

Career learning for the 21st century: a leadership issue for the FE sector

From a study on Career Learning, Information, Advice and Guidance (CLIAG)

Career Development Service

The logo graphic for LSIS consists of several flowing, wavy lines in shades of orange and red, resembling a stylized 'S' or a ribbon.

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Acknowledgements

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- Career learning for the 21st century: the career blueprint – a competence approach

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Foreword

In 2008/09, LSIS undertook a number of projects for the DCSF, looking at Career Learning, Information, Advice and Guidance (CLIAG) for young people in the further education (FE) sector.

This work involved discussions with a wide range of people from across the FE sector as well as an in-depth look at the research that has been conducted into this topic over the last few years. The results have been used to produce a series of reports for the sector and others with an interest in the topic.

It became clear that CLIAG is a leadership issue and that leaders in the sector need to address how their organisation can deliver this support effectively to gain maximum benefits for young people and their organisation.

The effective delivery of CLIAG is increasingly being recognised as important in enabling the FE sector to maximise success rates, and address government and sector agendas. This publication summarises some of the evidence that supports this. It also explores some identified weaknesses and suggests some ways forward. Whilst the focus of the study has been primarily on the 14-19 age group, many of the findings are applicable to work with learners of all ages.

For a more detailed report on the research into the impact of effective information, advice and guidance, see the publication *Career learning for the 21st century: a leadership issue for the FE sector. Sources of evidence*.

Ann Ruthven

Programme Lead, Career Development and Safeguarding

Part 1: Why is Career¹ Learning, Information, Advice and Guidance a leadership issue?

Leaders in the FE sector need to ensure that the delivery of CLIAG is effective because:

- indicative evidence from a range of settings in which CLIAG is provided suggests that, where this delivered effectively, it can improve learner success rates; and
- the work undertaken by staff involved in CLIAG, and their expertise and skills, can assist providers to implement government agendas and achieve leadership priorities.

The CLIAG services may need to be further developed to enable providers to do this.

Part 2: What evidence is there that effective Career Learning, Information, Advice and Guidance improves learner success rates?

Any measurement of the effectiveness of CLIAG needs to take account of:

- the number of differing variables, which impact on career and learning decisions taken by individuals, not least the influences from informal sources of IAG; and thus
- the difficulty of directly linking CLIAG interventions to impact upon learners' decisions and their destinations, amongst the multiple variables having both positive and negative influences.

1 The term 'career' here is used in the sense of a pathway through life. We suggest that, for the 21st century, in which individuals need to take a more active part in developing and managing their own careers, and learn how to do so, the term 'career learning' is more appropriate than 'careers education'. The acronym 'IAG' has been increasingly used to apply to the information, advice and guidance given about a wide range of issues including health and finance. However, the focus of this paper is on the learning, information, advice and guidance required to support decisions about learning and work options. Elements of CLIAG are delivered through a range of processes and interventions, embedded both within the curriculum and outside, by both career specialist and other staff, and at different stages of the learner pathway, thus creating a very complex picture.

Over the last 15 years, however, a body of research has accumulated across settings where CLIAG is delivered, such as in schools, in higher education, and in adult community settings, as well as from the FE sector, which provides indicative evidence that CLIAG can improve retention, achievement and progression through:

- equipping learners with the skills and competencies necessary to make really well-informed choices, including choosing subjects linked to career goals. The career-related skills cited included career exploration, self-awareness and self-confidence, and support progression by enabling young people to make more effective transitions;
- providing good quality and sufficiently detailed IAG to all parties involved (e.g. parents, employers, etc) including clarity on expectations and realistic 'tasters' to ensure learners are placed on the right programme;
- increasing motivation and self-confidence, including giving the encouragement and impetus needed to make changes, for example, by raising self-esteem and setting clear career goals;
- including processes at entry or induction to confirm course choices and where necessary referral to career specialists;
- providing support, particularly in the early stages of a programme or at transition points, such as through buddies or mentors; and
- providing timely and tailored CLIAG, sufficiently early, so that learners understand progression opportunities and routes, and are more committed to their learning.

Much of the evidence outside the sector is derived from quite large-scale studies following up students or service users after IAG interventions, encompassing between 1,000 and 4,000 participants. Findings from a longitudinal study of users of public guidance services also indicated that those receiving advice and guidance were more likely to have made changes than those who received just information.

Another study suggested that providing information and advice had a greater impact on re-engaging the least qualified. Within the learning and skills sector, a body of research was undertaken by the Further Education and Development Agency (FEDA) and the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) into the causes of non-completion and withdrawal, and strategies to address these. In addition, from 1999 to 2005 providers undertook small-scale action research projects and shared the findings through case studies.

Part 3: How do government and provider agendas relate to Career Learning, Information, Advice and Guidance ?

There is a wide-ranging consensus amongst government departments and bodies, such as the Skills Commission and the Confederation for British Industry (CBI), about the need for high-quality IAG for learners, parents and employers to support entry into, and progression through, the further education sector. The impartiality and comprehensiveness of the IAG are frequently cited as important in effective delivery.

The 14–19 reform programme

Reforms to the 14–19 curriculum, such as the introduction of the new 14–19 diplomas, the introduction of greater flexibility at key stages 3 and 4 and the increase in partnership working between schools and colleges, should open up a much broader range of options for 14–19 learners, and hence introduce greater complexity in decision-making (for example, covering the learning pathway, selection of provider, level of learning and specialisms). The effectiveness of partnership working in delivering comprehensive IAG is key to the successful delivery of the 14–19 entitlement for all young people in an area. In addition to the development of the online prospectus and common application process, closer working is likely to require common policies, procedures and agreed protocols on CLIAG. It also offers an opportunity to maximise the economies of scale, including sharing resources and the expertise of specialist staff, such as from Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs), across the partnership, or developing and delivering career learning to groups from different providers.

High quality IAG will need to be available to young people and their parents to support them in making informed choices from pre-entry to post-exit – and to ensure that they are on a learning pathway that meets their needs and aspirations – so making personalised learning a reality. There will also need to be integration between guidance on current learning choices, next steps and longer-term career goals. Whilst this will be particularly important at the key decision points, given that young people’s career ideas change and develop, there is also an argument for regular career health checks and linking individual learning plans to career and progression plans. Developing young people as competent career planners and managers is an important element in helping them negotiate their way around this complexity.

Every Child Matters (ECM)

CLIAG helps providers meet the *Every Child Matters* (ECM) agenda by contributing significantly to at least three of the outcomes – for example, by challenging aspirations and helping young people achieve economic well-being. The 2008 Ofsted consultation proposes that an assessment of the extent to which providers of 16–19 education are meeting the ECM agenda is included in future inspections. Of particular relevance in the new inspection framework would be an evaluation of the extent to which learners “increase their employability and economic well-being through learning and development” and “how well the provision enables learners to contribute to the wider society”, so encompassing volunteering and some enrichment activity.

Employer engagement

Whilst the extent of the involvement of specialist staff in forging links with employers varies from one provider to another, for those institutions offering an academic curriculum, such as some sixth-form colleges, the role of the careers staff can be crucial in building up and maintaining employer contacts. In order to develop a coherent, organisation-wide approach, related strategies need to take account of the work of career specialists, and the ways in which they can help to engage employers.

Raising the participation age (RPA)

The government anticipates that a suitable route will need to be found for every young person, underpinned by advice and guidance, if the future requirement for them to remain in education or training until 18 is to be fulfilled. The challenges RPA is likely to pose include:

- how to help learners navigate around the additional work-based learning options available, assuming these can be developed;
- how to engage any unmotivated young people who do not want to be in learning, and mitigate any negative impact on the retention and achievement of others;
- how to work effectively with partners, including providers, local authorities and Connexions, to identify responsibilities for following up and tracking young people who change their minds and do not enrol or withdraw; and
- developing ways of engaging learners more quickly in learning (i.e. through post-exit services; realistic and more frequent tasters, a more flexible curriculum, more frequent start dates, and clear progression routes for those on one-year courses).

Young people under 19 and their parents will need to know what their responsibilities are in relation to proactive involvement in seeking other learning options, who can assist in this and where to go for help.

Equality and diversity

The work of colleges is fundamental to many of our ambitions across government. You will be an important part of our agenda to make Britain a fairer and better society. Improving social mobility is a key ambition for us.

John Denham, address to the Association of Colleges conference, November 2008

A range of government policies, for example, set out in *Youth Matters* (DfES, 2005a), the *Children's Plan* (DCSF, 2007) and elsewhere, is concerned with ensuring that young people become active citizens and have high aspirations. It was noted in Ofsted's annual report 2008 that:

High expectations and aspirations are a common feature of outstanding colleges.

Talisman, November 2008, Vol. 71

The Ofsted consultation on new proposals for the further education and skills system inspections, (Ofsted, 2008), indicates that it intends to “ensure that the colleges and providers which we inspect meet the needs of all learners through effective promotion of equality, diversity and social inclusion”. It is intended to have a “focus on whether particular groups of learners are achieving as well as they should, including the most able and those, whose circumstances make them vulnerable”.

“We will specifically judge how well a college or provider fulfils its duties in terms of equality and diversity and the impact on learner achievements.” Within ‘leadership and management’, it is proposed that the effectiveness of the provider “in promoting equality and diversity”, in tackling “unlawful and unfair discrimination” and in “closing the achievement gap” are evaluated. The proposed introduction of ‘limiting grades’ may result in a grading of ‘inadequate’ in an area such as equality and diversity, limiting the judgement for overall effectiveness.

The government’s focus on disadvantaged groups such as ‘looked-after’ young people and teenage parents has been encouraging greater access to FE for these groups and impacting on the learner profile, requiring partnership working and tailored IAG to support them. Findings from research (SWA Consulting, 1998 and the Sutton Trust, 2008) suggest that good quality advice and guidance are particularly important in supporting the aspirations of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who are less likely to access the community or family-based personal and social networks that can offer support and advice, for example, on university progression.

The evidence would suggest that learners and their parents or guardians whose family members have not been in higher education are likely to need good quality, motivational and personalised CLIAG and support to navigate complicated HE admissions processes.

There is an expectation that CLIAG provision will address social and cultural stereotyping, from *Youth Matters* (DfES, 2005) onwards, so including *Further Education: Raising skills, Improving Life Chances* (DFES, 2006), and two Women and Work Commission publications (2006 and 2007). It is also specified within the IAG standards (DCSF, 2007b) that:

Information, advice and guidance services will promote equality of opportunity, celebrate diversity and challenge stereotypes.

The *Government Action Plan: Implementing the Women in Work Commission Recommendations* (DCLG, 2006) stated that improvements to CLIAG were key to “breaking down gender stereotypes and changing the gender make-up and culture of workplaces in the longer term”. *Towards a Fairer Future*, a review of the progress made on the action plan concluded:

Careers advisers, parents and educational practitioners have a key role in shaping the perceptions of young people. Challenging gender-stereotypes in careers advice and guidance is crucial in giving girls and boys an informed choice.

Women and Work Commission, 2007

A report published by Edge, the educational charity, in July 2008 indicated a low take-up of apprenticeships by black and minority ethnic learners, and that women still continue to make up less than 3 per cent of those achieving apprenticeships in construction and engineering.

Given the frequently crucial nature of decisions on vocational options on entry to the FE sector, it behoves providers to review with 14–19 partners whether sufficient is being done to ensure that stereotypes are challenged and non-traditional careers explored: for example, through work experience or tasters to explore atypical subject areas, and reviewing the content of career learning and materials used to deliver this).

There is also some evidence of the need to develop differentiated approaches to CLIAG, which take greater account of individual preferences in ways of engaging in career learning, with studies (SWA Consulting, 1988 and Moon et al, 2004) reporting differences between the genders.

Developing the learner voice

The learner voice is central to the government's reform of the public services, requiring them to become more responsive to stakeholders' and users' views and needs, and empowering them to co-design services. New guidance² issued to the sector by DIUS in September 2008 requires providers to be proactive in seeking the views of learners, potential learners and employers in relation to decisions affecting them, and to consider consulting with under-represented communities.

Impartiality and client-centredness should be at the heart of good CLIAG, and this places those advising learners and employers, including college specialists and Connexions personal advisers (PAs), in a central position to collect valuable feedback from them about the services they are using. This would include from:

- potential learners in under-represented communities or the Neet³ group during outreach activities;
- applicants during the admissions process;
- learners on a programme who are considering withdrawal; and
- those who have left, who can make judgements about the extent to which the provider has prepared them for further learning and enhanced their employability and career opportunities.

Staff can also gather intelligence about the appropriateness of the curriculum offer and barriers that prevent participation.

Skilled staff will have developed competencies in enabling and advocacy, which can be harnessed to develop a learner-voice culture across the organisation, and empower learners to offer their views. This may, for example, include organising activities to develop the learner voice and increase learners' confidence to enable them to offer their views and contribute to service improvement, or encouraging participation at learner forums.

2 DIUS, 2008. *Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances: Giving Learners and Employers a Say*. London: DIUS.

3 Young people not in education, training or employment (Neet).

Part 4: What aspects of 14–19 career learning information, advice and guidance need to be improved?

Research undertaken in the past decade has identified or suggested a number of weaknesses in CLIAG, including:

- insufficient focus pre-16 on both the range of learning pathways available, particularly through work-based learning, and on the longer-term career implications of subject choices;
- less adequate provision of pre- and post-exit services in the FE sector, which may be needed to support the progression of learners, particularly those whose progression or career plans fall apart, and to support the implementation of RPA;
- inconsistency in the quality of the CLIAG delivered on different sites, and available to part-time learners; and
- variability in the provision of advice and guidance given to HE students in the FE sector.

The complexity of the provision poses a challenge to the leadership to ensure that all their 14–19 learners are consistently enabled to develop sufficient career understanding and skills, and that there is coherence in their CLIAG provision. Whilst some providers have undertaken steps to address weaknesses, others may still need to do so. To facilitate this, some providers have mapped their CLIAG provision against the *National Framework for Careers Education and Guidance in England*, covering learning outcomes for the 11-19 age range. CLIAG strategies need to take account of the influence of informal guidance – particularly from peers and the media – and, in some cases, from parents and the extended family. This suggests approaches that include developing learners as peer mentors, and that reach out to local communities.

The range of staff involved in the delivery of CLIAG in the FE sector poses challenges to ensure that they are all adequately trained for this role and work within the boundaries of their expertise. Tutors frequently bear a heavy responsibility for supporting progression, including into HE, and, in addition to initial training for this part of their role, will also need regular updates.

Online CLIAG and the inclusion of career learning materials on virtual learning environments (VLEs) can support learners who do not visit the main site and those who need post-exit assistance. National developments, such as the requirement of the new National Apprenticeship Service to ensure that young people in schools are fully informed about high-quality vocational training opportunities, may begin to address other concerns.

Part 5: What conclusions can we draw?

A one-size approach to CLIAG does not fit with the needs of learners in an era of personalised learning, and does not reflect the principles being considered in the new refreshed improvement strategy (LSIS, 2008). There is a danger that marking out curriculum paths at an earlier age will reduce the breadth of career options available to individuals. Young people's career awareness and understanding develops over a period of time – some in higher education may still not have clear career goals. Learners need opportunities to broaden out and explore a range of options, including the non-traditional, before narrowing these prior to entry to vocational programmes, be these in the FE sector or in higher education. 14–19 partnerships need to ensure that there are opportunities to do so.

The economy requires workers who have good employability skills and can understand how their skills profile is transferable to other occupational sectors, for example, the applicability of engineering skills to construction. We need to build career resilience within the population as a whole. Findings from the research into the impact of CLIAG have identified the importance of developing career-related skills. These may be being developed implicitly, but further consideration may need to be given as to how this learning becomes explicit. The complexity of choice is also reinforcing the need for young people to become effective career planners and developers. Learners need to be supported through a career learning process, which will develop these skills, and continues the momentum away from a position where learners receive advice and guidance to one where they are more proactive in managing their own careers.

In conclusion, the evidence supports the place that effective CLIAG has in supporting young people. In particular, it can help them choose the right course, support and motivate them to complete and achieve, and help them to progress. It can also help those in danger of dropping out or who have chosen the wrong course or programme. In addition, it can contribute to a range of other issues that concern leaders in the sector, such as equality and diversity, and Ofsted inspections. To be effective, however, it needs to be planned, reviewed and developed, adequately resourced and delivered by staff who are suitably trained and supported.

Part 6: Where is further information available?

A more detailed publication, *Career learning for the 21st century: a leadership issue for the FE sector. Sources of evidence*, is available on the LSIS website at www.lsis.org.uk and includes:

- policy and national developments over the last decade that have affected CLIAG delivery in the FE sector;
- a summary of the sources of evidence describing the impact of effective CLIAG on learner success rates, including on recruitment, student motivation, retention, engagement in learning, achievement and progression;
- CLIAG-related strategies that can improve success rates; and
- more detailed information about how CLIAG can be developed to assist in meeting government agendas.

The website also includes examples of effective CLIAG, and new resources to help staff improve their practice.

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Learning and Skills Improvement Service

The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) came into operation on 1 October 2008.

Combining the best aspects of two different and highly successful sector bodies – the Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL) and the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) – LSIS works closely with the sector, as its key partner, to focus on learners and on supporting excellence, sustainable provision and self-regulation in the further education and skills sector. Leadership development underpins and forms an important part of the organisation's strategic role in the sector.

LSIS was established after consultations with sector leaders identified a strong desire for an organisation that would be sector-led. As a sector-owned public body, LSIS is owned, directed and governed by further education and skills colleges and providers – the first time that this vibrant sector's talent is being harnessed to participate in this way.

LSIS continues to consult with the sector about its priorities and remit. While this is taking place, the activities and services of the former CEL and QIA organisations continue under LSIS branding; more information about the range of activities is available on their websites at www.centreforexcellence.org.uk and www.qia.org.uk.

Disability equality policy

LSIS is committed to promoting equality for disabled people and we strive to ensure that all our communication and learning materials are available in various formats, including large font, audio or braille. Please let us know if you consider yourself disabled and require reasonable adjustments made to support you.