is evident as they explain why they have had recourse to what they feel are less than straightforward ways of accounting for what they do.

One service described the case of Miss R. As her qualification level was above Level 2 the service provided in excess of six hours unfunded IAG support to enable her to rebuild her life and to start to realise her career potential. "Without such support", Miss R said at evaluation, "I would have severely struggled to obtain the traineeship and would most likely not be using my previous educational attainments or supporting myself by now; I cannot thank the centre and the staff enough for this."

Services report the pressures created by the multiple funding streams which require annual bidding and contracting rounds, which divert resources away from service delivery and provide an insecure base for complex services to clients. As one college-based guidance manager puts it:



*"...the admin time I spend claiming all my little bits stops me from moving forward with new initiatives. Put all the money in one pot and let us use it effectively. I am currently getting money from Bitesize, nextstep, Aimhigher and work force..."*

Another college manager, providing a service in a depressed industrial area, comments:

*"Our current funding streams are varied: nextstep (focused on those without a Level 2 qualification), Aimhigher (targeted at those with a Level 2 qualification and for whom HE may eventually be an option) and a variety of other smaller locally-based contracts that mean that we don't need to turn any adult away. One of our biggest challenges, however, is that most of the funding is annual, so we are constantly devoting resource to submitting tenders. In spite of this we manage to offer a high quality service."*

Anomalies and perceived reductions in funding of opportunities for adults are shown to be creating real hardships, often to very vulnerable clients with disabilities, dependencies or other significant disadvantages. Cuts in both FE and training provision are cited, including courses suddenly closed. As one IAG provider says:

*"Outcomes are restricted by lack of opportunities for clients. We are seeing many long-term unemployed clients unable to access 'Work Based Training' (WBT) and those who are eligible for early entry to this scheme, e.g. ex-offenders unable to access training that may improve their employability and gain Level 2 qualifications, as we understand there is a 'freeze' on the WBT budget. This is also a big concern as we understand that the government intends to support those on Incapacity Benefit (IB) who want to work. Re-training would be a very big help for this client group, especially where linked to gaining training whilst working for an employer, as prospective employers will be looking for recent work experience and qualifications."*

L received intensive support from a 'Prescriptions for Health' project. He had a health problem and had been out of work for a long time. He had developed mental health problems and was dependent on painkillers. The adviser initially visited L at home and then saw him regularly and helped him to get on to a

music technology course where he did so well that he became 'student of the year'. He is now working and is well. Although this was a success story, this IAG project (which had many other successes) has now folded due to lack of funding.

For some, however, seeking help from an information, advice and guidance agency had less than positive outcomes. The issues here were less to do with the guidance process itself and much more to do with external factors, including rules of financial eligibility for both information, advice and guidance and for education and training, as one service describes:

*"B has recently reached a period where he feels well enough now to come off IB and seek work. He is concerned that his engineering skills/experience will not lead to him finding work as he had already been made redundant from this sector and is constantly reading about the decline of engineering in UK. Even if he did see work in this field, he would be reluctant as he fears it may lead to redundancy again. He has developed an interest in IT (hardware side) from his own endeavours but does not have any formal qualifications or work experience. Just at the time where I felt I helped this client raise his confidence so that he could face a career change, we find that the local IT training project is not taking on any more clients due to the WBT budget freeze. This has been a major knock to this gentleman's confidence."*

One service with a contract to deliver IAG to probation clients has encountered a number of funding difficulties:

*"Probation clients are required to attend for IAG as part of their sentence which presents challenges. The contract was initially funded solely through nextstep which meant that the provider only received a maximum of £35 per client (and nothing if they did not turn up!) so clients only received one appointment. This was ineffective as the clients often had complex difficulties. The provider has been able to secure some additional funding through Offender Learning and Skills (OLASS) to supplement the nextstep funding and this has meant that clients are currently able to receive a much more flexible service with more than one appointment. However, in 2006/7 this arrangement is under threat because of competition for funding with skills for life provision."*

### Offering a complete service

A recurring theme in the case studies received is the need to provide services over and above those funded through specific contracts linked to targets. A number of agencies report that they use alternative sources of funding to cross-subsidise more sustained and in-depth guidance to ensure a positive outcome for their clients. Others see the provision of effective guidance as an investment ensuring that students are enrolled on the most appropriate programmes with the best chance of success.

Ms O has mental health problems but managed to do an access course part-time and wants to go into HE – she is a lone parent on Income Support and Incapacity Benefit. She has been supported in applying for a foundation course at her FE college as she has anxiety problems and needs a safe environment. The college arranged a quiet place for her to go if she needed it and arranged for her to meet her course tutor and a university student as a mentor, together with lots of help completing the UCAS form and ongoing support and encouragement. Her enthusiasm has led to her brother also undertaking an access course: he will begin university in September. Ms O and her brother have between them already had more than a dozen guidance sessions unsupported by direct funding.

The college believes this is good professional practice as:

*“...they in time will come off welfare benefits and keep themselves and her child who is much more likely in turn go on to university. The other key benefit is that the family’s health and well-being are improved and they require fewer health and social services.”*

Respondents report significant and sustained demand, especially for face-to-face guidance, from these clients:

*“We work with around 9,000 individuals each year, who have chosen a face-to-face service (around 7,000 from our nextstep contract, 1,000 from our Aimhigher contract and around 1,000 from our other smaller contracts). Satisfaction ratings are high, over 99% at the end of January 2006. Clearly some people are comfortable accessing a telephone service, whilst others prefer to seek help face to face. We must offer both, or we risk losing the opportunity to help those who could benefit most.”*

*“Lasting sustainable progress is often slow and frequently outside government ‘countable’ time frames.”*

Some argue that the present system is discriminatory to adults outside priority categories: *“adults are being short-changed and undervalued.”*

H is in her mid 40s and has a good job with a major telecommunications company. She is well educated but is now seriously considering going into nursing as she feels she would like to do something more useful with the remaining years of her working life. She would like to discuss this with a guidance worker but is having difficulty in finding independent careers advice as she does not fall into the appropriate categories funded by government and she does not know where to turn for high quality private guidance. NHS Careers can provide information on nursing careers but not the all-important guidance and help with making the initial decisions about whether or not to make a mid-life career change.

However, in services which manage to juggle the funding streams, a high-quality service can be offered to those in work but looking for a change of direction.

F is a 35-year old financial adviser looking for a career change. After in-depth guidance, using Adult Directions software, youth work emerged as a strong area of interest. As a result of advice he has embarked on voluntary work as a mentor attached to a local youth group. He has contacted his local college and enrolled on an Access to HE programme. His aim is to progress towards Dip HE/BA (Hons) in Youth and Community. He is continuing to work as a financial adviser. This offers flexible hours and will support his educational progression.





## [6] Achieving the infrastructure

As this report was being compiled, the new Secretary of State for Education and Skills was setting out his vision for further education:

*“Whether it’s a mother who’s been bringing up children, retraining to return to work; an offender in custody, gaining the basic skills necessary to rehabilitate; a frustrated thirty something, picking up new IT skills for a career change; a high flyer in a large organisation receiving leadership training to push them further up the ladder or a reluctant 16 year old getting the encouragement and personal attention they need to stay on in education... this is fundamentally uplifting – giving individuals fresh chances, society greater knowledge, our economy increased capacity. And it’s of huge importance to our country, as we encounter profound social, economic and technological change.”*

Alan Johnson, Secretary of State, Department for Education and Skills, 6 June 2006

From the qualitative evidence submitted by NAEGA members about their current practice, it is clear that the government’s aim of achieving:

*“...an infrastructure to support adults to progress in their careers and their lives... a universally available, highly respected, and well used service offering linked information on jobs, qualifications, training and related services... but would also give guidance on-line, over the telephone, or face-to-face for people wanting help to identify the best way of getting on...”*

Skills White Paper, 2005

as part of the Skills Strategy is neither unrealistic nor non-essential. The handful of real-life stories presented here demonstrates the tremendous cost-effectiveness of very small scale interventions, providing they are made accessible, at the right time, in the right way and can be followed up. In this way, individuals do not lose confidence as they negotiate the steps that will bring about real and positive changes in their lives. These changes cannot always be measured in economic terms, although ultimately, any improvement in an individual’s health or a family’s happiness is likely to cost the nation correspondingly less in other public services. Employers too benefit from effective guidance to individuals – of the cases quoted here, most resulted in a successful career-change or re-entry to work after periods out of the labour market.

Many practitioners believe that, in principle, guidance should be provided free to all because of the beneficial outcomes for the economy as well as for individuals. NAEGA’s view is that, if some portions of the guidance offer are deemed to be too expensive to provide other than as charged services, then they must be widely available from accredited and quality-assured providers: a market in unregulated privately-funded guidance should not be allowed to develop. All would agree that the full range of guidance services should be free at the point of delivery for those on low incomes and for those for whom the positive outcomes in terms of economic benefits may be far off, but for whom decisions about life-change will be critical for their future well-being and for that of their families.

## [7] Characteristics of successful practice

The case studies and other evidence provided by NAEGA’s practitioner members demonstrate conclusively that there is high-quality practice in the provision of information, advice and guidance to adults in England but that too often this is achieved in spite of, and not because of, the current infrastructure and accountability requirements. The current drive to reduce the burden of bureaucracy in other parts of the education and skills sector does not appear to have had much impact here. Some of the most successful services for adults seeking advice on learning and work are those that are totally client-centred in their ethos. They achieve not only high client satisfaction ratings but also in good evidence of

measurable outcomes in terms of skill development, learning and employment, and the attendant subjective but vital outcomes of rebuilding of confidence, and improvements in health and well-being. They tend to be services that are not dependent on one heavily circumscribed funding regime, leading to a far greater degree of professional satisfaction for managers and staff alike. This is because they are confident that they are providing the best possible service for everyone who approaches them and can use their professional judgement about how to respond to each individual, for how long and by what means.

## [8] Principles of excellent practice

NAEGA is currently finalising a set of principles for ethical practice linked to its continuing professional development strategy. The following key principles have long been agreed as underpinning excellent practice in adult guidance in England:

- ▶ **Client-centred:** focused on the needs, requirements, interests and aspirations of the user
- ▶ **Impartial:** free from bias in the provision of information, advice and guidance
- ▶ **Accessible:** universally available with no barriers to access presented by short-term funding priorities or other constraints external to the needs of the user
- ▶ **Confidential:** observing high standards of professional confidentiality
- ▶ **Ethical:** underpinned by a commitment to equality of opportunity for all and an ethos of striving to redress the impact of educational and social disadvantage and maximising the life-chances of all clients.

## [9] A universally available service in England

A universally available service of adult guidance in England should include the following features:

- ▶ Statement of entitlement for all adults requiring help in making life transitions
- ▶ Comprehensive, flexible and genuine choice of services available to every adult appropriate to their individual requirements, including:
  - one-to-one and group sessions
  - face-to-face and telephone, email and web-based services
  - accessible, local, community-based and well-publicised specialised regional and national services
  - free core services, to include information, advice and guidance and repeat contacts
  - additional specialist services which might incur a cost for those able and willing to pay ie well-qualified people in employment seeking career development or change
  - good impartial guidance available to adults in continuing, further and higher education
  - effective guidance available in training programmes, via employers' organisations and in the workplace
- ▶ Effective system of monitoring and evaluation, to include user profiles; user requirements; user satisfaction with services received; user outcomes – short, medium and long term; user feedback on opportunities pursued
- ▶ Building on feedback from clients to improve guidance services and to influence the range of opportunities for learning, training and personal development available
- ▶ Recognisable service identity not dependent on short-term branding to publicise particular funding initiatives
- ▶ Stable funding regime that allows practitioners to use their professional judgement in gauging the most appropriate levels and type of service to offer to each individual client and that guarantees continuity of service for clients
- ▶ Extensive and effectively funded-referral networks, linking professionals from all key agencies concerned with adults, and underpinned by collaboration, information sharing and joint training
- ▶ Common professional ethos underpinned by high-quality training and continuing professional development
- ▶ Professional recognition for guidance practitioners with support for reflective practice to ensure continuous quality enhancement of services provided.



## [10] NAEGA's contribution

NAEGA's aims are to:

- ▶ Promote the provision of adult guidance services
- ▶ Encourage high standards of practice
- ▶ Promote equal access to learning and work opportunities for adults in the UK
- ▶ Work in partnership to achieve our aims.

In collating and presenting these case studies and feedback from current adult guidance practice, NAEGA hopes to make a positive contribution to the shaping of national policy in the context of the current Review of Information, Advice and Guidance in England.

NAEGA's practitioner members provide a rich source of evidence-based intelligence about the impact of current policy on guidance providers and their users. By using their reflections on their professional practice to shape a coherent national policy for England, there are real gains and benefits: to policy-makers, who can gauge the impact of proposed policy changes; to the practitioners themselves, whose professionalism is enhanced when their feedback is treated with respect, and above all, to all those adults for whom access to the best possible guidance may bring real, lasting and positive life change.

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