



executive summary

Information, advice and guidance for young people

Tamaris McCrone, Clare Gardiner, Clare Southcott and Gill Featherstone

Background

The responsibility for strategic planning and the provision of high-quality and impartial information, advice and guidance (IAG) now lies with local authorities (LAs). Furthermore, recent statutory guidance (DCSF, 2009) recognises that LA performance indicators, such as young people's participation rates in education, employment or training, are influenced by the quality of IAG.

This research project was commissioned by the Local Government Association (LG Association) in February 2010, prior to the UK general election (in May 2010), and was intended to inform preparation for the review of IAG services that the Labour Government had planned to conduct in 2011. Priorities for the new Coalition Government are still under review. However, on 24 May 2010 they announced plans to cut the current year's Area Based Grant from which Connexions services are funded, which means councils are currently having to make difficult financial decisions about the future of Connexions services. The implications of this research may need to be re-considered as priorities are finalised. Nevertheless, the fundamentals of 'good' IAG identified by this research are applicable to any future provision arrangements.



The LG Association commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to undertake research to evaluate the current ‘fitness for purpose’ of the IAG services provided to young people in the 14–19 context and to identify improvement and support needs for LAs ahead of the forthcoming government IAG review. This executive summary presents key findings from an online questionnaire survey of Heads of Connexions and LA strategic managers with responsibility for IAG. A final response of 57 per cent of the 152 LAs was achieved. Additionally, advocacy interviews were conducted with seven survey respondents from areas with evidence of at least one aspect of IAG-related provision deemed to be good practice. These provide examples of IAG provision that could be replicated. Data collection took place between April and June 2010.

Key findings

What does current IAG look like?

IAG services were widely perceived to contribute to raising learners’ aspirations and learners were seen to be provided with support from a range of IAG providers and/or partners who understood their roles and responsibilities. It was clear that LA and/or Connexions’ respondents felt confident that young people are currently informed about how services can help them and how they can access support. Furthermore, IAG services were said to be regularly and systematically monitored, reviewed and evaluated and actions taken to improve services. Additionally, there were high levels of confidence that there was appropriate IAG support for those at risk of becoming young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs), including learners with learning difficulties and disabilities (LLDD).

However, lower levels of confidence were reported in terms of school and college IAG provision in contrast to external provision. Fewer than half of LA and/or Connexions respondents believed that learners were provided with a high-quality programme of careers education or that IAG was delivered consistently in schools and colleges across the curriculum. On balance, not all senior Connexions and LA managers felt confident that current IAG provision was meeting all learners’ needs or that learners were receiving personalised IAG to help them make informed decisions. Furthermore, the evidence suggests that this lack of universal provision might be impeded by the tension between providing universal service and the need to focus on vulnerable groups and lack of resources. In terms of meeting the Quality Standards, there was also least confidence reported that parents/carers know how IAG services can help their children and how these services are accessed and that young people are engaged in the design, delivery and evaluation of IAG.

Two-thirds of respondents expressed confidence that, since the transfer of Connexions services to LAs in 2008, LA managers currently possess the knowledge and understanding to commission quality IAG services that meet local needs (although, not surprisingly, more confidence was apparent amongst LA strategic managers in contrast to senior managers of Connexions services).

What does ‘good’ IAG look like?

Over half of respondents reported having a form of partnership agreement in place to deliver IAG and, where an agreement was in place, the majority of respondents felt that schools were implementing the strategy in the agreed way. This, along with views of what ‘good’ IAG should look like, suggest that partnership working, where all partners understand their roles and ‘buy in’ to an overall local strategy, is key to effective delivery of IAG. Linked to this was the need to have not only clear strategic direction, filtered down to all stakeholders, but also ownership of that strategy by all stakeholders. Furthermore, a fully collaborative approach to IAG provision would highlight the need for clear delineation of accountability by all partners.

Full engagement in IAG provision by schools and colleges, and consistency of provision across and within schools, would facilitate ‘good’ IAG. Agreed strategies with a clear emphasis for example, on targeting young people such as LLDDs and NEETs, and the provision of universal, personalised IAG for all learners, especially in light of the recent Raising Participation Age (RPA) policy (where respondents clearly wanted further guidance)

would assist consistent provision. Schools and colleges might also benefit from more extensive future use of monitoring data to further enhance their contribution to IAG services and meeting the Quality Standards.

'Good' IAG was also characterised by delivery being carried out by fully trained and qualified staff. This extended from the need for LA managers and staff and Connexions Personal Advisors to be fully conversant and knowledgeable about IAG to the need for senior leaders in schools, careers coordinators, form tutors and other staff to be trained in current IAG policy and how it relates, in particular, to the 14–19 pathways.

What improvements are required?

It is recommended that in order to bring about improvements in the provision of IAG, stakeholders need to consider the following points.

- Working more collaboratively to ensure that learners receive IAG that is timely, comprehensive and personalised to their needs. The full engagement in partnership agreements would appear to be an effective way forward to achieve this goal. Such agreements would facilitate clarity with regard to expectations, ownership and accountability of all stakeholders.
- Achieving further transparency in terms of responsibility so that all partners understand their roles in IAG provision. This would also serve to enhance accountability so that all concerned parties would fully appreciate stakeholders' duties.
- Gaining further engagement of schools, in terms of senior leadership endorsement and support of the importance of IAG to learners. Additionally, increased awareness and knowledge of 14–19 pathways by parents would further increase the effectiveness of IAG.
- Acknowledging that schools would benefit from further support from LAs so that they can fully embrace a more extensive role in the provision of IAG and work with their partners within the LA. A key part of further improvements requires addressing the training needs within schools, so that staff (including senior leaders, careers coordinators, form tutors and others delivering elements of IAG) are fully conversant with current IAG strategies and 14–19 pathways.

These improvements are unlikely to be effective unless a strategic and holistic approach is taken to ensure that all key aspects of IAG are delivered. Furthermore, IAG should be considered within the broader context of both careers education (CE) and IAG and its place in the wider curriculum.

Reference

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009). *Quality, Choice and Aspiration: A Strategy for Young People's Information, Advice and Guidance*. London: DCSF. [online]. Available: <http://publications.education.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/IAG-Report-v2.pdf> [24 August, 2010].

Further information

For more information about this report visit www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LIAG01/ or email Tamaris McCrone at t.mccrone@nfer.ac.uk.



This project was funded by
the Local Government
Education and Children's
Services Research Programme



National Foundation for
Educational Research
The Mere, Upton Park
Slough, Berkshire SL1 2DQ
tel: +44 (0) 1753 574123
fax: +44 (0) 1753 691632
email: enquiries@nfer.ac.uk
web: www.nfer.ac.uk
© NFER 2010

Cover image supplied
by educationphotos.co.uk