

# Career learning for the 21st century

Effective practice and partnership working

Career Development Service

**LSIS** LEARNING  
AND SKILLS  
IMPROVEMENT  
SERVICE



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- Unionlearn
- Learning Opportunities in the South East
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## Download

This guide is available to download in PDF format from the LSIS and CEGNET websites.

LSIS: [www.lsis.org.uk](http://www.lsis.org.uk) CEGNET: [www.cegnet.co.uk](http://www.cegnet.co.uk)

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

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- Career learning for the 21st century: Embedding CLIAG – a guide for leaders
- Career learning for the 21st century: CPD series: Introduction to CLIAG
- Career learning for the 21st century: CPD series: Introduction to interviewing
- Career learning for the 21st century: CPD series: Introduction to values and ethics
- Career learning for the 21st century: CPD series: Introduction to group working
- Career learning for the 21st century: CPD series: Introduction to evaluating and measuring impact
- Career learning for the 21st century: CPD series: Introduction to reaching potential by raising aspirations
- Career learning for the 21st century: Careers blueprint supporting an all-age guidance strategy
- Career learning for the 21st century: Mapping the blueprint against other frameworks
- Career learning for the 21st century: Quality awards for career learning, information, advice and guidance



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## Foreword

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In 2009/10, the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) undertook a number of projects looking at career learning, information, advice and guidance (CLIAG) for young people in the further education (FE) sector.

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This work involved discussions with a wide range of people from across learning and skills 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.

This publication provides examples of effective practice identified by providers as case studies. You will find exemplars from a wide range of organisations delivering CLIAG in the context of offender learning, children leaving care and supporting learners with learning difficulties. We hope you will find examples that you can use to inform what you do and how you deliver CLIAG in your organisation. More generally, the exemplars in this document also serve to highlight some of the key features of effective CLIAG in the sector; of particular note is the importance of partnership working, senior level support and engagement of staff.

Other salient features include the value of having qualified and informed staff and the importance of continuing professional development (CPD) in ensuring that learners benefit from high-quality provision.

Finally there is a recognition, evident in many of these approaches, that from school onwards a whole-age approach towards developing career skills is of value in ensuring learners have career competencies for life. With such impressive work taking place, it is vitally important that the sector as a whole continues to gather feedback and evaluate the very clear impact of the benefits of careers education and guidance (CEG) on organisational objectives and learner needs.

**Ann Ruthven**  
**Head of Learning and Learner Support**

# 1. Introduction and background

## 1.1 Introduction

This guide is one of a series of publications titled *Career Learning for the 21st Century*, produced by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) from 2009. It is the second to focus on effective practice.

It has been designed to help those working in career learning, information, advice and guidance (CLIAG) across a range of settings. Those who may find this guide useful include staff and managers working in the learning and skills sector – but the approaches taken are also likely to be of interest to those delivering CLIAG in schools, adult and community learning and higher education. The guide includes a number of recent case studies of effective practice in CLIAG, and offer examples of how CLIAG interventions can contribute to the retention, achievement, employability and progression of learners.

The aim of this guide is to provide examples of effective practice covering the following approaches, outcomes, target groups or settings:

- Working with learners with learning difficulties and disabilities
- Working with care leavers
- Work-based learning
- Offender learning
- Higher education
- Working in partnership.

It is intended that this guide can be used as a source of ideas and strategies, and the summary tables overleaf signpost relevant effective case studies that the reader may like to consult.

## 1.2 Background

In October 2009, LSIS was commissioned by DCSF and BIS to undertake a project to enhance the leadership and delivery of CLIAG, including producing CPD modules for staff, and trialling the Canadian Blueprint framework of career competencies. A key strand of this work was to identify examples of effective practice in the delivery of careers learning, information, advice and guidance. For the purpose of the project, effective practice could either be a whole organisational approach, or be found in an element of careers work, such as that within a particular programme, product or approach. This built upon work from the previous year, which had also included capturing and sharing effective practice, included in the publication *Career learning for the 21st century: Effective practice in the FE sector*, downloadable from the LSIS website.

There is a broad consensus on the need for impartial and comprehensive CLIAG across government and bodies such as the CBI to support 14-19 progression. In October 2009, the DCSF published *Quality Choice and Aspiration – A strategy for young people’s information, advice and guidance*’ which envisages CLIAG as key to raising aspirations and ensuring all reach their potential. This goal is mirrored in *Fuelling Potential*, published in March 2010 by BIS, which signalled the introduction later in the year of the new advancement and careers service. To achieve this ambition, there will need to be personalised IAG, which centres on the needs of the individual, and specialist local help for vulnerable learners and those with additional needs. Work-related experiences and mentoring will need to be expanded to ensure people have a broad understanding of the world of work to inform their decisions. New state-of-the-art technologies will be exploited to ensure that CLIAG is up to date and that learners and students engage with it – young people and those over 19 in higher education or using the advancement and careers service. The case studies offer approaches to help the field develop strategies and provision to meet these needs.

Research undertaken by LSIS indicates that leaders in the learning and skills sector value the CLIAG for a range of reasons including the intelligence it provides for planning purposes, and the contribution it makes to enhancing the organisation’s reputation in the community through providing impartial advice. However, most frequently cited is the impact of effective CLIAG on the retention and progression of learners.

The nature of the work CLIAG practitioners undertake frequently requires working in partnership both internally, such as with curriculum areas, and externally – be it, for example, in 14–19 consortia or ‘advancement’ networks. Effective collaboration will take account of the need to share information in a way which respects confidentiality and data protection legislation, and can have a significant impact on the recruitment, retention, achievement and progression of learners, as illustrated by case studies in the Guide.

Therefore, the purpose of this publication is threefold:

1. to highlight the excellent range and quality of approaches being developed and used by staff throughout the range of settings and enable these to be shared across sectors, with a focus on those approaches which support the development of services both 14 – 19 and 19+ to meet the sectors’ and government priorities;
2. to increase understanding, particularly amongst leaders in the sectors, of the contribution CLIAG can make in meeting government and sector agendas, policies and targets, where it is delivered effectively; and
3. to offer guidance on the most efficient and effective ways of CLIAG providers working in partnership with others.



## 1.3 A definition of effective practice

The definition below was drafted by the LSIS team and used to identify effective practice. Papers consulted to inform the definition include:

- The Ofsted Common Inspection Framework
- Framework for Excellence
- Embedding IAG in Learning Provision for Adults
- IAG national quality standards
- DCSF IAG strategy
- DCSF Principles for Impartial CEG
- The **matrix** framework.

The definition provided some guidance to aid the search for examples of really effective practice. Not every case study included here met all elements of this definition: for example, there was not always sufficient triangulated and robust evaluation information to ascertain the full impact of an approach. More crucially, for the purposes of this guide, an approach was judged to be effective if it was fit for purpose, potentially applicable in other settings and was clearly valued by learners, staff and their organisations alike.

### Definition of effective practice

Effective practice in CLIAG in the learning and skills sector helps learners to reach their potential by ensuring placement on correct programmes, addressing barriers, supporting them on programmes to reach their learning goals and increase their employability, and facilitating next steps and progression. It also improves their ability to manage their career and pathway throughout life.

Features of effective practice are likely to include:

- Provision that:
  - motivates and raises aspirations and confidence;
  - expands young people’s understanding of the world of work, and learning, and ways of entering these such as through work-related experiences and tasters;
  - helps young people to make wise decisions about learning and work options
- Provision that is regularly modernised or refreshed through continuous quality improvement (CQI), informed by a systematic approach to the evaluation of the services and analysis of a range of relevant data, including destination data, and good practice / resources from elsewhere
- Provision that is culturally sensitive and inclusive – and embraces and actively promotes equality and diversity
- Provision that is personalised and differentiated as appropriate to meet the needs of all learners
- Provision that is informed by labour market information (LMI) and supported through strong links with employers
- Learners’ involvement in the design and development of services

- Harnessing new technologies creatively to innovate
- Delivery in ways that are cost effective and sustainable.
- There is evidence that the above are in place.

This is likely to be found in organisations that have embedded CLIAG in their culture and demonstrated by:

- an agreed understanding about what CLIAG is, what it can and cannot deliver – based on shared underpinning principles;
- a committed leadership, which recognises the benefits and value-added effective IAG brings – and secures adequate resourcing;
- a ‘joined-up’ approach with clear management and allocation of responsibilities, which ensures excellent co-ordination and coherence of CLIAG within the organisation, thus providing appropriate and timely CLIAG for learners – and ensuring that good practice can be identified and spread;
- a systematic approach to the review of staff performance, identification of development needs and the meeting of these;
- effective partnership working.

## 1.4 How to use this guide

- It can be used as a source of ideas, inspiration and strategies.
- The reference tables overleaf signpost the case studies against their particular areas of impact and give a brief description of each one to help you identify studies you may find interesting to consult.
- The format of each case study is not standard, as the examples vary from one-off approaches to whole organisational programmes and as such are tailored to give the most salient information to the reader. However, in each case study there is:
  - a brief description of the provider;
  - what they wanted to achieve;
  - their effective practice and the factors that helped make this successful; and
  - some indication of the impact the practice has had, and how they know that their approach works.

There is also a section on how you might use or adapt the approach in your own organisation or practice with useful hints and tips.

Some of the abbreviated terms used in this document:

ASD	autistic spectrum disorders
ASDAN	Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network
BIS	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
CAS	careers advice service
CDC	career development centre
CEG	careers education and guidance
CEIAG	careers education, information, advice and guidance
CLIAG	career learning, information, advice and guidance
CMS	content management system
CPD	continuing professional development
CQI	continuous quality improvement
DCSF	Department of Children, Schools and Families
DDA	Disability Discrimination Act
E2E	entry to employment
ECM	Every Child Matters
EET	education, employment and training
EMA	education maintenance allowance
ESOL	English as a Second Language
FDF	Foundation Degree Forward
GFE	general further education college
HE	higher education
HMP	Her Majesty's prison
IAG	information, advice and guidance
ILM	Institute of Leadership and Management
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
LDD	learning difficulties and disabilities
LEAP	learning, employment, advice and preparation
LMI	labour market information
LLN	lifelong learning network

LSA	learning support assistant
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
LSIS	Learning and Skills Improvement Service
MOU	memorandum of understanding
MIS	management information system
NACRO	National Association for the Care and Rehabilitation of Offenders
NEET	not in education, employment or training
NIACE	National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
NICEC	National Institute of Careers Education and Counselling
NOCN	National Open College Network
OLASS	Offender Learning and Skills Service
OMU	Offender Management Unit
PA	personal adviser
PCDL	personal and community development planning
PDP	professional development planning
QCF	Qualifications and Credit Framework
SAR	self-assessment report
SLN	Sussex Learning Network
SSC	sector skills council
TNA	training needs analysis
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UCAS	University Central Admissions Service
ULR	union learning representative
VLE	virtual learning environment
YOT	youth offending team

References are also made in the document to the **matrix** Standard. This is the quality framework for the effective delivery of information, advice and guidance on learning and work. The **matrix** Standard is useful for organisations that deliver information, advice and guidance to external clients as part of their business and also for employers who are committed to developing their people. Each year a number of providers with outstanding practice are nominated for **matrix** excellence awards.

## 2. Examples of effective practice

### 2.1 Summary tables

#### 2.1.1 Summary of effective practice described<sup>1</sup>

Case study title	Page	Learners with learning difficulties and disabilities	Care leavers	Partnership working	Increasing employability	Using new technologies	Supporting progression	Supporting / retention achievement	Increasing take-up of services
Somerset Adult Learning and Skills	19	✓					✓	✓	
Heriot-Watt University	24			✓	✓				
The University of Derby	27					✓			✓
City College Norwich	35	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Harrow College	44			✓				✓	
HMP Bullwood Hall	48			✓	✓				✓
Bradford Leaving Care Service	55		✓	✓	✓		✓		
Teenagers to Work in Sunderland	58		✓		✓		✓		
Learning Opportunities in the South East	63			✓		✓	✓		
Unionlearn with the TUC	67			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓

<sup>1</sup> Not all features of effective practice are included here. These tables represent the main features of the effective practice described for ease of reference by the reader. For example all providers are likely to be working in partnership.

## 2.1.2 Summary of effective practice settings<sup>2</sup>

Case study title	Page	Web-based delivery	Offender learning	Further education	Adult and community learning	Connexions / LA	Higher education	Work-based learning	Employer-based
Somerset Adult Learning and Skills	19				✓				
Heriot-Watt University	24						✓		
The University of Derby	27	✓					✓		
City College Norwich	35	✓		✓					
Harrow College	44			✓					
HMP Bullwood Hall	48		✓						
Bradford Leaving Care Service	55					✓			
Teenagers to Work in Sunderland	58					✓			
Learning Opportunities in the South East	67	✓						✓	
Unionlearn with the TUC	63	✓						✓	✓

<sup>2</sup> The table represents the main settings, in which the effective practice explored in this guide, occurs, for ease of reference by the reader.

<b>Brief description of the case study</b>	
Somerset Adult Learning and Skills	It became clear that the initial information and assessment processes in place for learners with learning difficulties were not resulting in decisions about learning opportunities, which the learners owned. New approaches were put in place to address this, including a customised brochure, and the development of a toolkit of resources with assessment tasks mapped to the curriculum, which could be used by tutors and learning advisers to develop tailored learning programmes.
Heriot-Watt University	As a response to a drop in graduate employment rates, the University's Career Advisory Service established a professional development planning system and rolled out a programme of careers education in the academic schools. This was augmented with other initiatives, such as a careers mentoring programme where students were paired with alumni.
The University of Derby	A re-location and increased student use of the internet prompted a review of the Career Development Centre's services, to identify what assistance the students wanted and how this could best be marketed to increase accessibility and take up. A variety of new approaches was introduced including rebranding the service, taking IAG out to students and using new technologies to support web-based delivery.
City College Norwich	A new physical space, new technologies and a specialist team were developed to support learners with Autistic Spectrum Disorders to complete their programmes, achieve and progress. The provision covers both learners on mainstream programmes – as well as those on a specialist course – Phoenix Purple. Learners are supported in accessing tasters and work-related learning and work experience placements to help them progress into further learning and employment.
Harrow College	The college improved the information sharing processes with the youth offending team to increase the retention and achievement of their clients on college programmes. This included drafting a service level agreement, which, whilst taking account of data protection and confidentiality, enabled members of the YOT team to access web-based student records.



<b>Brief description of the case study</b>	
HMP Bullwood Hall	Through much closer and more formalised partnership working the staff developed a more joined-up and seamless service for offenders, to increase their achievement and employability on release, and reduce the risk of re-offending. The work has led to more effective information sharing and better referral – and thus to inmates having greater ownership of their action plans. As a result, there has been an increase in the take up of the learning on offer.
Bradford Leaving Care Service	LEAP E2E is one of many employability projects run by Bradford's leaving care service. It offers a 12-week programme and successfully engages the hardest to reach NEET care leavers and children in need, by offering an understanding, informal learning environment. IAG on career progression is provided, embedded into programme delivery, and linked to work tasters, work place visits and informal learning about the workplace.
Teenagers to Work in Sunderland	The Teenagers to Work programme provides an opportunity for children in transition from care, to explore the world of work and to begin to understand the employability skills they need to build to be successful. The placements are an excellent source of career learning, informing and influencing career choice and post-16 learning pathways, including elements such as placement diaries, which evidence strengths, and identifying 'real' and achievable career goals.
Unionlearn with the TUC	Since their introduction, Union learning representatives have been promoting and developing workplace learning by identifying needs, mentoring, coaching and signposting to opportunities and to other services. They work within a network" model, which builds active working relationships with IAG providers and connects TUC affiliated unions with these providers in a range of ways. In 2008/09 over 200,000 learners were supported by unions.
Learning Opportunities in the South East	Four lifelong learning networks joined together to promote vocational higher education in the south-east of England, enable users to take decisions independently and approach institutions with confidence. The development of comprehensive and up to date web-based information and a progression tool has enabled users to obtain personalised information, advice and guidance relating to work-based and work-related higher education.

## 2.2 Case studies

- Somerset Adult Learning and Skills
- Heriot-Watt University
- The Career Development Centre, University of Derby
- City College Norwich
- Harrow College
- HMP Bullwood Hall
- Bradford Leaving Care Service
- Teenagers to Work in Sunderland
- Learning Opportunities in the South East
- Unionlearn with the TUC.

## Developing personalised IAG for learners with learning difficulties to aid progression

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### 1. Somerset Skills and Learning (SS&L)

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#### Introduction

Somerset Skills and Learning (SS&L) operates through 15 community-based centres throughout the county, delivering post-19 learning and work-based learning to approximately 16,000 learners each year. Fifteen tutors deliver discrete courses for some 250 adults with learning difficulties or disabilities, as part of Foundation Learning accredited at entry level 3. Personal and community development learning (PCDL) and provision accredited by ASDAN, including a series of 'Towards Independence' certificates, are offered.

The service tries to respond to local needs as they arise, by running accessible courses on topics such as relationship training. Much of the focus is on developing skills for independent living and classes aim to support this by treating topics broadly – such as focusing on 'Healthy Eating' rather than just 'Cookery.' There is a lot of use of Music and Art in the provision – including a focus on completing projects, such as preparing and delivering a carol service.

Some of these learners have been able to progress into mainstream provision but need accessible information and support to do so. For those who have the potential for employment, the County Council runs work preparation courses to facilitate entry into paid work in social enterprises. There are also a number of SS&L foundation learning programmes, for example, in hospitality and catering, gardening skills and performing arts. Being part of the county council is valuable for developing links with areas such as adult social care, and the staff can refer learners for voluntary placement activities and supported work placements, thus enabling them to take small steps towards paid work.

The range of different disabilities and difficulties poses a challenge for tutors, who need to be skilled in differentiation. Many learners are reliant on transport to access the provision and making the arrangements for this is very complex. However, SS&L has local venues and uses village halls and churches in the heart of communities to deliver courses and support inclusion.

## What we wanted to achieve

It was becoming increasingly clear that learners with learning difficulties needed to be empowered to be able to really make their own decisions about what they wanted to learn. The existing information and initial assessment processes and tasks were not tailored or meaningful enough to enable them to participate in planning their own learning and making real choices. Carers in homes and centres also found it difficult to help learners choose what really suited them – rather than fit in with what was available. In some cases older parents of adults with learning difficulties may have a fairly fixed view of what their sons or daughters can achieve and don't see the value in them trying new things or progressing into other learning. In a residential setting the options may be quite limited. The extent to which learners were not being engaged in the decisions was demonstrated by the fact that some couldn't remember what they had applied to do.

The service's main brochure containing the range of provision available was too complex for learners with learning difficulties. There was a need to provide discrete, more accessible course information, simplified enrolment processes and more consistent initial assessment processes.

Whilst the service had developed a range of progression options, both internally and through referral elsewhere, there was a danger that the lack of adequately detailed information about what the learner might be able to achieve and how they needed to be supported, might in some cases be impeding progression.

## What we did

A more accessible programme with the range of relevant opportunities for learners with learning difficulties was produced in 2007. A small forum of learning-disabled learners was convened to inform the process. The brochure is icon-based, uses a generously spaced, larger script in as simple a way as is possible and uses first names for tutors.

In 2008, annual open information sessions, convened by the Disability Project team and tutors, were introduced in March and April with learners, carers, supporters and friends, to identify learning needs and those courses which needed to be set up for the autumn.

It was agreed that a toolkit of resources was needed for learning advisers and tutors to facilitate initial assessment and person-centred planning for learners choosing courses – both on entry, and once on the courses. This would also give a good range of meaningful initial assessment tasks mapped to the curriculum, which would help tutors in planning schemes of work and developing tailored individual learning plans. Collaboration on a NIACE project gave the impetus to develop the toolkit. In 2007, two disability workers started on the project and researched what was already available, initially drawing on the experiences of a small number of tutors. Then, with the use of Somerset Total Communication,<sup>3</sup> they investigated strategies for improving ways of communicating with this group of learners. New resources were developed, mapped to the core curriculum, trialled with tutors and an adviser, reviewed and initially piloted at a short summer course. Staff in the service have been trained to use the toolkit and it is now being used by all.

The initial assessment process was reviewed to incorporate exercises from the toolkit. In addition to identifying literacy levels, the initial assessment process, undertaken in the first session focuses on the learner's likes and dislikes, what they have done and where they might like to progress to. Disability project workers and learning support workers take them through the guidance process and aim to empower the learner to make their own informed decisions. Individual learning plans which address identified learning needs are produced from this process and include information on learning goals, support needs, space to record achievements and notes on communication. The tutor identifies learning targets with the learner, which are linked to the core curriculum, so it is then possible to identify the elements of the curriculum they have covered and record their achievement.

A range of games and resources from the toolkit are used at the open information sessions in the spring to help learners talk about what they have done in the past and what they would like to do in the future, and to establish the level required. Tutors also use resources from the toolkit for assessments during the programmes to talk with learners about what they have completed and where they want to progress.

### What helped to make it work?

Participation in a national project helped to focus staff on development work, and gave access to valuable specialist support and expertise.

Working with a small group of tutors as part of the development process brought a valuable range of perspectives. During the trialling, it was helpful to capture tutors' reflections through feedback sheets at the end of their sessions. Cascading training to all staff was key in ensuring that they are confident enough to use the new resources.

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3 All centres use signs and symbols based on Somerset Total Communications, which developed out of the Speech and Language Therapy Service.

## What were the results?

The toolkit was published in 2008. As the use of the toolkit is being embedded in the service, tutors now have a wider range of resources, in the form of games and quizzes as well as tactile communication resources, which can be used in different ways. These are held on CD and on the staff website, so they can be printed out and laminated as necessary. This has introduced greater consistency into the assessment and hence is supporting quality improvement throughout the organisation.

There is now a good range of adaptable initial assessment tasks mapped to the pre-entry core curriculum. Generic tasks have been sent to all tutors on the Foundation Learning programme to ensure that initial assessment is meaningful for all learners as they start their programme. The main impact for the learners has been in enabling them to be able to select more accurately the learning they wish to undertake – both at an initial stage and to support their progression.

Helping learners to identify potential barriers to their learning when developing the individual learning plans is an important factor for retention and completion – both for the individual and the Service. A sheet of labels with pictorial and symbolic images to represent barriers has been developed and learners were asked to identify those barriers, which might apply to them. Not only were they therefore more able to complete this themselves than being reliant on their carers, but the tutor was able to use their written responses to gauge literacy levels, and hence the most effective teaching methods, and any support which might be needed.

**“This was so useful for this short course as it gave a quick identification of possible support needs with a group of new learners.”**

**Tutor**

Using the toolkit is enabling tutors to monitor learners’ progress more closely and to identify and celebrate achievements, which motivates both learner and tutor. This is also providing more detailed information to help staff consider which learners may be able to progress into mainstream provision. Learners’ horizons are being widened. Those who can move on have a nextstep interview, and an accessible action plan is developed with them.

Disability workers are visiting the living environments to discuss progression options with parents and carers. The open information sessions in the spring to which they are invited, is encouraging a focus on next steps. This work is challenging some carers’ and parents’ views – as one parent commented:

**“ I was very glad my daughter did the course as she showed me how to do some computing.”**

## How we know it works

Progression Pathways for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities are now fully developed and achievement has increased over a three-year period.

In 2008/09 the Foundation Learning programmes enjoyed a retention rate of 96 per cent with an achievement rate of 96 per cent for programmes at entry level 3. In all cases, achievement in the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) National Open College Network (NOCN) units was being used as progression from personal and community development learning programmes.

These units are also being used as preparation for the following year. The units have formed opportunities for learners to be engaged in English, maths, ICT, in functional skills and as tasters in vocational areas to inform foundation learning awards, certificates or diplomas.

## Tips for transferring the practice

These approaches are transferable to a range of settings, and fit in well with a culture in which tutors share ideas and resources. It is important not to duplicate what already exists, so researching what is already available, including good practice within the organisation itself, is important. This is particularly the case where funding is limited.

As funding has changed, so college-based options may no longer be available to these learners. An adult learning environment is appropriate, but there may need to be more detailed work on establishing progression pathways and developing the range of links to ensure that an adequate variety of options based on small steps is available.

It is important to take parents and carers along this journey with the learners so that their aspirations are equally raised and they are supportive of new goals.

A wide skill set is required to support the achievement and progression of these learners. It requires the complementary skills of the disability workers, IAG workers and tutors together to help the learner make realistic but challenging choices.

## Improving Graduate Employability

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### 2. Heriot-Watt University

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#### Introduction

Heriot-Watt is a research intensive, vocational university with close industry links. It produces around 1,500 graduates each year primarily in science, engineering and business disciplines. Its Careers Advisory Service comprises nine members of staff including four careers advisers, an information manager and an employer liaison specialist. Their remit is to assist students and recent graduates in planning and implementing their career choice through a programme of class based workshops supported by individual advice and a comprehensive careers library and website.

#### What we wanted to achieve

The university had historically enjoyed high employment rates for its graduates. However, employment rates had started to worsen around the year 2000, and by 2004 the university had slipped to mid-table in the national rankings. As a university that prided itself on preparing students for a successful professional career, it was clear that something needed to be done to reverse the trend.

#### What we did

An employability strategy was drawn up which earmarked contributions from both the academic and support functions, and not least the Careers Advisory Service. Working in collaboration with academic colleagues a professional development planning (PDP) system was developed by the Service and rolled out in academic schools. This was combined with a comprehensive programme of careers education that involved the delivery of careers seminars in almost all years of every undergraduate programme. In some schools this took the form of dedicated careers and PDP modules, in others it was included in related academic modules, whilst in others it was shoehorned into one-off, timetabled lectures.

The approach adopted was to empower all students with the ability to fulfil their career potential by teaching them the required career management skills as part of their course. Previously the service had relied on students to self-refer for individual interviews or workshops, which tended to attract a minority of the more motivated students. The blanket careers education approach ensured that students across the ability and degree subject range received a minimum level of support. Employers, including university alumni, were frequently engaged, wherever possible, to deliver business simulations and skills sessions.

This approach was complemented by other extra-curricular initiatives, such as a careers mentoring programme, whereby students are paired with recent alumni to help them with their career planning.



A series of industry case studies have been developed with financial support from the Scottish government. These are run with students, on a group basis, to provide them not only with an insight into the nature and commercial pressures of a range of key industries, but also the opportunity to enhance personal skills such as group work, problem solving and communication.

The Careers Advisory Service's website was augmented with tools such as CV builder, covering letter creator and interview simulator. These were designed to maximise students' chances of succeeding in the graduate selection process. An e-portfolio to support PDP was designed in such a way that selective sections could be printed off to form an effective CV – an approach with immediate appeal to students.

In addition, careers information resources were redesigned to match the range of degree disciplines and job areas most commonly pursued by their students. An employability website has also been developed which enables students to assess their current proficiency in the relevant personal skills employers look for and access details of activities whereby they can address any gaps.

Academic staff, in addition to collaborating with the Careers Advisory Service on PDP and careers education, are now reviewing the curriculum with the help of an employability consultant with a view to more effectively integrating employability skills into their modules. This should ensure that all students have the opportunity to develop the competencies they will need to demonstrate to employers, in order to successfully compete for graduate jobs.

In tandem with the increase in work with academics and students, there was a drive to increase employer engagement.

### **What helped to make it work?**

It was relatively easy to persuade academic departments to give the Careers Advisory Service teaching time within the curriculum because there was university-wide concern at the falling statistics and support to reverse the trend. Having the backing of a university strategy also helped give the Service legitimacy.

Due to embedding the careers education programme on a combined basis with PDP, academic staff viewed the input of the careers staff as fulfilling part of their requirements to provide PDP to all their students. Most could also see that there would be obvious benefit to the students, which after all was the key motivation for the changes.

Careers Advisory Service staff anticipated that it would mean a lot of extra work but realised that it would help raise the service's profile with both staff and students, and secure a more central role in the university, if the service was central to fulfilling a key institutional policy.

## What were the results?

As might be expected, the increase in classroom-based activity raised the profile of the Careers Advisory Service, with the result that a far higher number of students sought follow-up individual advice. Now though, with the benefit of the classroom teaching, they are seeking advice from a more advanced starting point in terms of their career planning and the help required is more often fine tuning than a complete service.

Work with employers led to a 40 per cent increase in employer presentations held on campus and an increase in the number of careers fairs held from one to six.

## How do we know it works?

Whilst it is difficult to prove causal relationships, these initiatives do seem to be paying off: Heriot-Watt came tenth in the 2010 Sunday Times university rankings for the percentage of graduates in graduate-level employment.

It is also interesting to note that the biggest improvements occurred in those degree courses with the most intensive careers programmes and the least improvement amongst those with less developed ones. Employer feedback confirmed that their students were better prepared and student feedback showed increased ratings across all areas of the Careers Advisory Service's work. Staff have also noticed a marked improvement in the standard of CV, application and practice interview performance.

The service now consistently comes in the upper quartile for student satisfaction in surveys such as the International Students Barometer and National Student Survey. In recognition of its efforts to address key institutional and client needs in an innovative way, the Careers Advisory Service received a **matrix** Excellence Award in 2008 – **matrix** being the quality standard framework adopted by all higher education careers services.

## Tips for transferring the practice

Most of these measures are eminently transferable to other universities and colleges. Almost all universities see the employability of their graduates as a priority, so careers services can present themselves as an important vehicle for achieving key institutional goals.

Having this role enshrined in a related policy and supported by senior managers helps give the initiative legitimacy but convincing the stakeholders such as academic colleagues was not as difficult task to achieve as they had anticipated. Being able to assess activities such as CV and interviews helps reinforce the learning as well as well as monitor whether the students are reaching the required level.

It's important to engage one's careers service colleagues at an early stage so that they feel they have had a hand in devising the strategy rather than having the change imposed, and so that they are able to see the benefits that will accrue.

## Increasing take-up of information, advice and guidance through effective promotion of services and curriculum delivery

### 3. The Career Development Centre at the University of Derby

#### Background

The Career Development Centre (CDC) at the University of Derby offers:

- short diagnostic drop-in sessions, one-to-one guidance, e-guidance, telephone and email guidance;
- workshops within academic programmes;
- access to both paper-based and web-based information;
- opportunities for students to undertake volunteering projects, and to gain a University of Derby award for employability, leadership and management;
- a Student Employment Agency, providing opportunities for part-time employment; and
- an employer mentoring programme, which provides opportunities for students to be mentored by employers, to help them to improve their awareness of employer requirements and introduce them to commercial environments.

The service is delivered to a diverse community of over 20,000 students from the UK and overseas, with only 30 per cent of students being between 18 and 21 years of age, and 38 per cent of the student population being part-time. The university incorporates sites at Kedleston Road, Markeaton Street, Chesterfield and Britannia Mill as well as at the Devonshire Campus in Buxton, and graduates are supported for up to three years after graduation.

The CDC's team of 25 (full-time and part-time) sit within the student experience team, which is part of the wider student support and information services department of the university. In 2009, the Career Development Centre won temporary funding to extend its services to the wider community, providing a service to unemployed managers, professionals and graduates and those at risk of redundancy.

#### What we wanted to achieve

The service's vision is to be:

**“Central to adding value to students' experience at the University of Derby.”**

The mission is to:

**“Support every individual to make choices that are right for them and enable them to maximise their investment in their education.”**

The service seeks to achieve these by:

- providing high quality careers education, information and guidance services;
- ensuring employability and career management skills are embedded within courses by developing effective partnership working arrangements with academic staff; and
- promoting graduate employment in the region, by engaging with employers and through collaboration with internal and external stakeholders.

Not all programmes include work experience placements – so there is a particular need to access and support learners on these courses to help them improve their employability.

It became clear that a number of factors were reducing the potential for engaging effectively with service users – and thus the overall impact of the service. Increasing use of the Internet by students as the first port of call when seeking information about careers raised questions about the quality and comprehensiveness of the information being accessed. At the same time, the service had been relocated away from a highly visible location with a high flow of student traffic, and near to where students handed in assignments, to a lower ground floor. The service was also experiencing difficulties in attracting employers to careers fairs since the university was not a first choice for many of the traditional university recruiters. It was concluded that the service needed to:

- raise its profile with students and staff;
- review its approach to engaging with employers; and
- undertake a major review of its web-based and online services.

## What we did

The service was relocated in April 2006, one year after the **matrix** accreditation in 2005. The staff decided to use the **matrix** standard as a benchmark, against which they could test out continuous quality improvement strategies, helping to ensure they didn't miss anything.

### 'Out of basement campaign'

The 'out of the basement' campaign was launched in 2006/07 as an internal strategy to identify ways to take the service to the students to offset the effects of the move. The term was not used externally, but by the CDC team internally, to challenge their thinking in terms of how they delivered their services and to stimulate their thinking. The challenge was to encourage staff to think differently and learn some new ways of working.

**Career cafes:** these were introduced monthly, over the lunchtime period in public areas where staff and student would be circulating, and at all three sites, at the Atrium at Kedleston Road, the Street at the Markeaton site and the Dome at Buxton. The main purpose of these was to be visible, and for careers advisers and information staff to take all aspects of the service to the clients. Staff could be asked anything from ‘how to improve a CV’, to ‘what do you do’, to ‘how can I find a part-time job’. Staff could also promote opportunities like the volunteering, the mentoring and the University of Derby Award. The informal environment allows the client to dictate the agenda.

**Rebranding:** the service had no recognisable identity, but needed one to establish its own brand and a strap line to embrace all client bases. Negotiations were initiated with the Director of Marketing at the University, and the students fed back their ideas on the proposed strap lines. The sub brand created had to support the corporate brand values, which were ‘safe, supportive and friendly’. The logo with the strap line was agreed – Your Future, Our Job – with a distinct orange, blue and white colour scheme, which supported the service values and was clear about what the service offered. It now appears on all publicity, marketing literature produced by the CDC and is used on the website.

**Use of new technology to improve service provision and access:** staff reviewed the opportunities new technologies offered.

**Website revision:** the university adopted a new content management system, and the CDC was one of the first departments to revise and improve the look, structure and interactivity of its website. It is more search-engine friendly than the previous platform, and offers the facility for each department to have its own web editors.

**Virtual careers cafes:** using real-time technology running from 6pm to 8pm, once a month, these allow distance learners, part-time and work-based learning students based anywhere in the world to speak to a careers adviser using video, audio and text. They have been delivered by two careers advisers and others are now being trained to use the learning and teaching platform, Wimba, supported by the education technology department.

**Virtual careers fairs:** staff developed and ran two successful virtual careers fairs using Graduate Prospects software. The fairs in 2008 and 2009 ran for two weeks, and enabled employers from all over the UK and overseas to talk to interested students who registered.

**Online booking was introduced for drop-in:** students can now book a 20-minute, drop-in diagnostic appointment to see a careers adviser, followed up by a longer guidance session if necessary.

**Text reminders:** have been introduced to remind students about drop-in and guidance appointments. The CDC receptionists send text reminders each morning to clients booked in to see careers advisers.

**Podcasts and video streaming:** have been introduced to the website to increase its interactivity and address different learning styles and preferred communication methods. Staff have been able to stream a variety of videos and podcasts from the website, including those generally available from Graduate Prospects, and also ones made in-house directly responding to questions raised by the students.

In order to deliver the service in different ways, it was necessary to consider:

- staff resourcing issues; and
- how staff could be released from their core duties.

When staff assessed the service delivery, the number of booked drop-in slots, it was found that occupancy varied by month but was never up to capacity. So the number of appointments available was reduced to free staff up to do other things. Similarly, lunchtime cover decreased to enable delivery of the career cafes. Business processes were re-engineered and service delivery re-aligned to support the campaign. There was no additional resource, but staff had training to use the new technologies.

### Three-year marketing and market research plan

The CDC established a new post in 2006 and recruited a marketing and communications coordinator, who reviewed the marketing strategy and undertook market research. Focus groups and a market research campaign were run at three of the university's main sites. A three-year marketing and market research plan was developed, to ensure a strategic approach was taken to measure and offset the impact of the move; to test the impact of the rebranding and to inform the continuous quality improvement of the services. The plan which was developed encompasses a market research plan, an e-marketing plan including website development, promotional plan, evaluation and control mechanisms, and an events plan. Students were employed to undertake the research and input the data. One challenge was to have sufficient control over the students doing this and to ensure that the quality of output was of value. In relation to marketing, another challenge was to ensure buy-in by all staff members in the team.

The market research undertaken in 2007/08 established that the three main barriers to usage of the CDC were:

- 35.6 per cent of respondents knowing what they want to do already;
- 24.4 per cent of respondents not knowing what they want to do; and
- 22.6 per cent of respondents of the view that planning their career is not a priority at the moment.

## The University of Derby Award for Leadership and Management

The University of Derby Award for Employability, Leadership and Management, designed for students without work experience opportunities on their programmes, was conceived by a small steering group lead by the pro vice chancellor. The CDC undertook research into the types of awards in the sector and decided to develop an endorsed award offered by the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM). It was felt that external accreditation would be attractive to students, and the ILM brand is recognised around the world. A steering group was established, comprising curriculum leaders, students, support staff, representatives from the students union and senior management, to debate how the award would fit into the university offer, what it would look like, and how students would engage with it.

The award recognises activities, such as voluntary work, in which students engage outside the normal curriculum. The agreed content included underpinning knowledge on leadership and management; career decision-making and career management skills; and an introduction to graduate competences required by employers. The students are required to undertake a project that demonstrates their leadership and management skills; research a graduate job role and self-assess their competences against the requirements for the job. The evidence is collated into a reflective portfolio, and the students are required to present their project and their learning in a presentation made to an external panel. Feedback is given to them both on their project; on their research into a graduate job role and on their presentation.

The volunteering coordinator and the project administrator became course administrators for the award. The volunteering coordinator maintains extensive and pro-active links with local voluntary sector bodies. CDC hosts an annual volunteering fair with over 50 organisations attending and recruiting students as volunteers. A monthly newsletter goes out to those based locally, which identifies organisations which wish to recruit volunteers and gives examples of where students have provided excellent support and service.

### What helped to make it work?

The above approach involved everyone and built a culture of team working and mutual support in a team made up of various disciplines and specialist roles.

It required a leadership approach that:

- embeds confidence in the management of change; and
- enables everyone in the team to feel they can do what is expected, not that they are being asked to do more, but to be prepared to review every aspect of what they are doing to see if it can be delivered in a smarter, more client-friendly way.

It also requires giving staff the time and space to come together to discuss and to plan.

As part of the re-accreditation review for **matrix** and then post-accreditation work, the service moved from an annual operational plan to a three-year strategic plan with measured key performance indicators (KPIs). The strategic plan developed some key performance indicators. These enabled the service to measure how successful the new approaches were in increasing access and take up. These measures included:

- the number of students with whom staff were having contact through curriculum interventions;
- the percentage of students aware of the CDC;
- the number of users of the drop-in service and the number of new users;
- the percentage of users satisfied with the service;
- the number of organisations advertising vacancies with the CDC; and
- the requirement for all staff to participate in a peer learning project.

This represented a balanced scorecard approach, with quantitative and qualitative measures.

An approach, which sets out a strategic vision and mission, and identifies key performance indicators, is one that a whole careers team can develop. This was aided by direct feedback in video interviews from major stakeholders. This feedback came from a senior curriculum manager in the University, the Director of Business Development and a specialist consultant in the area of careers education and guidance. They were asked to state what they expected from a high quality careers service, what would add value for students/employers, what the service should do more of and also what it should do less of. Students were also asked their opinions.

### What were the results?

Developing a three-year strategic plan helped to focus on service improvement, rather than business as usual, as well as make a successful case for additional staff. One additional careers adviser joined the service in 2009.

The introduction of a strategic market research and marketing plan has helped not only in evaluating the service in the light of a major change, but also to track and measure the impact of the staff's response to that change. It has enabled the service manager to communicate the success not only to the team, helping to say well done for doing all the work, but also to other key stakeholders within the University and it continues to shape the delivery of the service into the future. Staff now also have statistics showing the team why students are coming to see them, helping them to design their workshop content and focus their marketing.

In order to gain wider recognition within the university, CDC gained representation on the university quality enhancement committee and participated in, and contributed to, the Learning and Teaching Forum. The cross-university role has been recognised in enhancing employability and personal development planning (PDP), culminating in the CDC receiving an internal quality award for enhancing employability in 2009. The CDC manager also gained a place on academic board, the most senior deliberative structure of the university.



## How do we know it works?

### Awareness of the service

The rebranding helped increase the impact of the marketing as the Career Development Centre (CDC) was no longer centrally based in student services, and to make the publicity and support materials distinct from other library resources. Awareness levels of the existence of the CDC at Kedleston Road and Devonshire Campus as of the start of the marketing plan for 2008-10 were 75.6 per cent, an increase of 6.5 per cent on the 2007 baseline. Awareness of location at the Kedleston Road site has seen an increase from 73 per cent in 2008 to 79 per cent, an increase of 8.2 per cent from 2008 and 6.7 per cent from the baseline year. Awareness of the locations of the CDC overall has increased from 69 per cent in 2007 and 2008 to 72.9 per cent, an increase of 5.6 per cent. The most popular way of finding out about careers events and services is the website – 33.8 per cent.

### Service usage

The number of students seen through curriculum interventions increased by 10 per cent in 2008/09 over the previous year. In 2008/09 the most popular way of respondents obtaining careers advice was through the Internet – 48.5 per cent, and staff assisted 180 students in the Careers Cafe sessions, including 132 who had not previously used the service.

The introduction of online booking for short diagnostic drop-in sessions, and the text reminders resulted, in 2008/09, in an 8.4 per cent increase in the overall number of students seen, and a rise of 8.1 per cent in new users to the service – bucking a three-year trend. This in turn has led to a 100 per cent increase in guidance interviews. The website redesign, podcasts and video streaming contributed to an increase in the website traffic of 46 per cent during 2008/2009. The virtual careers fair was launched in 2008 and repeated in 2009. Each fair has attracted over 40 employers and some 300 students.

In 2008, 22 students graduated in the University of Derby award in leadership and management, and in 2009, having won additional funding to extend the programme, over 40 students graduated. The service gained excellent feedback from students with some gaining offers of permanent employment. Comments about the work of the students shared at the awards evening demonstrated the value placed on their contributions by employers.

“The site that Luke produced for us was commended by our head office, and is ready to go online.”

“The project was very successful as it raised a significant amount of money.”

“I have appreciated her leadership skills and insights into the needs of the group.”

## Tips for transferring the practice

It is important to ensure that innovation is informed by feedback from stakeholders and learners, and that students are involved in the branding and design of services.

Best practice in change management should be followed when introducing changes – so involving all staff and providing effective leadership, which imbues a culture of continually reviewing what they are doing to improve services. When introducing changes, consideration will need to be given to how these will be resourced, the implications of re-deploying staff on new duties – and how they are to be trained.

Service development needs to be informed by:

- market research to determine the needs of learners;
- quantitative data on service delivery; and
- the impact of any changes, which will need to be monitored.

## Realising the potential of all: autistic spectrum disorders (ASD)

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### 4. City College Norwich

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#### Introduction

In 2005, the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act, with a focus on ensuring that no learner was disadvantaged in education and employment because of a learning need, was encouraging colleges to review their provision and develop more individualised approaches to meeting learners' needs.

City College Norwich is a college of further and higher education catering for 16,000 learners across the Eastern region. In 2005/06, as part of the admissions process, the college started recording the number of applicants and entrants who disclosed that they were on the autistic spectrum. Offering additional help at interview such as a note taker encourages those applicants to disclose, who may be disinclined to do so due to a desire for a 'fresh start' or from a negative experience from their initial schooling. Whilst Asperger's syndrome, which is a form of autism, affects individuals in different ways, some young people on the spectrum tend to find it harder to:

- express themselves socially and emotionally face-to-face or on the phone, hence leading to frustration and sometimes anger; and
- deal with uncertainty, change and a lack of structure in their lives.

People with ASD may suffer from anxiety and stress, produced by different triggers. The needs of learners with ASD vary: not all in the college will need the support described below.

#### What we wanted to achieve

The college had always had a few learners with ASD, particularly in the foundation studies department, who had been integrated without special arrangements being made. However, feedback from tutors, which could then be correlated with learners' admissions forms, indicated that these learners tended to find it more difficult to settle and thrive on mainstream programmes, and a number of issues around extreme behaviour and bullying were arising. Some learners with ASD were dropping out of their programmes because they couldn't cope with changes, such as to their timetables or alterations in the classrooms used – and had nobody to turn to for help to sort these out. (There was an adviser for mental health who they came under but this was not appropriate for their situation).

Those coming from the structured environment of a school could not cope with the relative lack of structure and being without a home base in a college. The social skills required for some college administration, such as applying for educational maintenance allowances (EMAs) could create huge problems.

As one tutor commented:

“We had a lot of learners with ASD who would drop away – they would just be seen as disruptive people who didn’t want to learn. If they lasted six weeks, that was good.”

Tutor

It became clear that the existing provision was not meeting these learners’ needs adequately – and that a different, more personalised approach was needed, which would:

- give them some respite from the noisy and busy environment of the college;
- provide access to support and mentoring; and
- enable them to reach their potential.

### What we did

Recognising that many more learners with ASD were coming through the school system and applying to the college, some LSC funding was made available to investigate improved support for them. The learners were consulted to identify what they needed. In addition to ensuring that all staff were made aware of what disorders on the autistic spectrum were, and the implications of having learners with these in their classes, they also requested a base room where they could drop in when needed. It was decided to develop a single space for learners with ASD, which would:

- enable them to relax; and
- build relationships with ASD-aware staff who could help them articulate their problems – and support them in dealing with these.

### Setting up and staffing the RUGroom

A number of rooms, initially designated for learners with ASD but not specifically designed for the purpose, did not offer adequate continuity and consistency to learners – or enable learners to chill out when necessary. Over time, as the number of learners with ASD was increasing, it became clear that a larger purpose-built area was needed with specialist facilities and equipment, to enable more effective engagement with staff and facilitate the development of social and communications skills.

In 2006/07, the LSC gave funding to develop a new facility. Space in the main college building was found and the facility opened in September 2007. The learners were encouraged to contribute ideas in the design process through a student conference led by the team of designers, where they offered ideas for the layout and furnishing of the room, and subsequently also for the development of the bespoke software, thus creating a facility, which met their needs. Specialist learning technology consultants developed a technical specification, which encompassed a number of computing platforms, games-based equipment and audio systems – designed to engage the learners and support the range of activities to develop social interaction and learning.

Online communication allows learners with ASD the time to frame what they want to convey to others. Bespoke software was commissioned to support a safe and engaging virtual space to facilitate ongoing and ad hoc conversations between learners outside the RUGroom, including personal pages and private spaces, so allowing for social networking within an educational context. A sense of identity and personalisation is created through the inclusion of avatars with a personal message status in the software, which also enables learners to share their work with their peers, thus giving them an audience.

Learners can exhibit their work on a virtual gallery, which also enables them to track their progress and improvements, thus increasing motivation. Although there is restricted access to this to protect the learners, they can recommend their work for external exhibition, for example, to employers. There is also potential for setting up a supportive environment for incubating new business start-ups to enable learners to exploit their new skills. The facilities include a television and radio studio for filming and drama work.

The mobility offered by 12 laptop computers enables staff to incorporate ICT flexibly into all the sessions they deliver. The name “Really Useful Group’ (RUG) was chosen by a student and gave the space an identity. The room incorporates pods, which can be used by learners to take time out from the activities in the main part of the room to calm down or collect their thoughts, so enabling them to be alone, but still part of the group. Flexibility in the ways in which the furniture and furnishings can be used enables learners to build and control their own space and level of privacy.

A team of 22 learning support assistants (LSAs) was recruited to support the learners with ASD in the college, for example by explaining concepts after a class and helping them develop study and research skills. Staff working with learners with ASD need to develop an understanding of what reduces the anxiety and stress levels of each individual – and what their triggers are. The RUGroom enables staff to see learners holistically – and the reasons for their actions. Staff also need to know about the range of coping strategies and how learners can develop these – being based together enables them to share ideas and support each other more easily. In addition to staff attending specialist courses, such as the ‘Postgraduate certificate in Asperger’s syndrome’, in-house training enables staff to learn from each other, and a psychologist from Anglia Autism also supports the specialists who work in the RUGroom – for example in addressing issues such as anger management.

The RUGroom is used to support learners with ASD on mainstream courses at the college, who, for example, can use the facilities during the lunch hour. It also acts as the base for those on a special course, Phoenix Purple, designed to act as a transition for those learners unable to integrate on mainstream courses, many of who will have been excluded from school, have come from special schools – and/or have spent a period outside education, employment and training.

## Developing self and opportunity awareness

Learners with ASD may have been very isolated and participated little in social activities, and may have had little exposure to the world of work – or indeed may have had a ‘disastrous’ work experience at school. An important part of the approach used by staff is initially to focus on the interests of the learners – but also to introduce them to a range of other activities to both help develop life skills and widen the scope of their further learning and career goals.

For Phoenix Purple students, the opportunity to undertake the service section of the Duke of Edinburgh silver award develops self-reliance and skills in working in groups. Within the RUGroom the LSAs help learners enhance communication and social skills through a range of creative and engaging activities, which can also provide structure in unstructured time. In addition to social events, such as bingo nights, karaoke and quiz nights, they have set up a wide range of lunchtime clubs focusing on practical skills, such as sewing, jewellery making, drumming, beauty therapy and driving theory.

The Phoenix Purple course is built around learners’ progression ideas, including exploring these through ICT, art, drama and photography using flexible individual timetables. Person-centred reviewing encourages thinking about future goals and gradually develops the learner’s own skills in target setting. Learners can invite parents and friends to give their perspectives on what they admire or like about them, and involve them in discussions about their future goals and moves towards independent living.

Where an interest or talent is identified, staff support the learner in investigating mechanisms for developing related skills – including for example accessing internet communities and developing opportunities for learners to ‘taste’ further learning and work, ensuring one to one assistance from an LSA where this is needed – for example in taking notes and giving emotional, social and behavioural support.

Some will attend some mainstream learning, such as GCSEs and introductory certificates in IT, applied sciences, sport and leisure and art and design, to prepare for entry on to full-time programmes. A specialist speech therapist works with learners in small groups to develop communication and conversation skills. Practical life skills such as cooking, budgeting and finding one’s way around the local vicinity are also covered, to ease learners towards greater independence and self-reliance.

## Making effective transitions

Students in the foundation studies department develop high levels of employability skills through a range of very innovative projects. They run a number of successful enterprise businesses, including a community-based cafe and a floristry enterprise, developing skills to industry standards. Transitions into further learning and employment pose major challenges for some learners with ASD – and need to be made through small steps and with the support of staff. LSAs working with course tutors are the first point of contact for supporting progression. With guidance from the college's advice shop, they research courses and other options for the following year. Where learners are moving into a work experience placement, supported employment or on to further learning, the LSAs will make the initial contact; brief the staff receiving the learner (where known); accompany learners for the first visit and attend reviews, as necessary and appropriate, depending on each individual's support needs.

Those learners progressing on to mainstream further and higher education within the college can continue to use the RUGroom and retain their password, so remaining in contact virtually with their peers through [www.rugroom.net](http://www.rugroom.net) and enabling them to access the social support they may need.

## Increasing employability

The second year of the Phoenix Purple course concentrates on work skills and increasing understanding about what a job really entails to help inform the learners' decision making. Learners prepare a personal page, focusing on what they like about themselves, with staff encouraging as objective a self-assessment as possible. Whilst visits to employers increase awareness of the range of work available and what this entails, hands-on experience has proved more effective. Work placements are organised with supportive employers, for up to a day per week, in areas such as catering and office work (e.g. data inputting) so that learners understand what is involved in fairly basic work – and can decide if they are happy doing this – or will need further qualifications. Specific requirements in a job can be explored with staff, such as where driving is a requirement, and the need to be able to deal with noise and unpredictability.

Those learners who do not have an immediate vocational goal with a specified training route, but are 'work-ready' are encouraged to consider 'Project Search', which enables them to taste different types of work as part of a college course based in employers' premises. They have lessons in employment skills but also have opportunities to apply for a job, are interviewed and placed for three months, after which they can re-apply elsewhere. Project search is now in the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital and set to be rolled out across the country this year.

A conference was held to raise awareness of ASD amongst local employers in partnership with a local charity, Asperger East Anglia. Students spoke about their AS and the positive attributes that make them great employees such as time-keeping.

## Developing an ASD-friendly environment

In order to develop an ASD-friendly environment, basic awareness training for all staff across the college is crucial, as learners with ASD can appear rude and difficult to college staff who have come from a background that has not included contact with them. In addition to this, specialist staff also support individual lecturers and tutors to help them understand the support their learners with ASD needs and to deal with a 'crisis'. Learners have been becoming more open about their disorder – but if they have not disclosed, and a problem arises, specialist staff can observe discreetly and give advice.

With the learner's permission, the college's ASD specialists have also led sessions with their peers, to increase understanding of ASD and challenge the ways in which people with ASD are perceived, with a view to other learners becoming more forgiving.

### What helped to make it work?

The college leadership found that having a project manager on site during the installation of the RUGroom was paramount to the success of the project, particularly given that the room, furnishings and equipment within it are not used in traditional ways.

Working with community-based specialist agencies, such as Asperger East Anglia, has proved valuable in a number of ways including:

- supporting their learners outside college hours (through youth workers briefed by the college staff);
- setting up a conference on AS for employers; and
- delivering training – although this needs to be appropriate to a learning and skills setting.

### What were the results?

This physical space with the new technologies, created by the college, together with the team of staff, are facilitating a broad range of innovative approaches to learning. Those learners who find it more difficult to express themselves vocally have been able to engage with the technology to clarify their thinking and communicate virtually.

The RUGroom and these fresh approaches are transforming the life expectations of learners identified as having ASD. More of these learners are applying to the college, are being retained on programme, are achieving and progressing into further learning and work.

Raising awareness of learners with ASD and the challenges they face, both within the college and the wider community, is leading to a greater understanding of their needs and potential – and should reduce the likelihood of these learners being stigmatised both within – and as they leave – the college environment. It has also resulted in staff being more prepared to take learners with ASD on their programmes – not least since they are aware support will be available, and now look for this support.



“Over the last four or five years, the rest of the college has become more supportive.”

Phoenix Purple Tutor

How do they know it works?

What the learners say

Learners with ASD themselves report improvements in social interaction and confidence – crucial skills for employability. They also realise that there are other people like themselves.

“I’m a lot more confident than when I started – in the first year I didn’t talk to anyone.”

“I’m getting better at building relationships and making friends.”

“Before I did social events, I felt uncomfortable going out with other people I didn’t know.”

Those learners with experience of the college prior to the RUGroom being established, appreciate having a facility designed specifically to meet their own needs, where they feel secure and can “go between lessons” and “socialise, make friends and think about things” with a range of specifically selected hardware and software, but which is also incorporated within the main building. Learner involvement in the design has given a sense of ownership and being “part of the space”.

“It’s a safe area – there are no random people walking in.”

“There are quiet spaces – the pods are there if you want to be away and have time to yourself.”

“It’s a good learning experience, because it’s also like a safe place, so it’s not too overwhelming.”

Continuity in staffing and access to one-to-one support were also considered important by these learners because this enabled them to talk through any problems or issues with somebody they knew, who could act as an advocate with other staff or learners if necessary. Exploring interests and life goals with learners also enabled staff to discuss options for further study and suggest courses of action.

“It can be daunting talking to somebody you don’t know.”

“Staff get to know us over time and they get to know our interests. When courses have to be recommended, it makes it easier for us students.”

Similarly the learners welcomed the supported and gradual transitions.

“The first time I went I was just talking to the people I was going to work with ... It allowed me to ease myself-in ... I found it easier building it up gradually.”

“We did it bit by bit. I was able to get comfortable.”

“A couple of years ago, I felt that a job was impossible for me – the experience that I have had will help me when I do finally find a job.”

As learners with ASD progress in their learning and enter employment, they are increasingly in a position to act as peer mentors and role models for others entering the college – thus reinforcing a virtuous cycle.

### Attracting learners with ASD

A spreading reputation for effective support for learners with ASD has contributed to a dramatic increase in the number of applicants disclosing a disorder: from 2005/06 to 2009/10, the number rose from 18 to 152, so over an eightfold increase. Learners are applying from further afield in the county because of the standing of the college – whereas in fact they would be better served if their local college had a similar facility. When asked why they had come to the college, learners commented that “it was recommended” and that there was “no support in the sixth form at school”.

### Supporting progression

In the academic year 2007/08, 80 students disclosed ASD, of which 97 per cent were retained on programme (including completed and continuing learners), and 88 per cent of those who completed, achieved. Of the 80 learners with ASD, 50 continued on programmes at the college, eight went into higher education, six went into employment and two into further education elsewhere.

“Having a place that’s designated means that they can still come to the college – many learners have said that to me.”

Senior LSA

The 2008 Ofsted inspection report noted that:

“Support for students with ASD is excellent. Specialist resources, including assistive technology, have enabled many students with additional needs to remain at the college and succeed.”

“Students with ASD make very good progress over a wide range of programmes from entry level to advanced level. They have become student mentors, spoken at conferences and presented on local radio.”

## Tips for transferring the practice

Even where providers cannot access resources to develop sophisticated facilities for their learners with ASD, action can still be taken to help them achieve and progress. Listening to learners with ASD in an appropriate way, which respects their views, in order to identify their needs, is crucial to developing bespoke provision. Involving them in the development of facilities creates a sense of ownership.

Learners with ASD may require a transition period to develop communication and social interaction skills. Embedding communication into practical learning activities, which interests them, helps them develop these. They are all individuals and will progress at different rates – in some cases it may take a long time to take a small step: provision needs to take this into account. Starting with their interests and building up a personalised programme is important to engage them. They need structured timetables – and to learn how to create structure in their lives. Onward transitions need to be carefully planned with ongoing support and contact.

Learners should not be isolated, but feel part of a wider community. Having a home base with opportunities to participate in fun activities (music, games etc), both offers them a refuge and structure, but also improves social skills and facilitates the development of friendships with others similar to themselves, thus reducing the sense of isolation. Good role modelling – including appropriate behaviour, is important – both from interaction with staff and more independent learners with ASD. A room with screen dividers would offer some privacy and the opportunity to chill out.

Being good with technology tends to be characteristic of people with ASD. New technologies are thus offering new ways of engaging them: for example Blackboard is proving a useful way for learners to find and print off lecture notes. Learners with ASD will need their own quiet area with PCs or Apple Macs with enough space between terminals and the opportunity to wear headphones. Avatars offer the opportunity for learners to create a sense of identity, and explore the kind of person they might be – and role they might have – in the future.

## Enhancing partnership working to improve intervention strategies

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### 5. Harrow College and Harrow YOT

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#### Introduction

Harrow College is the largest college in the north west London borough of Harrow. It is the only general further education college (GFE) in the borough with a significant vocational offer and the only one offering programmes at entry level, level 1 and level 2. A broad A-level and vocational programme at level 3 is also provided.

Harrow Youth Offending Team (YOT) is a constituent part of Harrow Council's Young People Services and is responsible for tackling youth crime, specifically protecting the public, reducing first-time entrants to the criminal justice system and preventing recidivism.

#### What we set out to achieve

In 2008, staff set out to improve the processes for sharing information between the college and the YOT, with a view to improving intervention strategies to support learners and their chances of successfully completing their course of study. Additionally it was intended to provide improved levels of data protection for the young people concerned, and provide a more structured methodology for the college and YOT to follow when addressing disciplinary issues.

This was because, prior to the changes, information sharing could be slow and did not always facilitate timely intervention. When members of the YOT sought information about their clients who were enrolled in the college, the YOT advisers would contact a member of the learner services team who would provide data after consulting with tutors or other members of the teaching team. The requirements of confidentiality would mean that information about the reasons for making enquiries would not always be shared with teachers.

#### What we did

College staff needed to agree clear objectives, draft a service level agreement with the YOT and secure approval for that agreement on each side. Once that was achieved, a process for managing access to learner data was needed. With approval from the college executive, the director of learner services, working with the learner services manager, reviewed the existing arrangements and investigated data protection and confidentiality issues, including briefings from the YOT partner on Youth Justice Board requirements.

A service level agreement (SLA) between Harrow College and Harrow YOT was jointly drafted, that enabled the establishment of remote electronic information sharing and a clear process for involving the YOT in dealing with issues that arose at College for learners for whom the college and YOT had a shared responsibility.

The new approach was agreed with the college's MIS manager, who worked with the IT services team to set up access for the YOT advisers team to data for their clients: no other college data can be accessed by the team. As college staff were already using web-based access to student records, it was relatively straightforward for YOT staff to be added to the group of system users. There was a need for a small number of YOT staff to be shown the workings of the college student tracking information management system and for a degree of liaison between each organisation's IT department to establish the remote access required.

Where appropriate, email groups for teaching teams were set up by the learner services manager, who has responsibility for the day-to-day management of any issues arising from the process, to facilitate direct communication between them and the YOT.

College staff were briefed on the new arrangement and associated benefits – and the YOT contact was trained to use the system.

By giving partners in the YOT team direct access to a web-based view of the student record system, members of the YOT have open access at any time to information on attendance and punctuality, student targets, coursework marks, any concerns or warnings raised by teachers. In addition, student performance reviews, which are online and undertaken every half term, can be accessed without the need to request information or to involve members of college staff.

Developing a common understanding of:

- the data sharing and confidentiality requirements (Data Protection and Youth Justice Board); and
- the key performance indicators that the partners are working with;

was an important part of the process. Whereas the YOT has a target to secure engagement in education, training or employment, the college must additionally focus on learner success – engagement is not sufficient. The main challenge to setting up the SLA was understanding the complexity of the data protection landscape and the differing rules and responsibility that each partner to the agreement brought to the table.

### What helped make it work?

The process worked well for the college and the staff would not have done anything differently. In particular, the staff found the following useful:

- Spending some time agreeing objectives
- Focusing on what can be done do with the resources available
- Finding wins for each side and for the students
- Undertaking detailed risk assessments so that staff are best placed to deal with any issues that arise
- Being clear about data sharing, data protection and confidentiality.

## What were the results?

The impact of the new agreement was felt on a number of different levels for both the college and the YOT staff – and the benefits from the new approach have been very clear from an early stage.

By simplifying the process, the new agreement has resulted in the lifting of a fairly large administrative burden and a consequent visible reduction in the workload of college and YOT staff, so freeing up their time to deal with other work. Learner Services staff no longer need to track down data for the YOT team, since they can now access this themselves. Staff at the YOT have a much clearer view of what was happening to their clients who attend the college. This is enabling swifter more proactive and preventative action to be taken by both college and YOT staff with clients at risk, to ensure a successful outcome at the college. This has consequently led to more timely interventions by both the YOT and College staff to support YOT clients.

There has also been a significant improvement in the data security and data sharing between the college and the YOT, with only those who need to know having access to YOT information. Providing online access eliminates the need for hard copies of information, which could go astray, or access via intermediaries. The process is tightly controlled and there are clear steps in place that involve the young people concerned in the decision-making with regard to what information is shared, unless the YOT believes that there is an overriding safety issue that necessitates the sharing of information with the college against the wishes of the young person concerned.

There has also been a broader impact on relationships between college and YOT staff. Faculty managers have built a better relationship with YOT advisers that is highly valued, and tutors acknowledge the support given by the YOT team. The college has also instigated new approaches to dealing with some kinds of behavioural issues, such as the use of restorative justice.

## How do we know it works?

Anecdotal reports suggest that the swifter YOT response to incidents at the college, enabled by the enhanced information sharing, has brought about a change in some young people's behaviour within the college. This has been attributed to the fact that young people are aware that they are being closely monitored and supported from two directions, and have reported that the fact that their YOT adviser will know straight away if they miss a class or a deadline, makes them think twice about doing so. Hence this reduces the potential for poor attendance and performance to become an ingrained habit. A member of the YOT team reported that:

**“The fact that our young people now know that their behaviour and attendance can be monitored on a daily basis has definitely led to an improvement in their engagement and desire to work with us to overcome any difficulties they may have.”**

This learner-centred approach is helping both parties to meet key performance indicators. Whilst it is difficult to quantify improvements in retention and achievement for this group of learners at Harrow College, because the YOT team did not keep data on an individual college basis prior to the implementation of the partnership agreement, all of the concerned parties report that there has been a significant improvement in the retention and achievement of the YOT client group within Harrow College. The YOT is required to provide routine quarterly returns to the Youth Justice Board (YJB) with regard to the YOT client group and their engagement with education, training and employment (ETE). Whilst perhaps being only 15 per cent of the overall YOT case-load, the improvement in retention at Harrow College is judged to have played a significant part in the improvement of the YOT's quarterly returns to the YJB over the last year. The chance of re-offending reduces when YOT clients are retained, achieve and progress into further learning or employment.

### Tips for transferring the practice

Sharing data in this way can have real benefits for all parties. The basic premise of efficient and timely information sharing to improve assistance and support to young people, and therefore increase their chance of success, is transferable to any location. Having originally piloted the SLA with Harrow College, Harrow YOT has now developed similar agreements with other local colleges. In doing so, staff have identified three rules when embarking on establishing an agreement like this:

- Firstly, know what it is you are trying to achieve and then select a partner organisation, which believes in what you are trying to do
- Secondly, start small and prove the concept works before expanding the project – this gives you a low risk environment in which to fine tune
- Thirdly, ensure that you fully understand the data protection/sharing issues involved in your local area and the implications that the involvement of statutory organisations may have for you. Their duty to protect the public may provide them with a legitimate right to information that would not normally exist for other non-statutory organisations.

It is important to understand that partnerships often start with a lack of knowledge about what the other side in the partnership is doing or trying to achieve. Better knowledge and trust comes from working together. The key to making the new system work, was the willingness of all those involved in the project to establish a comprehensive monitoring system that then facilitated the timely intervention and support for young people from appropriate staff from either the college or YOT.

## Working in partnership to develop more effective guidance provision for offenders

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### 6. HMP Bullwood Hall

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#### Introduction

HMP Bullwood Hall holds approximately 230 sentenced prisoners – from a very wide range of nationalities, with an equally diverse range of over 30 first languages – who are being considered for deportation at the end of their sentence. Recently 8 per cent were screened as below entry level for literacy with a further 54 per cent at entry level, primarily due to language barriers. The average length of stay is three months and so there is a high turnover of learners. For much of the period of their stay, learners are uncertain about their deportation status, which has a significant impact upon their personal priorities and upon their capacity to plan for the future. Since in most cases ultimate resettlement destinations for the population are both global and uncertain, this both impacts upon the nature of guidance provided and the learning and skills provision available, and challenges guidance workers to develop an understanding of the nature of employment in other cultures and countries.

The key work undertaken by the guidance service is to identify prisoners' needs and to support them in making choices from the activity options offered by the establishment. Ongoing information, advice and guidance is provided to support prisoners in identifying education, training and particularly employment options open to them on their release and supporting them to meet these wherever possible.

In addition to the prison staff and those working for subcontractors delivering guidance, offenders themselves act as orderlies (prisoner work placements) championing areas such as learning and skills, and guidance and diversity. The guidance orderly has undertaken initial training in guidance and helps with activities such as engaging new arrivals at induction, interpreting or translating, ensuring materials are up to date and collecting feedback.

The contractual arrangements between the prison and its subcontractors are governed by a partnership agreement, which was drafted by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), has a focus on quality assurance and defines accountabilities.

#### What we set out to achieve

Until August 2006, the establishment was a female prison at which point a re-role took place, and within a month the prison started to receive only male foreign nationals. It was initially thought that resettlement work would not be required. However, it became clear that was not the case and so began the process of re-establishing relevant provision, and in particular the development of English as a Second Language (ESOL) provision. The re-role coincided with the implementation of the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) and the development plan for the new learning and skills provision included the reintroduction and development of guidance. The OLASS provision of IAG started in April 2008.



## What we did

The intention from the outset was to develop an integrated, 'joined up' and seamless service, based on the needs of the offenders. Whilst the partners already worked together, this required a new, more in-depth partnership approach, involving all the agencies delivering aspects of guidance within the provision, including NACRO and subsequently St Mungo's, Jobcentre Plus, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) – and most specifically, Tribal, which held the contract to deliver the OLASS IAG provision in the prison – and Milton Keynes College, the learning and skills provider. One of the biggest challenges was creating a seamless service within a prison culture, which militates against sharing information for security reasons and has organisational barriers to joint working, and thus the development required strong leadership and persistence. The prison's head of regimes with overall responsibility for the guidance provision had a strong commitment to quality improvement and valued external judgments, so it was decided to use the **matrix** standard as a template to build the new guidance service up from scratch. The regional Test Bed initiative funded Tribal to facilitate and support this process.

A working group was established with the partners, who jointly developed a traffic light action plan, which was constantly updated and used at each meeting to agree and document the necessary actions. Whilst the three main partners (the head of regimes, who led the process, the education manager from Milton Keynes College and the guidance workers from Tribal) initially constituted the core membership, and met regularly to monitor progress and to evaluate agreed actions, the group was expanded to include key staff from those teams. In addition, others, such as staff from the Induction residential unit and the Offender Management Unit (OMU), were involved as necessary to agree actions. Steps were implemented following agreement by the working group to ensure shared ownership – this included sharing the responsibility for implementation.

A communications strategy was formulated to overcome the barriers that typically exist in a custodial setting. The role of the regimes officer was redefined to become a central communication hub, streamlining the flow of information between partners. A weekly update with general news from the regimes function was provided for colleagues, including those from partner agencies. Authorised access was introduced to enable specific information on prisoner allocation to work places, education, risk assessments, updates to the sentence plan etc. to be shared securely. Systems were developed to enable effective communication between departments; one example is in the paperwork used to summarise information gained from initial assessment and induction to inform allocation to activities. This was collated in a format that is sufficiently detailed but also concise and thus accessible.

Resources were pooled to:

- create or update documentation that could be used across the prison to promote the service and provide clarity on what it offers, using a common branding;
- provide or record information about learners such as basic skills level, individual timetable, residential location and ethnicity; and
- find information about the opportunities which offenders might access.

The referral system was reviewed and awareness of the process promoted. Individual action plans, which can be seen and updated by the prison departments and partners, were introduced, and individual timetables set up. A regimes directory was jointly produced to inform new arrivals at induction and is updated as required. This was then made available on the wings and electronically. A major challenge in this environment is providing information in accessible formats. A professionally produced guidance handbook was created for staff and offenders and translated into twelve languages. Staff used facilities such as Google Translate to produce documentation in different languages, and then draw on the language skills of offenders themselves to verify the translations. Opportunities for work, and the qualifications and training required in different countries are researched through embassies and the IOM – and the intelligence shared between partners.

Systems to consult with, and elicit feedback from, service users were set up to inform development of the service and to check user's understanding, in ways and using formats, which took account of language barriers. This includes quarterly focus groups, feedback from orderlies, and from completed sheets, which have become more icon-based. The ways in which feedback is collected are specified in a joint quality framework for learning and skills, which was developed and implemented in partnership with the OLASS partners. The feedback is shared between the partners, necessary actions agreed and the men are advised which changes can (and cannot) be made. Examples of action taken include rebranding the guidance service to increase clarity and using orderlies to talk with their peers to increase understanding of the role of 'pre-release interviews'.

Posters of 'You said, we did' were displayed to share feedback and response to suggestions.

Partnership arrangements with the prison's contracted service providers were reviewed, as were existing policies and protocols, and updated as necessary (within the requirements of prison orders) to ensure that these matched the criteria for the **matrix** standard. In addition a partnership protocol was negotiated, covering the new systems and communication processes. The quality assurance manual sets out standards for the learning and skills provision across the regime, so that all are clear on what is expected. The common commitment to quality assurance is also demonstrated by the head of regimes observing staff delivering guidance for the partner agencies, and giving feedback, which identifies good practice to share – and any areas for development.

### What helped to make it work?

Clear communication and senior management buy-in to achieving the **matrix** standard were crucial in engaging all the necessary staff in the partnership-based process, whether they worked directly for the prison or an external agency. The head of regimes identified key players, gave regular updates to the establishment's governor and senior management team, tailored briefings to middle managers and presentations to whole and team staff meetings, and focused on the benefits to offenders, staff and the establishment. Meeting with colleagues from across disciplines, thus involving staff from a range of areas and agencies, helped to create a whole organisation approach to the development of the provision.

The role of the regimes function within the establishment as a central communications hub has been critical to the development of effective partnership working, ensuring that:

- duplication and ‘silo’ work which could lead to provision of counter-productive guidance by different partners are avoided;
- partners are fully informed as they work with the men; and
- there is less opportunity for the men to play one worker off against the other.

Development of a strong team ethos and staff sharing the same vision has helped to develop the close working relationships, which in turn have helped all to understand the key drivers and performance targets which each must meet, and also facilitate the open and frank communication and trust needed to address any problems and drive the work forward. Setting the ground rules at the outset facilitated collaborative working. The detailed action plan kept everyone on track. Staff shared an aspiration to achieve excellence.

“We all believe in it. Everyone is working toward the same goal and that helps to drive it forward. We have a very clear idea.”

Guidance worker

### What were the results?

The prison now has a coherent cross-prison guidance service, which is owned by staff working within the partnership.

“Now we talk about our provision.”

Education Manager

15 months after the start of the process, the prison’s service was successfully assessed against the **matrix** Standard – and thus met an objective quality measure. The partners are working effectively together as a team both in terms of delivery and to support each other in problem solving and decision-making.

“We can talk about our problems and take a collaborative approach to addressing these.”

Education Manager

They report that the work increased awareness of each other’s roles, that links with the offender management unit and resettlement are better established and more effective – and that the level of communication has really improved. Staff from partner agencies and prison departments are obtaining the information they need more quickly and easily, and all are benefiting, such as from the input into sentence planning for prisoners which the guidance service is now making.

More effective liaison arrangements and sharing of information together with better promotion of referral procedures, is also leading to more timely referral. As a result the provision has become seamless to offenders – and the dreaded scenario of being passed from pillar to post without any tangible outcome is being avoided. Improved liaison with the resettlement department is strengthening support for planning ‘through the gate’. While the men’s needs may be met by staff from one of a number of organisations, they are not aware of that: they just know that their needs are being met. The men also benefit because:

*“They don’t have to keep saying the same thing over and over again to us all.”*

Education Manager

### How do they know it works?

Fostering a whole organisation approach to the delivery of guidance and to achieving quality standards resulted in both an increased awareness of, and support for the guidance service itself— and also of the process of continuous quality improvement. Increased awareness and understanding of the Guidance Service, is resulting in a trend of increased access and take up of the service. For example a comparison between those accessing the service provided by Tribal in 2010 with that provided in 2009 indicates an increase of 33 per cent in those receiving enhanced guidance – and an increase of nearly 50 per cent in those assisted during induction activities.

The provision of more in-depth and personalised information about an offender’s learning and skills needs and identification of the appropriate level, is leading to an identification of what the men really want to do – and they are being placed in provision linked to their individual action plans (IAPs). Feedback received from some 65 offenders between October 2009 and February 2010 indicates that 84 different learning and skills activities, whether in education or work places, had been, or were being, attended by them.

*“The prison will allocate to meet the needs on the action plan – the clients are benefiting from it.”*

Guidance worker

The information provided has enabled the Milton Keynes College staff to research courses outside their own provision, which are more appropriate for the client. Thus the scope of the programme has broadened, including the promotion of distance learning creating a progression route for higher level learners that extends beyond release.

*“Through the partnership working, we have been able to address individual needs through more detailed and timely information.”*

Education Manager

Systems have been introduced to trigger reviews, ensuring that these take place regularly on a time scale to suit each individual. This has resulted in an increase in the number of reviews and improved outcomes for learners.

Whilst the take-up of learning and skills provision has remained at a similar rate, the achievement rate had increased dramatically over the last three years going from 8 per cent in 2006/07, to 23 per cent in 2007/08 and to 64 per cent in 2008/09. Important factors contributing to this improvement based on working more effectively in partnership are:

- the modularisation of the provision and closer alignment with the learner's level and needs, including ESOL and literacy embedded in programmes;
- enabling learning to be delivered in accredited bite-sized chunks, which can be completed before an offender is moved on;
- a new allocation process based around a weekly meeting, which by involving the partners allows for a more holistic view of individuals to inform the decisions made; and
- an IAG review after four weeks at which the men can see the distance they have travelled and can set new goals, with an increasing sense of ownership in their action plans.

“There is definitely a better match between what they want to do – and what they are doing.”

Education Manager

A complex system of allocation and timetabling has evolved to enable offenders' activities to be fitted in. Awareness of other roles and practices, such as allocation, is improving the guidance provided by all the partners, and gives a sense of continuity. The 2008/09 annual report of the Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) noted that findings from a peer review of the learning and skills provision concluded that:

“There was strong leadership, a highly effective partnership work to deliver seamless provision and effective peer monitoring. The Board fully concurs with these findings.”

The improvements are contributing to meeting the performance targets in the prison's strategic development plan. The increased focus on employability and transferable skills, which the partners have bought into, helps to meet the resettlement agenda. The partnership working is ensuring that nearly all offenders are engaged in purposeful activity. The feedback from offenders has proved to be a valuable source of intelligence for planning learning and skills provision, as well as ensuring that their voices are heard in the planning and design of the guidance service. Feedback from offenders with appreciative comments is also motivating for staff.

### Tips for transferring the practice

Using a nationally recognised external measure of quality – in this case the **matrix** standard, which all could buy into, was useful in identifying where the service was, where it wanted to be and mapping the journey. It was important to recognise that as in any change process, mistakes can be made, but that the important thing is to learn from these – and to remain optimistic despite setbacks. For example, in retrospect, it would have been useful to have established an identity and a brand for the partnership earlier.

Using the offender population as a resource in supporting guidance delivery has proved effective, particularly in roles as interpreters and orderlies, thus providing an additional dimension to partnership working. Many offenders want to work with others – and this gives them the opportunity to develop skills in interacting with others. The role of the prisoner orderly who is seen as an asset by service users was more clearly defined as part of the process. The men have typically commented:

“What is good is that you can talk to the Orderly ...that often helps”.

## The LEAP project: Successfully engaging young people leaving care

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### 7. City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council

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#### Introduction

City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council's LEAP project (learning; employment; advice and preparation) sits within Bradford's leaving care service. LEAP E2E, offers a 12-week programme for the hardest to reach young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), care leavers and children in need. The core elements of the programme are: health awareness, advice and guidance, vocational preparation; delivery of functional skills and personal and social development.

LEAP E2E is one of many employability projects run by Bradford's LEAP project. Other options include, but extend beyond, a university support worker; conservation work on a local allotment, work tasters and apprenticeship schemes in the private sector or within City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council.

#### What we wanted to achieve

This programme successfully engages young people who have been amongst the most difficult to engage NEETS in Bradford. This is achieved by providing an understanding, informal learning environment that offers information, advice and guidance on career progression that is embedded into programme delivery. Linking this to work tasters, work place visits and informal learning about the work place and the skills needed to be successful allows the IAG to have relevance and a context for the young people.

The team also understands the challenges facing young people in transition from care to adulthood and the IAG provided this in the context of pathway planning and achieving stable, suitable accommodation. Managed by the Leaving Care Team and linked in to the wealth of knowledge available from other professional assessments, the LEAP team are best placed to ensure the course meets individual need and that the IAG delivered is realistic about initial progression opportunities whilst maintaining high aspirations for future progressions.

#### What we did

The Bradford Leaving Care Service has a dedicated Connexions PA who works with care leavers on the programme, and continues to provide intensive IAG support to them until they are 20 years of age – up to 25 if they have LDD. The strong working relationships forged with young people offer consistency and this has led to a significant increase in positive destinations for many care leavers.

The young people attend the LEAP programme for 16 hours per week, and are expected to achieve accreditation in basic and social skills. Class sizes are kept small with two E2E workers and a youth worker in each session so that support is available to individuals at any time.

## How do we know it works?

The LEAP programme is easily accessible for young people as it operates within the Leaving Care Service. Feedback from care leavers confirms they value being around staff they are familiar with and who understand the needs of young people in the care system when trying to re-engage with learning. Care leavers have also highlighted the value of being around young people from a similar background when working with the LEAP team.

## What helped to make it work?

The LEAP tutors and LEAP youth workers work hard to keep activities varied, offering tailored work tasters, and a programme of physical fitness (gym, football or swimming). The young people are also entitled to a 'passport to leisure', enabling use of Bradford's leisure facilities outside programme hours.

Throughout the course young people are encouraged and supported to prepare for future education, employment and training. Information, advice and guidance is tailored to the personal circumstances of the young person and their career action plan.

**"I already have my chef's qualifications – now LEAP will help to push me ahead."**

**"Before I came here my maths and English weren't that good, but now they are starting to get better."**

The manager of LEAP ensures that past participants in the programme are supported by LEAP staff up to 12 weeks (and beyond if required) after completion of the programme. The team are then able to track progress as young people are encouraged to return to LEAP and share their success with the current course participants in order to create positive role models.

Josh, 19, who now works in the painting and decorating trade continues to visit LEAP:

**"LEAP helped me move up a few levels ...the staff here are sound, you get on with them. I can ring and come in when I want."**

Young people on the current programme also highlight their relationship with staff and the informal learning environment as key to their enjoyment of the programme:

**"I talk to the staff more than any of my other workers...we do work here but we have a laugh with it, there is nothing I would change."**

It is this approach that supports the high retention of learners achieved by this programme.



## What were the results?

Since the launch of LEAP E2E in August 2008, 49 care leavers have engaged with the programme and 38 have progressed on to further education, employment and training options or gained accreditation from the programme to support their progression towards sustainable and rewarding employment. This is an outcome indicator that is rising year-on-year.

## Tips for transferring the practice

The key to delivery of the LEAP programme is placing the resources to deliver this programme, and the associated IAG, within the Leaving Care Team so that programme delivery is embedded into the Leaving Care Service. It is also essential for the team to be given sufficient staff resources to offer a highly supportive environment.

This programme demonstrates the need to deliver career learning and IAG in a context for this group of young people. Accessing interviews as a discrete activity to support individual progression but within a short programme that is offering information and advice on the further learning and work engages the young person – the discussion in one-to-one interviews is informed by learning from the group situation and the guidance professional can use the one-to-one guidance environment to further contextualise the advice and guidance for the individual.

## Teenagers to Work in Sunderland

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### 8. Sunderland City Council

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#### Introduction

The Teenagers to Work programme (T2W) was introduced as part of the Quality Protects initiative in 1999. This national initiative provided funding to deliver work experience for looked after children until 2003. Sunderland City Council took the decision to continue to fund this programme and celebrated 10 years of Teenagers to Work in 2009.

Each summer the team delivers a four-week work-experience programme during the school summer holiday. Each young person is offered a placement for two days each week and their subsistence allowance is paid according to how many hours they attend 'work'.

In 2007 and 2009 the team introduced a number of vocational courses designed as an alternative to work placements, in order to meet the needs of those young people who are not yet ready to access a work based opportunity.

The Sunderland Team have also supported the development of Teenagers to Work in Durham and South Tyneside and both authorities now deliver equally strong programmes for their young people.

#### What we wanted to achieve

The team currently delivering the programme began managing delivery in 2004. At this time, the need for a greater emphasis on employability was recognised and a new recruitment process was implemented. The team also introduced a more specific focus on preparation for the transition to post-16 learning – targeting all young people in year 10 and 11.

#### What we did

T2W is delivered by a dedicated team of employability specialists who work alongside the Leaving Care Team. This team is currently funded by the Working Neighbourhood Fund in Sunderland until March 2011, offering one-to-one support to young people in transition from care and care leavers. All members of the team are trained to level 4 in advice and guidance.

Programme delivery also relies on residential care staff, foster carers, looked after children education team and leaving care social workers who provide support for the application process and who, where necessary, support young people to access their placements.

The funding made available to support this programme is used to offer a 'wage' that covers costs for lunch and refreshments each day. This acts as a significant incentive for young people who are keen to earn their own money – often for the first time.

Each year in January, an application pack is sent to every young person in year 10 and 11. This pack includes a job file with job descriptions for the vocational areas that are available every year, an application form to be completed by the young person and two pro forma references that are completed by both the carer and social worker. The application form also asks the young person to indicate what their ideal placement would be with the promise that, if at all possible, the team will endeavour to source this placement – in this way the placement database grows each year.

## Recruitment

Each young person is invited to an informal interview with one of the team and a placement provider – often their first guidance interview. The interview is often a first chance for the team to:

- meet the young person and their carer;
- provide information, advice and guidance on future career aspirations;
- understand what has informed the young person's placement choice;
- clarify the young person's expectations of the placement;
- discuss any support needs;
- identify any constraints on where the placement could be located;
- gain a better understanding of what placement matches might be suitable;
- gather further information to inform any risk assessments for young people with more challenging behaviour.

All young people who apply and attend their interview are offered a placement on either an individual basis or as part of a supportive small group experience. All those offered an individual placement are required to attend a two-day induction to prepare them for the workplace.

## Induction

The two-day programme is delivered in May half term and attendance is mandatory. The programme is designed to be interactive and enables young people to explore concepts such as teamwork, communicating effectively, the expectations of employers and health and safety at work. It's an opportunity for young people to ask questions about their placements and discuss any concerns. One-to-one time with the team is available during the induction programme.

At induction, young people are given their placement pack, which includes the sickness policy, their work experience diary and their weekly timesheets. They are responsible for returning signed timesheets or arranging for their supervisor to email their attendance each week.

## Placements

The team has built up strong links with a range of placements, relying strongly on the local authority and third sector partners in addition to private employers. The programme is particularly well supported by the Community Services directorate who offer placements in all leisure centres, horticulture, highways, cleansing, culture and tourism, libraries and business administration.

In 2007, a hair and beauty course and a construction course were introduced to offer placements in these areas where it had proved more challenging to source placements. Both courses take place at local training providers where a working environment is simulated.

2009 saw the introduction of the Summer Castle programme that offers vocational tasters in sport and leisure, catering and woodworking for young people with statements of special educational need, who attend the three Behaviour Partnership schools in Sunderland. The courses are staffed on a 1:4 ratio, allowing for significant support for behavioural issues. We use the resources of the schools and skills centres that would otherwise stand empty and we employ tutors and teaching assistants who are happy to work to offer additional opportunities to the young people they support in term time. The courses provide an opportunity to try vocational areas not available in term time and each course has the same work focus as the individual work placements with a great deal of emphasis placed on employability skills. In addition to delivering the activities, the tutors talk throughout about careers in each vocational area and the learning pathways available to take the next step after year 11. This very practical, pragmatic career learning meets the needs of a group of young people for whom attention and classroom-based learning may not be sufficient.

## Delivery

During the four weeks of the programme, the team closely monitors the attendance of all young people via their timesheets, adjusting the 'wages' of the young person where they have been late or absent. The very clear message is that 'this is work' and you have to turn up to earn.

The team are also available to 'troubleshoot' where necessary but increasingly, this is not necessary as the team give great consideration to placement matches, preparing young people and their placements and ensuring appropriate support is available

## What helped to make it work?

The team has built up strong links with a range of placements, relying strongly on the local authority and third sector partners in addition to private employers.

The team invests as much time in preparing the placement as they do the young person and some young people return year-on-year to the same placement where it is available to them.

## What were the results?

Research shows that career exploration skills and building a picture of the world of work are both aspects of career learning that support a positive transition to post-16 learning. The delivery of information, advice and guidance becomes much more relevant to both the young person and their carer within the context of a work environment. Work experience also provides young people with information to add to their employability portfolio and ensures that, when interviewing for apprenticeships, college entry or part-time employment, young people have a reference and experience of the world of work.

## Benefits for young people

- Increased self-esteem
- Positive experience of the world of work
- Increased understanding of the recruitment process
- Opportunity to try out future career ideas
- Prompts young people to research career aspirations
- Information, advice and guidance is set within the context of future work opportunities
- Placement providers are often happy to act as a referee for future applications for apprenticeships and employment
- Benefits to professionals
- Provides a focus for conversations about career aspirations
- Delivered by a team who carefully match young people to placements
- An opportunity to discuss CRB processes with young people with offending history
- Young people are occupied in positive activity during the summer holidays
- Visiting young people 'at work' offers Leaving Care Social Workers a different perspective on their attitudes and abilities.

## How do we know it works?

This programme is delivered by a team that is committed to 'work experience for all'. Subject to suitable risk assessments, the team aspires to offer an appropriate work experience opportunity to every young person applying to take part. There is a particular focus on the young people in residential care as positive summer activities are particularly relevant to this group.

The Summer Castle programme now allows young people to take part in work related learning in an environment that can support their needs. The teaching assistants who worked on this programme in 2009 are all signed up to support Summer Castle again in 2010, reporting that they enjoyed the programme as much as the young people.

Sunderland City Council knows this programme works because young people and their carers prepare for the programme from January each year. The professionals who support the young people report the positive impact on the young person's self-esteem that results from earning their own money for the first time.

We really know this programme works because our young people ask to take part in the programme year-on-year.

Over the four Teenagers to Work programmes between 2004 and 2008, there were 130 young people who took part, with 112 successfully completing the programme – a high rate of participation can be seen with 86 per cent of young people completing the Teenagers to Work programme.

Furthermore, 25 young people took part in the Summer Castle programme in 2009, with 22 successfully completing the programme. Once again, the completion rate is high at 88 per cent.

### Tips on transferring the practice

Implementing this programme requires strategic support at a senior level to ensure access to work placements across directorates within the local authority. These placements are the core of the placement database and represent a range of opportunities that can then be supplemented by other private and third sector opportunities.

Delivery of this programme clearly has resource implications, as there is a financial commitment if incentives are to be offered, and it is essential that sufficient staff time is made available to deliver a successful programme. The programme can be scaled up or down depending upon the resources available.

The ability to deliver this type of activity could be one aspect of the role of a specialist employability worker within a leaving care service – a support model already implemented by many services across the country.

## Working in partnership to promote vocational higher education to people in work and their advisers

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### 9. Learning Opportunities in the South East

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#### Introduction

In September 2008 the four lifelong learning networks (LLNs) in the south-east (Hampshire and IOW LLN, Kent and Medway LLN, Progress South Central and Sussex Learning Network) joined forces to create a new service, called Learning Opportunities in the South-East, to promote vocational higher education to people in work, returning to work or about to enter the workforce plus those who advise, support and employ them. The service was funded by the four LLNs, the Learning and Skills Council and the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA).

This new service built on the extensive work undertaken by the Sussex Learning Network (SLN) between August 2006 and August 2008 to deliver information, advice and guidance. The initial work by the SLN was linked to national objectives and was a direct response to the Leitch challenge set by the 40 per cent target for adults in work achieving level 4 by 2020. Whilst progression to HE was clearly defined for students following traditional A level routes into university, research and mapping showed that there was much less clarity for those progressing from vocational routes. They sought to produce jargon-free information, advice and guidance for those who knew little or nothing about higher education.

For Learning Opportunities in Sussex, an early decision was made to put great emphasis on using the web as the primary vehicle for up to date information and advice. An online personal planning pack was designed to personalise the material and one-to-one email and telephone advice was piloted. It is this work that was built on and extended to the south-east to cover Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Kent, Medway, Oxfordshire, Surrey and Sussex.

#### What we wanted to achieve

The Learning Opportunities in the South-East team set out in September 2008 to provide a direct source of information so that learners and potential learners could:

- Obtain personalised information, advice and guidance relating to work-based and work-related higher education
- Search for local progression agreements using the South-east Routes Progression Tool and use these agreements to support their progression into and through higher education
- Feel confident about making a decision independently and approaching an institution to apply for a course.

In addition, they developed resources and provided staff development for practitioners and brokers, for example, Business Link and Train to Gain skills advisers, nextstep advisers and further education college staff. They also established links with the development of the new Adult Careers Service. As things progressed, information and advice was extended to respond to the external climate. For example, material on the recession, redundancy and job searching, was added together with a new section on alternative routes to higher-level skills for people who didn't get into oversubscribed universities in 2009.

## What we did

The team has worked together since 2006. The core team is two full-time, two 0.5 and one 0.6 with a number of consultants being employed for specialist tasks. Since September 2008, they have:

- Set up governance for the project with terms of reference
- Written a project plan together with communication and evaluation strategies
- Contracted and briefed web developers and designers
- Refreshed and re-written material for Learning Opportunities website which now includes over 30 information sheets on discrete topics that include barriers to learning
- Researched and produced location specific data and worked with web developers to produce the innovative Foundation Degrees in the South-East web tool
- Produced four versions of the *Learning Opportunities* booklet (one for each LLN area) and a range of complementary marketing and publicity materials
- Began the dissemination and staff development process which is ongoing throughout the project
- Built networks and operational links with colleges, universities, employers, practitioners and brokers across the south-east
- Written and produced an advisers' pack, plus tailored materials for Business Link and Train to Gain skills advisers and Jobcentre Plus advisers
- Set up an online free shop so that advisers can easily order materials
- Carried out mystery shopping to check quality of information, advice and guidance (IAG)
- Promoted one-to-one telephone, email and face-to-face information, advice and guidance
- Responded to significant changes in the economic climate by adding to the website information about the recession, redundancy and job searching
- Responded to changes in the HE environment by adding to the website information and advice for people who didn't get into university
- Been invited by SEEDA to work with them and other local agencies supporting areas of large-scale redundancy
- Started the evaluation process
- Began planning for sustainability.



## What helped to make it work?

- The skills of the team:
  - High-level project management skills
  - Qualified and experienced careers and education advisers
  - Knowledge and understanding of higher and further education context, adult learners and barriers to education
  - Experience of website design, development and authoring
  - Experience of writing and producing learning and adviser-facing materials
  - Access to highly skilled external consultants for specialist work.
  
- Web development:
  - Developing a good working relationship with the small, external web development company who understood their aims and audience
  - Having a user-friendly content management system (CMS), which enables team members to quickly and easily edit and update content, independently of the web development company.
  
- Resource design:
  - Developing a good working relationship with the small, external design company
  - Creating a brand, style sheet and primary and secondary colour palettes for Learning Opportunities, which ensure consistency and make materials easily identifiable.

## Relationship with the University of Brighton

Learning Opportunities in the South East is externally funded but hosted by the University of Brighton, which is the accountable body. Learning Opportunities in the South East is a joint lifelong learning network project and its governance includes a clear reporting procedure to the four networks and other funders, as well as the university as the accountable body. However, because they are a small team and are externally facing, they have enjoyed a great deal of autonomy on a day-to-day basis. This has enabled them to react quickly to the external climate and to take forward ideas and improvements without the need to work through a lengthy decision making structure.

## What were the results?

Everything in the project plan has been delivered to time and budget and, as mentioned above, the team were able to respond to changes in the external climate and HE environment by producing timely and up to date material. They have thus been able to go beyond the remit of the original project plan in order to provide the best possible service.

## How we know it works

- In November 2009 they received two careers guidance awards from the Institute of Career Guidance:
  - Winner Working with Adults
  - Highly commended Careers Practitioner of the year 2009 (for the project director).
- Analysis of web statistics by number, length of stay, pages visited, personal planning packs accessed and so on.
- Feedback from those who have ordered and used resources.
- Feedback from events.
- “Praise” file of ad hoc feedback to individual team members.
- They have been approached by a number of organisations who wish to commission us to do specific work for them.

## Tips for transferring the practice

- Be very clear about your audience, objectives and deliverables and how they relate to an identified need or gap in provision
- Appoint team members with an appropriate range of skills and have regular face to face team meetings
- Ensure that there is a clear reporting and recording structure for all aspects of the project including communication with stakeholders and funders
- Web and user interface design expertise is essential to ensure good navigation, usability and accessibility (this is often underestimated)
- Develop a clear brand for consistency and ensure that all resources look professional by giving due attention to authoring, layout, editing and proof-reading
- Network extensively and use every opportunity to disseminate the work of the project
- Keep up to date with external developments and be prepared to respond to changes
- Be prepared to take on additional tasks as the project develops and the context dictates
- Actively seek feedback
- Consider sustainability opportunities throughout the project.

## Developing and implementing an active network model for informing, advising and supporting learners in the workplace

### 10. Unionlearn with the TUC

#### Introduction

“We will help unions support 250,000 members a year to access and progress through lifelong learning based on quality standards, including 25,000 on Skills for Life courses. We will deepen and extend partnerships with key stakeholders to sustain effective union-led activity.”

These are two of the goals of unionlearn, in which effective and relevant IAG plays a crucial part. Trade union activity and participation is now an important feature of workplace learning and also of workplace career guidance. Union representatives are helping members to access opportunities and to overcome barriers to learning, training, qualifications and progression at work.

They can often reach those who cannot, or will not, use conventional services or disclose their learning or training needs to managers. They broker and set up flexible workplace learning opportunities, including ICT-based learning and guidance. In addition learners have reported increased individual confidence, motivation and self-esteem.

In England, it is recognised that union learning representatives (ULRs) can make a significant contribution to promoting and developing workplace learning and the support services that underpin it. There are currently 23,000 ULRs in England, who are voluntary union activists with statutory rights set out in the Employment Act of 2002. Both the recent IAG Review conducted by the DfES, and the final report of the Leitch review of skills, acknowledge the role played by trade unions in fulfilling the government’s skills strategy, specifically in motivating and providing support to members in the workplace.

The activities in which most ULRs are engaged in, on a voluntary basis, to support learners, are best described as identifying needs, mentoring, coaching and signposting to opportunities and to other services. While their role includes many elements of what we would call IAG, the term is not the best one to describe the way in which ULRs work with their colleagues.

When unionlearn was set up within the Trades Union Congress (TUC) in 2000, the term ‘Supporting Learners’ was adopted to describe the work done by ULRs with union members, and a model and strategy were developed to support them in this role through a range of partnerships and access to resources. The strategy is based on a ‘network’ model, which built active working relationships with IAG providers and connected TUC-affiliated unions with these providers in a range of ways.

## What we wanted to achieve

It was never intended that unionlearn should become a provider of IAG, although many unions have now trained reps to NVQ level 3 and 4, and are offering **matrix** accredited services in the workplace, many of these funded through nextstep. Unionlearn were aware that many networks and partnerships are ineffective because they are often passive structures with no clear, shared aims and objectives. They wanted to achieve a model in which active agreements formed the basis for joint action plans and joint working to benefit union learners.

Many IAG agencies are not familiar with the workplace context and find both employees and employers hard to reach. For IAG providers, becoming part of the unionlearn network provided links to the network of ULRs and to union project workers who were working with learners in the workplace. The main aim of developing and implementing the model was to ensure that all union learners could get the help they needed to make the right choices, progress their learning and to achieve their goals.

## What we did

More than 600 union reps, ULRs and learners took part in the initial research and contributed to the development of the model. The union learner is in the centre of the network model, with the ULR providing first contact in the workplace and linking the learner to a range of services and resources. The key members of the network are:

- Other union reps and project workers
- The Careers Advice Service
- Nextstep face-to-face services
- Unionlearn and other workplace learning centres
- Employers
- Other learning and training providers (adult, further and higher education)
- Sector Skills Councils (SSCs).

Strong relationships were developed with all of these, and in particular Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), joint agreements and action plans have been established and maintained through regular contact with the Careers Advice Service (managed at that point by learndirect), regional and national nextstep services and the Skills for Business network (25 SSCs). Work with the SSCs focused on finding effective ways of providing and using labour market information (LMI) and progression advice. Carrying out and reviewing the action plans keeps the network active and a number of joint events and training sessions for ULRs have been held.

A key development and example of active networking was the launch in 2007 of the unionlearn learning and careers advice service, operated on behalf of unionlearn by the Careers Advice Service, to support ULRs. While it would have been possible simply to refer union learners to the national service, this agreement has made the service more accessible and user-friendly for union learners. Unionlearn provided training for the advisers to help them to understand the role of a rep and the context in which they are working, and many affiliated unions and groups of reps have arranged visits to the call centres to see the advisers in action.

ULRs, other reps and members can call a dedicated number 0800 092 91 90 to access the full range of services tailored to the needs of unions, including the additional telephone helplines in nine languages for migrant workers and others whose first language is not English. A microsite for the service can be reached from the unionlearn home page, [www.unionlearn.org.uk/uladvice](http://www.unionlearn.org.uk/uladvice), where course searches and other enquiries can be made. ULRs can also download resources to help them in their role, including guides for working with older workers and migrant workers. Posters and leaflets for use in the workplace can be ordered via the unionlearn website.

Ways of working with local services and providers were also facilitated by unionlearn, assisting with the development of local protocols with nextstep and the unionlearn Quality Award, which providers can receive for their workplace-friendly programmes and services. Union Learning Fund projects, partnership bids for regional funds and collective learning funds have made it possible in some regions for ULRs to gain nationally recognised qualifications so that they can deliver services supported by nextstep funding.

In the same way, the strategy for helping members to access higher level learning works through national MOUs and joint action plans with the Open University and fdf (Foundation Degree Forward), and local agreements with universities.

### What helped to make it work?

Union learning works most successfully when it is rooted in strong active partnerships, with employers, learning providers and IAG agencies. Unionlearn and the TUC-affiliated unions are experienced in setting up these partnerships and making them work for the benefit of union members. Creating and constantly reviewing strong, mutually beneficial working arrangements is the basis of the successful unionlearn network model.

A regional working group was set up very early in the development of the model to ensure that different ways of working were shared and regional partners involved. Unionlearn draws on the expertise of organisations like NICEC (the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling) to keep up to date on current thinking about IAG. It keeps in regular touch with the relevant government departments and participates in stakeholder groups and consultations about the development of services.

It has also been very important to promote union-friendly services and illustrate good practice and individual successes through case studies, publications, websites and national and regional events. The Supporting Learners regional roadshow has now become an annual event and is very well attended by union reps, project workers and local providers. At the annual unionlearn national conference, a presentation of the Quality Award takes place, with providers of careers information and advice receiving the awards for the first time last year. The unionlearn website regularly showcases examples of good practice in partnership working and of individual achievements in learning through the union.

The main factor, of course, is the dedication and enthusiasm of the 23,000 volunteer ULRs and other reps who help their colleagues to progress in their learning and careers through unions. Their willingness to engage in training and development activities, to make local partnerships work, to arrange tasters and other activities for members and to support members in workplace learning centres and union learning clubs is the most crucial factor in making this work.

### What were the results?

Unionlearn believe that the main aim of developing and implementing the Supporting Learners initiative is being fulfilled – that every union member who needs help to make the right choices and decisions about their learning and their career, and continuing support while they are learning, will be able to access that help when they need it through their union and its networks. In 2008/09 over 200,000 learners were supported by unions.

The unionlearn learning and careers advice service has supported ULRs in their work so that they always have a back-up and do not have to trust their own local knowledge of provision to advise members. The course search facility in particular has been very well used.

### How we know it works

Statistics are provided by the CAS for unions about the use of the unionlearn learning and careers advice service. They also know about the ways in which ULRs make use of the union learning Climbing Frame, a free electronic tool designed to help ULRs to support learners in the workplace. In 2010, a new improved web-based version of the climbing frame will be launched with additional functions that will enable ULRs to produce a more sophisticated range of reports.

Hundreds of ULRs have achieved NVQs level 3 and 4 in advice and guidance. Unions and unionlearn offices are being accredited with the **matrix** standard and also achieving the **matrix** excellence award. The unionlearn learning and careers advice service, nextstep services, unions and SSCs are all receiving the Quality Award for their careers information and advice services.

Informally, the enthusiastic attendance and evaluation of national and regional supporting learners events, and the constant flow of testimonies from union learners about their achievements and progress tells us that the help being received by learners through their unions and the network is both useful and valued. All of these successes are charted on the website and in a bank of case studies being built up by unionlearn.

## Tips for transferring the practice

There are various ways in which careers and IAG services can work collaboratively with trade unions:

- Delivering services in the workplace or in learning centres
- Making and accepting referrals
- Bidding in partnership for funds to support learners
- Developing joint approaches to employer engagement
- Involving unions in networking, training
- Providing access to resources for ULRs and union project workers
- Supporting unions to achieve the **matrix** standard
- Joint marketing of services
- Joint conferences and events
- Sharing information about referrals and any identified gaps in provision.

Linking up with unionlearn is a good first step to working with unions. The regional managers are able to supply contacts and facilitate joint working with unions. As the role of the ULR is voluntary, it is important to check the most appropriate way of contacting them. Unionlearn can advise on the best way to do this through their unions. The unionlearn website provides access to information and resources which will help careers practitioners to understand the role of the ULR and the range of activities they are engaged in the learning and skills field. Through the unionlearn Supporting Learners (IAG) project, joint agreements have been made with providers of services to ensure that these are accessible to union members.

With over 23,000 trained ULRs in the workplace by 2010, they will have a significant role in promoting access to the proposed new adult careers service. In order to do this they will need excellent working relationships with careers practitioners and other experts in the field.

### 3. Partnership protocol for CLIAG providers in the learning and skills sector

#### Introduction

“Effective partnerships between education and employers can make a real difference to your people”<sup>4</sup>

There is a history of practitioners delivering career learning, information, advice and guidance (CLIAG) working in partnership, particularly at a local level, to achieve greater coherence between services – and to provide a more seamless and effective delivery for users. This document includes guidance on the most efficient and effective ways of working together to ensure that learners receive high quality CLIAG from providers. In addition, there is a short checklist included at the end of this document to help partnership bodies or organisations assess their fitness to work well together.

In 1998, the Audit Commission observed that successful partnerships can achieve the following:

- services, which are more closely aligned with users’ needs;
- a better use of resources;
- the development of more creative approaches to problems; and
- greater influence on others.

As multi-agency working has developed, evaluations of integrated working have been undertaken across a range of different partnerships, including for example:

- Connexions partnerships;
- IAG Strategic Boards and Adult Guidance networks;
- learning partnerships;
- 14–19 diploma consortia; and
- multi-agency working supporting the *Every Child Matters* agenda and offender learning which provide a rich source of evidence on what makes partnership working successful.

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4 DCSF, October 2009. *Quality, Choice and Aspiration: A strategy for young people’s information, advice and guidance.*



Organisations in the learning and skills sectors need partnership agreements for the provision of CLIAG to make most effective use of specialists and employers to support learners. Employers in 14–19 consortiums, organisations such as Connexions, nextstep and specialist providers that provide help with issues such as drugs, housing mental health and disability are all key to meeting learners CLIAG requirements. Providers may have individual partnership agreements with these organisations and/or a wider partnership with a range of the external providers. Where learners are involved, all partnerships share responsibilities around impartial support and guidance, confidentiality and sharing of client records. The most effective partnerships also typically involve learners and are committed to the pursuit of shared objectives to meet learners' needs.

In 2009, the Centre for Guidance Studies at the University of Derby was commissioned by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) to undertake a literature review of these sources to identify the common principles of effective partnership working. Other sources reviewed included research on high performance leadership behaviours. This report draws on these sources to offer guidance to those seeking to develop partnership approaches and build consortia.

The intention was to identify the key factors in the delivery of effective practice in CLIAG in a partnership setting and to derive a recommended and accessible protocol that partner providers could use to be successful in supporting learners. By protocol we mean procedures, codes of behaviour and a suggested set of rules or practice that may be helpful to adopt in a partnership setting.

Effective protocols or ways of working can help a partnership to:

- implement best practice and develop a 'whole service' approach to learners' CLIAG experience;
- deploy staff, resources and expertise to best effect;
- demonstrate to Ofsted evidence of the providers' commitment to working in partnership;
- identify and manage weaknesses in the provision in addition to maximising strengths; and
- provide an environment for challenge and review which has the learners' best interests at heart.

This template provides a guide for the development of local protocols and some detailed suggestions on what should be included. The detailed procedures, actions and activities will need to be developed by local providers. Generally, effective partnership working includes the following features. These are:



## Working together to provide high quality CLIAG for learners in a partnership setting

### Starting points

#### 3.1 Developing a shared vision and goals

“To ask people and organisations to work in partnership is to ask them to adopt new ways of working and to accept a degree of collective control over their activities. To do this, people need to be motivated by a common vision in which they all believe and a confidence in their collective ability to achieve it.’

Frye, M and Webb, A, 2002

Developing a shared vision involves identifying common principles, desired outcomes and what the partnership hopes to achieve on behalf of the learner. Likewise, setting out the relevant national policy and legislative framework and identifying other relevant local policies, protocols and guidance helps to understand the broader context in which the partnership needs to operate. Developing a shared vision should also include:

- agreeing in advance what the main issues and opportunities there are in working together;
- translating the vision into clear, mutually valued and realistic goals and targets to develop ownership and commitment to the partnership;
- identifying the principles of good or effective practice the group wants to adhere too (see principles of good practice below);
- exploring shared values and ethics and agreeing what kind of culture and climate the group wants to have; and
- running joint activities, such as training and team building to build stronger relationships and mutual understanding of the different contributions each partner can make towards achieving their common aims.

#### 3.2 Principles of good practice

The following principles underpin effective practice when working with learners in a partnership context. In addition to the key principles of providing impartial careers education (Education and Skills Act 2008) each partnership should develop their own version and may find the following elements useful to reflect on as the partnership develops.

These guiding principles stimulate thinking on the modus operandi for the group and what its participants feel is important to work towards. In addition, it also indicates, to a large extent, what the partners value and hope to gain for the learners through the joint working.

- All agencies in contact with learners have a responsibility to safeguard and promote learners’ welfare
- Equality and diversity should be valued and fully considered in agency responses

- Promote and develop good working relationships between all agencies
- Policies and practices comply with current legislation and guidance
- Collective ownership for learner outcomes
- Joint training and CPD activities to ensure standards workforce development and promote joint working
- Committed to engaging with parents and carers
- Raising aspirations and reaching potential, focusing on the learners' journey and not just the point at which they access the services of the partnership.

### 3.3 Clear process for working together

This section covers the main different processes and functions which are part of working together to provide effective CLIAG for learners in a partnership setting.

To achieve its goals the partnership will need to think about the following:

#### Remit and scope

Defining what individuals, groups and situations are covered by the partnership and agreeing common definitions and language. There could be several ways of working depending on the learner. There will also need to be discussion of which agencies are to be directly involved in the provision. This may vary and is likely to change after initial implementation. The process of identifying a clear scope will help anticipate any boundary issues or problems and highlight any gaps in the service.

#### Implementation

A partnership will only be effective if there are clear plans for, and resources devoted to the implementation of its key tasks. Those involved are encouraged to establish a working practice for the partnership, test this out with others to get feedback and evaluate the plans further by testing them out on example case studies of learners or situations. Local protocols could also include diagrammatic representations of learner pathways and case study examples of how the protocol should work. Particularly important is the need for the partnership to identify how learners will access the relevant CLIAG services including all referral routes and explore what is needed in terms of planning, resources and funding.

#### Roles and responsibilities

In essence, this is identifying 'who does what' in delivering the service to the individual learners or other partners. Formally this can be discussed and captured as a service level agreement, role profile or performance indicators or more informally through joint discussion and agreement. Setting out clear role descriptions and written agreements on responsibilities within the partnership can help to avoid confusion, overlap and duplication of effort. More formal partnerships may require a management or governance structure in place. Attention should be paid to involving those with the motivation, resources and the skills to deliver on their objectives, as this will be the key factor in ensuring tasks are met.

In forming a working group it will be necessary to reach a balance between a workable group and involving all key stakeholders. Where possible, all participants should be in a position to progress decisions made by the group and the contributions of each partner should be clear, with agreed targets and outcomes. Where one party has more of an investment in the outcomes, is more senior (perhaps in another setting) or holds more of the power or funding, then this should be acknowledged and worked around. Ideally everyone in the group should have an equal voice in the partnership and any barriers to joint working should be aired and discussed.

Establish at the outset how the working group will communicate effectively with services not represented on the working group and who will be the key point of contact.

Consider how others will be involved along the way. What will the process for involving them and ensuring that their views are represented?

### Evaluation and review

Assessing the effectiveness of the partnership will include consultation with learners, parents, gaining feedback from staff and other stakeholders and monitoring the impact of the CLIAG provision. It is important that the review covers the principles and key information set out in the statutory guidance on impartial careers education in addition to any other legislative requirements.

The purpose of the partnership is to deliver better outcomes for learners. Groups will need to decide what monitoring information is gathered, and how it is collected and analysed. Successful evaluation includes identifying initial success criteria and acting on the subsequent feedback and review. Equally, it is also good practice to specify when the evaluation should take place and how it will be documented and reported.

## 3.4 Working together effectively

“Before people are prepared to implement the partnership’s decisions in their own organisations, they need a high level of trust in each other and hence confidence in the collective decisions they take.”

Frye, M and Webb, A, 2002

### Effective communication channels

Effective partnerships need regular and robust communication systems and processes for sharing and exchanging information. Consideration also needs to be given to appropriate mechanisms for communicating with external bodies outside the partnership.

Within a CLIAG context, data about clients frequently need to be shared securely and with the individual’s consent between partners. Partners will need to agree what information should be exchanged about specific cases, and develop effective systems for capturing the required information, transferring the information to other agencies and holding shared information.

“Information about young people needs to be managed and shared (with the young person’s consent) and a dialogue maintained, to ensure that repeat assessment of the young person is avoided and an overview of their needs is maintained over time and across agencies, ensuring that the young person does not fall through gaps. Referrals to specialist advice and key transitions should be managed in as supportive a way as possible.”

Connexions, 2003

### Respecting diversity

In any partnership arrangement there will be different agendas, personalities, skill sets, views and opinions, any or all of which could present obstacles to making progress and arriving at consensus-led decisions.

Thought will be needed to ensure that all voices are heard and any conflicts resolved. Continuity of member representation can have a significant influence on the success of the enterprise. The choice of personnel to involve may be important to building the mutual trust and respect required for developing synergy and strong working relationships. The timings and access to the workings of the partnership will need careful consideration e.g. the ability of working parents to attend meetings in the middle of the working day. This should help to create the best climate to ensure that participants feel comfortable in making a contribution.

## 3.5 Strong leadership

Strong, clear and imaginative leadership and management, encompassing a central co-ordinating role, are seen as vital to secure and maintain the commitment of key players and ensure successful integrated working. However, leadership of a network needs to be by consensus – and generally needs to be distinct from domination by any one partner. Those leading partnerships need to be able to:

- manage the complexities of team working;
- create a co-operative culture;
- build up motivation and trust;
- work with different organisational cultures; and
- be skilled at resolving any conflicts that arise, such as around issues arising for example around partiality, power relationships or contractual requirements.

There are certain leadership behaviours that can to a large degree promote more harmonious working in a partnership setting. These behaviours should be promoted and developed in all members of the partnership and not just the formal leader or chair. These behaviours are so called because they are recognised in high performing individuals and their successful organisations.<sup>5</sup>

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5 Tony Cockerill, John Hunt and Harry Schroder, 1995. Managerial Competencies: Fact or Fiction? *Business Strategy Review*. Autumn.

In brief, these leadership behaviours are in the following areas:

- **Clear communication** – presenting ideas clearly and with ease; delivering messages that are clearly signposted, transparent and engaging.
- **Confidence building** – personally building the confidence of others in their capacity to succeed or in the future success of their organisation; resolving performance problems; being open and transparent in action and decisions.
- **Influencing and impact** – forming win-win alliances with others by showing how partnership interests or goals will support their interests and goals; persuading others by identifying and highlighting the specific advantages, benefits or features of ideas, plans and relationships.
- **Interpersonal** – encouraging others to disclose their true feelings and beliefs; using emotional intelligence to respond to different individual requirements to encourage openness; committing time and energy to listening and encouraging others to discuss their true thoughts, concerns and feelings. Modelling disclosure and talking truly and openly about own thoughts feelings and issues.
- **Action orientation** – making well-formed and future focused plans; taking responsibility for implementation and the success of the tasks; looks for effective ways of working and how to tackle obstacles that get in the way of progress and achievement.





## Partnership Protocol Checklist

This is short checklist summarising the key elements to take account of when starting up partnerships or joint working. Alternatively, those already working in partnerships may wish to use this as a barometer to check on their progress and identify any improvement opportunities. Any negatives to the questions overleaf may indicate a gap, a barrier to progression or a need to revisit the group's key aims or purpose.

<b>Quick checklist for assessing and developing partnership working</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Does the partnership have a clear vision and objectives?	
Is the partnership aware of where its activities fit into the broader context?	
Does the partnership have overarching principles that guide or steer the members' activities and behaviours?	
Do all members of the partnership work to these principles? How are issues resolved?	
Can each individual articulate their role in the partnership and its relationship to the learner?	
Do any members of the partnership hold more power or sway than others? How is this managed by the group?	
Do individuals understand where their contribution has an impact on the learner?	
Do individual members exhibit high performance leadership behaviours?	
Is there evidence of acting on constructive feedback and review?	
Are there any gaps in knowledge and skills within the partnership?	
Does the partnership actively seek feedback on its provision?	
What do learners, and their parents and carers think about the service?	

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## 5. Further sources of practical support

- The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)
- The Association for Careers Education and Guidance (ACEG)
- The Institute of Career Guidance (ICG)
- NAEGA - national organisation that promotes adult guidance
- The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS)
- CEGNET – DCSF careers education support programme
- Connexions service locally might have curriculum advisers
- Landbased Colleges Aspiring to Excellence (LANDEX)
- The Association of National Specialist Colleges (NATSPEC)
- Association of Learning Providers (ALP)
- The Association of Colleges (AoC)
- The Single Voice
- Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK)
- Matrix quality standard for information, advice and guidance services
- The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)
- National Association of Managers of Student Services (NAMSS)
- The Learning and Skills Network



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## Learning and Skills Improvement Service

The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) aims to accelerate the drive for excellence in the learning and skills sector, building the sector's own capacity to design, commission and deliver improvement and strategic change. LSIS's vision is that every learner acquires the skills, knowledge and appetite for learning, living and working and every provider is valued by their community and employers for their contribution to sustainable social and economic priorities.

LSIS's *Strategic Ambitions* demonstrates how we will contribute to delivering core improvement principles and sets out our new ways of working to engage the sector in everything we do to make LSIS a truly sector-led organisation. You can find this document and other information about LSIS activities and services at [www.lsis.org.uk](http://www.lsis.org.uk)

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LSIS is committed to promoting equality for disabled people and we strive to ensure that our communication and learning materials can be made available in accessible formats. Please let us know if you consider yourself disabled and require reasonable adjustments made to support you.