

Evaluation Report

Brighton and Hove Information, Advice and Guidance Project

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1 Introduction

This report was commissioned by Brighton and Hove Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) Project. It details the findings of a qualitative review carried out with key partners and service providers involved in the Project. The report deals with the activity of the Project between April 2000 and March 2001.

1.1 Background

The GAINS Network arose out of the Brighton and Hove Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) Project that was established in October 1999. In September 1999 Brighton and Hove Lifelong Learning Partnership was successful in bidding for DfEE funding through the Access to Learning strand, to develop information, advice and guidance services. The funding was made available as part of the national framework for implementing the previous Government's policy on local information, advice and guidance (IAG) services to adults. That policy was to provide locally accessible and good quality information, advice and guidance services to adults about opportunities for learning and work. The emphasis on delivery through local IAG partnerships arose from the perception that the local partners would have a more coherent local knowledge of existing services and gaps in provision. Local knowledge would enable a more coherent coordination of existing services; an engagement with providers in the Voluntary and community sectors to use and develop their presence amongst priority client groups to deliver IAG services through outreach work; an ability to target additional services where gaps were identified; facilitate the development of local IAG provision towards national quality standards.

National policy guidelines on the development of IAG provision for adults sets its activity clearly within the wider context of lifelong learning and social inclusion. Lifelong learning is defined as providing everyone with the right opportunities to learn throughout life and enabling widening participation in those learning opportunities. It is also acknowledged that socially excluded groups face numerous barriers that disadvantage their chances of participating and contributing effectively in society.

Government research, in particular through the Social Exclusion Unit, identified a learning divide between the untrained and the highly qualified –in Brighton this is seen as an acute problem with a lower than average attainment amongst young people and a higher proportion of graduates. The Policy Action Team on Skills report (PAT2) recommended an extension of IAG, community-based 'first rung provision' and neighbourhood learning centres in order to improve participation in learning, skills development and job opportunities for the local population.

Brighton and Hove Learning Partnership identified the development of information, advice and guidance as one of the key tools in improving learning and employability locally. One of the Partnership's concerns has been to

address the lower than average rates of participation and achievement in key wards and target communities, being aware that large numbers of adults and young people apparently have no connection with conventional education and training providers and therefore imaginative approaches to IAG provision, participation in learning and encouraging achievement are needed to address these issues.

Brighton and Hove Learning Partnership used 6 months development funding to carry out 2 pieces of initial research in autumn '99 to identify local barriers to learning for adults and identify the needs of local IAG providers for training and resources. This informed the subsequent development of the GAINS network and ensured effective targeting strategies were written into the development plan. The Learning Partnership recognised, from the beginning of this Project, the importance of involving the voluntary and community sector alongside statutory institutions. This was to facilitate contact with key target groups where the advice and outreach work of the voluntary and community sector is particularly effective. Its effectiveness in reaching 'hard to reach' groups was seen as essential given the outcomes of the Initial research for the IAG Project. This revealed that those most in need of information, advice and guidance, as well as most in need of continuing their education to improve their skills were least likely to use existing advice and guidance services.

The DfEE made it a requirement of the national IAG Project that the Employment Service would be involved as a full member of all the IAG networks and as part of each local executive group nationally in order to ensure that IAG provision would 'join up' locally. This would partly be facilitated through the sharing of outreach provision locally. The DfEE suggest, in their 'Specification for IAG Partnerships', that particular geographic areas or client groups in e.g. areas of high social deprivation might respond to locally based informal services delivered through voluntary and community sector providers. These services could be linked to the Employment Service through the development of effective referral systems.

It was agreed nationally that it would not be necessary for the Employment Service to go through the Guidance Council accreditation process as it was already part of the Investors in People programme, had an in-house IAG training programme in place and had achieved the Charter Mark, which included customer satisfaction and advice. There was no point in duplicating training for another accreditation system.

The DfEE funding for 99-2000 emphasised development. The IAG Executive group strategy for 2000-2001 was to focus on work with the Voluntary and community sector and on development and capacity building; in 2001-2002 the emphasis will be on working with the statutory sector and on delivery of services.

1.2 Objectives

The purposes of this evaluation were to:

- Evaluate the extent of support experienced by full members of the GAINS Network in the process of meeting the guidance Council Quality standards.
- Assess the effectiveness of the training programme in meeting organisations' needs and identify possible gaps for the future.
- Assess the usefulness of the resources developed – website, newsletter, Directories, with suggestions for improvements.
- Evaluate the extent to which the project has involved the voluntary and community sector and how they can continue to be involved effectively.
- Assess the effectiveness of the GAINS network in developing stronger links between advice and guidance agencies
- Identify emerging issues to be addressed in continuation plans.

1.3 Process

Interviews were conducted, either by telephone or in person, with key partners and service providers. A semi-structured questionnaire was used in order to allow responses across the diversity of interests amongst the GAINS Network membership. In addition, information was obtained from evaluation reports produced by the accreditation consultant, the training providers, the outreach projects, and the project coordinator. This was not a quantitative survey but a piece of qualitative research that attempted to explore IAG Network members' experiences and place them in context in order to provide a broad overview of developments to date, identify similarities and highlight differences in order to inform future developments of the IAG Network.

2 Findings:

2.1 Training and Accreditation

2.1.1 Background

Research carried out during the development phase of this project (99-2000) identified that the IAG Project needed to offer a training programme to providers with 2 concurrent aims:

- 1) To meet staff training needs across the range of organisations involved in IAG services in the local area in order to raise standards of delivery and promote consistency throughout Brighton and Hove.
- 2) To ensure staff could demonstrate competencies against the Guidance Council quality standards.

A requirement of the DfEE funding was the achievement of accreditation against the Guidance Council quality standards by March 2002 at the latest. The DfEE guidelines point to the likelihood that small providers would need help towards meeting the cost of accreditation and that IAG funds should be

made available for this purpose. The IAG Project business plan states that the Learning Partnership will develop and improve the quality of service through:

- The delivery of an inter-agency training programme to IAG workers in the network
- Provide a training consultant, project coordinator, and administrator to support organisations in their pre-accreditation phase.
- Assist smaller voluntary providers with the cost of preparing and achieving accreditation

The Coordinator asked the Network to form a task group in response to the above research. The Working Together Project was recommended by this subgroup as being the most appropriate training provider because it had demonstrated its sensitivity to the needs of the Voluntary and community sector. It is a capacity building organisation active in providing training to voluntary and community organisations across Brighton and Hove; currently about 68% of the GAINS Network is made up of Voluntary and community sector organisations. This is a good example of consultation facilitating a 'bottom-up' involvement in the development of an effective training strategy.

The programme of training offered by the Working Together Project comprised 10 x 1 day and ½ day skills development sessions that were unaccredited, alongside 2x9 week (27 hours) OCN level 2 and 3 accredited courses offering the opportunity to achieve the Guidance Council quality standard mark. GAINS Network members were encouraged to access those parts of the programme relevant to their organisation's needs and aims.

In addition to the training offered to GAINS Network members by the Working Together Project, the IAG Project coordinated 5 training sessions led by the Guidance Council offering guidance about the standards expected from groups and organisations working towards the quality mark. The IAG Project also funded places (at a subsidized rate of £500 per place) on the NVQ programme in Guidance at Lewes Tertiary College (LTC) developed by LTC together with Sussex Careers Service. This programme was already in place at the time Brighton and Hove IAG Project was developing its own training provision and it made no sense to duplicate it. Currently 5 workers from the Brighton and Hove GAINS Network are developing their NVQ portfolios as part of this training scheme.

2.1.2 Training Programme

3 key findings emerged from the evaluation amongst participants on the training programme carried out by the Working Together Project:

- 1) The programme of training offered to GAINS Network members was produced and circulated in June 2000 although some events were not

due to take place until early 2001 – the requirement to plan attendance so far in advance resulted in poorer attendance towards the end of the programme.

- 2) Participants found the practical activities that enabled them to build on their experience the most valuable aspect of the training programme. These included: producing information maps, action planning, exploring the purposes of monitoring and practical risk assessment.
- 3) Opportunities to network and share information provided through attendance at training events were highly valued by participants.

The interviews revealed a more complex response to the overall training programme and accreditation process and indicated differences across the range of organisations involved in the network. Most responses were generally positive and the training process itself was acknowledged as a means of identifying future needs;

The Working Together training programme was very good –it dealt with things the workers knew about but gave it a clearer context and the training they delivered was cohesive and useful; the training events had worked at 2 levels –as training and as networking opportunities, reiterating the results of the Working together Project's own evaluation. It was clear that several participating organisations had used the training programme to identify training and development needs. One Network member commented that they *had identified [those] needs to be addressed by a future training programme.* Another organisation had used the appraisal process to identify job training and developmental needs. Generally, more specialist and targeted training was required and more consultation with organisations about the content and timing of the training programme. Suggestions included exploring CAMPAG units; working with difficult people – dealing with drugs and alcohol.

The developmental aspects of the training programme emerged quite strongly. The training offered has clearly strengthened the skills base within organisations and has acted as a positive force in prompting some organisations to review their current IAG provision and identify possible new areas for development: as a result of participating in the training one organisation identified IAG as a potential new area of work to complement their current training role. They argued that they would be able to offer their clients a better service as a result of these developments. The training programme had therefore been instrumental in enabling the worker participating to propose new areas for their organisation to move in to.

Not all comments were positive and a large proportion of organisations, whilst valuing specific aspects of the training on offer, also saw the training programme as a potential source of difficulties. The problems identified either related to the nature of the organisation or to their stage in needs identification. One person felt it was difficult to say whether training events met the needs of their organisation at present; another pointed to the

difficulties of releasing staff for training events particularly where they only had a very limited number of staff available. They felt, in particular, that to release people for the time required to attend the accredited courses was very difficult and might compromise their service: *Staffing has been a problem –only now sorted –sometime in Sept hope to deal with accreditation.* One organisation suggested that the training programme needed to be more spread out to enable them to release workers. There was also a conflation within one or two organisations between the skills development training and support for the accreditation process:

The training was focused on achieving the Guidance Council quality standards, therefore it wasn't currently relevant.

The cost of attending training events has been met by the IAG Project in line with DfEE guidelines, although it has still proved a source of concern, particularly amongst smaller voluntary and community sector organisations where staffing and cover can be problematic:

For the 2nd of the Open College units [project manager] wasn't able to release anyone to attend due to staff working on a 4hr availability system. It wasn't a problem with the training itself.

These criticisms probably reflect the very tight staffing regimes many voluntary and community sector organisations operate within; the situation would be less equitable if replacement and other costs were not made available.

The relationship between training and accreditation differed between organisations and depended on the extent and effectiveness of their support and review processes. It was clear that some Network members were using staff appraisal processes to draw up individual training plans with advisors that, in turn, enabled IAG workers to focus on the development of specific skills and so demonstrate individual competencies within the accreditation process.

Criticisms of the level of training offered generally came from experienced practitioners who were usually experts across a range of IAG work. Several organisations commented on the level at which the training was offered:

the level of the accredited courses was adequate but could have been better thought through, the 1:1 advice session in particular. [although] Training the Trainers was excellent.

It was felt that the training was aimed at newer workers and there was a gap for more experienced practitioners, a sense that their experience was being undervalued. However, in this initial phase, where the emphasis has been on developing a coherent and consistent IAG service and facilitating the development of skills across organisations, a mismatch is inevitable. However, it should be addressed in the next phase of the Project.

2.1.3 Accreditation process

Anna Melamed was appointed as consultant to support organisations in producing their portfolios for accreditation by the Guidance Council. Her summary of her support work and comments made during the interviews raise several important issues that need to be addressed in future plans:

- Decisions by organisations about going through the process of accreditation were often agreed at management level but the person who eventually carried out the process was often a practitioner. What this has usually meant in practice is that someone already busy with a full-time job has had to squeeze the process of compiling a portfolio of evidence into existing workloads.
- The process of matching existing policy documents against the Guidance Council requirements was seen as time consuming and bureaucratic, yet offered the opportunity to reflect upon and develop good practice. Several organisations felt that moving towards accreditation would benefit the organisation, enable them to tighten up procedures and ensure that the minimal level of advice given was good. However, one or two saw the process as additionally onerous, *Writing new standards seems like re-inventing the wheel.*
- Organisations aiming for accreditation but who were not yet delivering IAG services experienced problems in finding sufficient evidence – the solution was to use the organisation as a whole to provide evidence rather than the IAG work itself.
- Larger organisations found it easier to provide evidence where the standards were concerned with the running of an organisation. The smaller, more informal organisations found some of this more difficult yet demonstrated good advisor/client relationships and record keeping.

The response of network members during the interviews indicated a high level of regard for the support received from Anna Melamed during the process of accreditation. However, the Guidance Council training received severe criticism. *it was 'iffy', the trainer made things impenetrable and was arrogant; The Guidance Council trainers were useless.* Yet, the Guidance Council training events were also seen as helpful in raising members' awareness of what the standards were about. This apparent conflict suggests a pragmatic approach to the Guidance Council standards which had to be achieved as a condition of Network membership, alongside a critical appraisal of a training process that didn't appear to be offering new skills. *GC workshops were good- as a last resort*

The accreditation process received sustained criticism and is linked to earlier points about the difficulties encountered by several Community and Voluntary organisations in fitting training programmes around staffing needs. Even the larger organisations experienced these difficulties and offered similar criticisms. However, despite such critical views, most organisations involved with working towards accreditation have been prompted by the process to reflect upon their own (individual and collective) developmental needs. *The process of going for accreditation seems bureaucratic although the training was useful.* Several Network members acknowledged the importance of accreditation in raising the profile of the work carried out by the voluntary and Community sector:

The GAINS network has helped local voluntary and community organisations work towards nationally recognised standards and this has been important in terms of recognising the value of the work carried out often invisibly in this sector.

However, those organisations aiming at accreditation by March 2002 were not yet engaged with the process: *We're aiming for accreditation in Spring 2002 so no one has attended the training provided.*

The range of responses suggests an antipathy towards the Guidance Council that derives from the, sometimes onerous, accreditation process, *the main annoyance factor was the amount of paper work, jargon, terms, different folders that need to be cross referenced.* In contrast, the positive response towards the consultant suggests both gratitude for the guidance offered towards successful accreditation as well as respect for the clarity of advice and professional attitude displayed by her. The process was experienced as frustrating and remote whilst the consultant was able to develop a supportive dialogue with participants.

This ambivalence towards the accreditation process indicates a need to both make the process of achieving the Quality Standard more realisable and a need by the Guidance Council to acknowledge the range of IAG work and its contexts that exist across the voluntary and community sector – the Quality Standards seem more suited to those situations found within the statutory sector. The Consultant referred to this in part in her comments regarding mapping against the CAMPAG standards:

The Guidance Council needs to revise the requirements in this section, either by making it clearer how to tally other qualifications to the CAMPAG standards, or by setting the requirement much lower. At present, the requirements are too onerous [..]

2.2 Resources

2.2.1 Website

The website offers potential links to other useful sites as well as an opportunity to provide an electronic forum for network members to discuss ongoing issues. However, its usefulness during the current phase is questionable; only one organisation reported using it regularly and this was principally because the Information and Advice worker uses the web and therefore accessed the Network website routinely. The website was promoted in the Employment Service district newsletter even though there is no official access to the Internet within Job Centres either for staff or public.

Several organisations reported that they didn't use the website as it was not easily accessible although they had IT facilities available. One person felt that the Website could be updated more regularly, and in particular, it needed further development – *there was no action under Discussion Group and the Bulletin Board seemed to be inactive*. Those who didn't use the website were in the majority.

2.2.2 Directories

The Directories have been well received across the sectors represented in the Network and the information contained in them has been used by several organisations to update their own databases, *the Directories have been extremely useful and very valuable*. However, the wrong information was listed for one agency which led the agency coordinator to wonder if any of the other information was also incorrect. This was also picked up by the coordinator of a similar agency who stated that *the directories were available at all the [agency] sites –however I was hesitant about using them due to the mistakes that were in them*.

The Directories are clearly well used as sources for referral information, *they are useful to clients, a good reference document*, but also as a way of raising awareness of the voluntary and community sector. One comment about the Directory indicated their potential as a source of information for colleges and other statutory organisations about the voluntary and community sector: *The Directories would be more useful if they contained more information about local community and voluntary organisations and what they can offer clients*. The Directory of Learning Organisations was mentioned by one network member who hoped it would be available soon as it could potentially be very useful.

Those network members who didn't use the Directories were usually colleges whose referral systems were focused on educational provision; *We don't use the Directories as have other college nos. available on the enquiry desk. We Refer either in-house or to other colleges*. Others were employer-based where the information available in them was *not currently appropriate to the needs of the [employer] workforce*.

2.2.3 Newsletters

Voluntary and community sector organisations within the GAINS Network reported that they relied on the hardcopy newsletter for information, *it is useful – the ‘who is doing what’ info is good*. Other members commented that it *was well put together, just enough information to read it*. Members who don't routinely have access to local news felt the newsletter was useful for information about the locality. However, *although useful it is also infrequent*. Several organisations made a similar point, that the newsletters *might have more impact if they were produced more regularly*. One organisation reported receiving *enormous numbers of copies of the newsletter* but this may be related to their multi-agency nature.

Those organisations within the Network who are either not presently involved in the accreditation process, or for whom the Guidance council accreditation was seen as a duplication of processes they were following with other bodies, found the newsletter of little relevance. *The network newsletter was not very relevant- it is clear that achieving Guidance Council accreditation was the most important issue at the moment*. Despite this, one or two felt it *could be a useful source of information about the Voluntary and community sector*.

2.3 Network

2.3.1 Membership.

68% of network membership comes from the voluntary and community sector with representation from University Careers, the Careers Service, Employment Service, and the Further Education sector. The most productive outcome of the Project has been the way the Network membership has developed organically through existing members networking within their own sectors thus building links through a recognition of its usefulness by practitioners. The production of the Directory and inclusion of the GAINS Network list within the Voluntary Sector Directory was very effective in promoting the Network. These developments need to be consolidated.

The network is very important and should evolve in response to identified needs. However, it is important that the Network membership develops across sectors to represent the range of IAG providers in Brighton and Hove. A positive example of cross-sector links developing is the use, by Employment Service Business Managers, of the GAINS membership list to make contact with potential intermediary organisations. Previously the Employment Service would use organisations' leaflets to identify possible intermediary organisations. In addition, several agencies have put the GAINS membership list on their computer database as referral points .

2.3.2 Activity

There was an organic interaction developing between involvement in the training programme and interaction with other Network members through the Network meetings. As one reflection on possibilities for a future training programme indicated, *We will feed this back into the GAINS network.*

Links across the Network membership has resulted in more effective relationships between agencies and the beginning of skills sharing across the Network. One example is the training being offered by the IAG worker at GLAM to IAG outreach workers within the GAINS Network about issues of sexuality, ways of responding and advice about how referrals might be made. This is a positive development and an example of how the Network has grown organically with members beginning to share skills across organisations thus contributing to an improved level of service available to clients.

There were some criticisms and a lack of clarity about the purpose of the Network:

There has been no discussion [...] about what the Network's purpose is or what the government view is of IAG work nationally and how the local network fits in with it.

It is clear, however, that the network Coordinator has addressed the issue of the relationship of the Brighton and Hove Network to the national framework at key stages over the course of the project. The evolving nature of the network and changes in staffing, in both the statutory and voluntary and community sectors, has contributed to the lack of understanding and common purpose suggested by the above remarks. It is important to have a reason for involvement across sectors not just within sectors. *The focus of meetings is not always clear.* Meetings need to have a clearer focus and facilitate a sharing of each other's areas of expertise, identifying where there is common ground, where the work differs. It is difficult for such a diverse group to work together without a shared sense of the role of the network.

Changes to financing arrangements and the move to co-financing with ESF funds have caused some concern, particularly amongst the community and voluntary sector, due to a lack of information available. The transition to Sussex Careers as the lead body has also caused uncertainty and concern about what changes will mean:

There is concern about Sussex Careers taking over as they are perceived as being uninterested in the work of the voluntary and community sector because it is an area of work they seem to have little understanding or experience of.

This concern also focused on the potential conflict of interest between Sussex Careers becoming the Lead Body and its role as a major deliverer of IAG services, in competition with other Network members, and therefore the potential for Sussex Careers to enjoy an unfair advantage.

Concerns about funding amongst voluntary and community organisations in particular, arise from the erratic and often illogical and unthought through

nature of many initiatives. 'Joined up' government doesn't always filter down to improve the funding jigsaw that this sector has to operate within. Comments often referred to a waste of resources as well as their erratic and short term nature:

Short term funding is wasteful of human and other resources. Funding for longer periods is needed particularly for outreach projects. Outreach is not about throughput but about being there.

2.4 Outreach Projects

Sussex Careers

The Outreach project based in Hove Library and run by Sussex Careers *didn't quite work – the library didn't have the right catchment area, more promotion was needed. More consideration needs to be given to these issues in future.* There was no report produced for this project therefore there is no further information other than the comments above from interviews.

Opportunities

This outreach project was aimed at offering advice and guidance to lone parents and women returners. It therefore established a presence at Whitehawk Family Centre ; several people expressed an interest in doing training or seeking work but this was not a viable possibility for them at present. Some said the paper work put them off, others were reluctant to engage in any way with a process that was seen as formal or 'official'. The point was also made in the 'end of project' report that the estates involved had no central, neutral community centre space so making physical contact with potential clients in a neutral space was problematic. The report points to the short time frame for the project and that information and knowledge about the project's work was just beginning to circulate when the funding finished.

Workability

Workability offer guidance, training and support to people with disabilities and mental health needs. They also offer training to volunteers and other organisations in advising and supporting their client base. This outreach project aimed to establish a new outreach service for young people in partnership with Brighton and Hove Young People's Centre. Its focus was to develop and deliver a service for 'hard to reach' 16-25 year olds with disabilities and mental health needs. The final project report points out that it usually takes 2-4 months for a new service to become established and known amongst its potential client group. As a consequence of the short-term nature of the outreach contract the development work was just reaching fruition when the project had to close. However, the capacity of the Young People's Centre to address the needs of young people with disabilities and mental health problems has been increased through the staff and volunteer training that formed part of the outreach project. Although the project's initial outcomes were only partially fulfilled the project served to highlight a number of

important issues that should be acted on during the next phase of IAG development.

GLAM

For GLAM the outreach project offered the opportunity to make contact with organisations that might refer clients to GLAM's information and advice service as well as their training facilities. As a result, it now has much closer links with other Information and advice agencies. They have also established working relationships with other organisations that found out about them through the Network. From the other side, GLAM have more confidence about referring people on to other Information and advice agencies, as they now know the people and the organisation they are referring on to. Hopefully they would like the reverse to happen. Before both involvement in the IAG Network and developments through the outreach project, GLAM was more focused on training delivery with a minimal level of information and advice giving. The outreach project has increased the range of potential referral agencies and therefore their client base. The potential for increased publicity and ideas for a more extensive training programme have been the most evident outcomes from the outreach work.

2.5 Referral Systems

The Employment Service have their own referral procedures and are developing informal but written procedures with organisations that have overlaps with client groups. E.g. they sign an 'intermediary agreement' in which the Employment Service agrees with the intermediary that if, within 13 weeks of referral, they help a person into a job the Employment Service will be informed. For organisations funded through SRB money with a job outcome, this approach is of mutual benefit.

The complex relationship between guidance for work and learning and other guidance needs was highlighted by comments from a number of voluntary and community sector organisations that offer a multi-agency service. These agencies engage with their client group across a wide range of needs that emerge from real life situations, often at crisis points. The agencies respond to these crises by offering a 'joined up' service:

The problem is the [agency] is about holistic service delivery; guidance on employment is only one aspect of a range of services; it is multi-agency –there is the option to use a careers advice surgery but people who use the [agency] are disengaged and careers are probably not an immediate real possibility.

The issue of form filling kept arising in relation to the delivery of services to 'hard to reach' communities with specific needs. Although funding regimes require delivery data, it is important to ensure that systems operate from the principle of the needs of the client group using the service rather than insisting that delivery is determined by the needs of the system itself. It is also

important to acknowledge that organisations will use a range of referral systems which differ according to the criteria required by funding bodies.

Another outcome of the interviews was the tendency of many colleges and statutory education providers to refer either in-house or to other colleges. There is a patchwork of knowledge in this sector of the range of IAG provision offered by voluntary and community organisations.

Several Network members stated their uncertainty regarding the effectiveness of the Learn Direct links and would like a locally available site for Brighton and Hove Learning partnership with information for referral needs.

2.6 Support

The Business plan highlighted the critical role that both the Project coordinator and the consultant should play in the development of a cohesive local IAG Network.

The pivotal role of the current Network coordinator should be recognised; her work in promoting the Network has been one of the keys to its success to date. One member commented that *Support from the coordinator was very good; the Guidance Council however, gave them a tough time*. The Project Coordinator was variously described as: *very helpful, accessible, very efficient and effective*. In general the response from the interviews suggest that the Coordinator has effectively supported Network members and promoted the IAG Project proactively within Brighton and Hove.

Given the complexity of the accreditation process, the support of a training consultant who was efficient and approachable to facilitate the process was very necessary. Anna Melamed clearly offered this through her clear professional approach to the work:

Anna was really helpful in supporting [...]in putting her portfolio together and in the preparation for submission.

Other comments underline how important it was *to know that someone was available to be able to offer help*.

Client feedback data regarding the range and level of support experienced across the Network's member organisations is currently being processed by the Project Coordinator.

3. Recommendations:

3.1 Training and Accreditation

3.1.1 Background

Brighton and Hove IAG Project has recently produced a brief outlining joint activities with the IAG projects in E and W Sussex. Part of the joint work should be to ensure coherent progression routes from training programmes on to accredited courses – Training programmes need to be mutually supportive. The OCN accredited programme designed by the Working Together Project for Brighton and Hove IAG project should be mapped against existing provision in NVQs such as that offered through Lewes Tertiary College. This is not a difficult task and would ensure wider participation amongst smaller IAG providers and offer more coherent progression routes from the range of training programmes on offer across Sussex IAG Networks through the accreditation process. It is important to ensure that work across The 3 IAG Projects has coherent overlaps and that joint activity is effective.

Recommendations:

- 1) map OCN accreditation that has been developed against existing NVQ provision.
- 2) map coherent progression routes across training programmes; ensure progression routes are developed where gaps and inconsistencies are identified.

3.1.2 Training

There is a tendency amongst some Network members to leave statistical analysis to the Project Coordinator – this should not be allowed to continue. There is a need for skills development in this area, amongst smaller organisations in particular, who may have IT facilities but do not possess appropriate software or training in the handling and analysis of statistical data. This should be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Recommendation:

- 1) Training should be offered in the use of monitoring procedures and handling of statistics through use of software packages and appropriate use in analysis of data and reporting procedures.

There is also a lack of rigour within some organisations involved in the Network in separating equal opportunity data from personal information. This is essential in order to maintain coherence within both the Guidance Council accreditation framework and the Network's own Equal Opportunity policy. This should be addressed through training and a review of procedures.

Recommendation:

- 2) There should be training in effective use of referral and monitoring systems with a particular focus on the operation of the Network's Equal Opportunity policy.

The training programme requires an initial planning phase involving a consultation process amongst current Network members. This would aim to identify gaps in organisations' training needs and respond to development needs and the requirements of the accreditation process. Although accreditation is the overall aim of the IAG project in line with DfEE guidelines, the specific needs of organisations will require a range of training responses. The reflection and appraisal process necessary in reviews of progress should be used to develop short, medium, and long-term goals for each member organisation and the network as a whole. The Network should take responsibility for developing a programme of training and events in response to emerging needs. By using the Network meetings as part of this process, the changing needs for IAG training should more easily be identified and mapped across the range of organisations involved. This approach is both evaluative and developmental, allowing the skills within the Network to be valued positively and gaps identified without raising a sense of inadequacy and defensiveness.

Recommendations:

- 3) Carry out a skills audit of practitioners across the Network.
- 4) Use the skills audit to develop short, medium and long term development goals for the Network.
- 5) Through this audit identify areas of expertise and use this as a resource in training and skills sharing. Acknowledge skilled practitioners as experts in their area of practice and draw upon their experience by using them as co-trainers.
- 6) Set aside time at Network meetings to carry out periodic reviews of the training process to date. Use this opportunity to identify the priorities for the next phase of development.
- 7) An outline programme should be drawn up for the autumn with dates identified but flexibility retained. This will allow changes to the content of the programme to reflect current and emerging training needs within the Network.

3.1.3 Accreditation

The Project business plan refers to the need to assist smaller, voluntary providers with the cost of accreditation through IAG funds as their limited funding will not allow additional budget allocations for this purpose.(p 26). This is in line with the DfEE specifications. Part of this role could be delivered

by training providers continuing to offer accreditation at subsidised rates; if providers charge the full market rate to IAG Networks this will limit the effectiveness of such provision in contributing to the raising of quality standards across Networks. The cost of the NVQ course at Lewes Tertiary College is due to increase 3 fold in 2001/2. Market costs will make it less likely that IAG Projects will be able to raise skills level as effectively. It will also discriminate against the voluntary and community sector and smaller organisations that do not have access to funds to meet this level of cost. The result could be a training budget that struggles to meet the requirements of the Business Plan (Themes 1,2,3 and 4).

Recommendation:

- 1) The Lead Body and Executive Group should ensure that coherent progression pathways and affordable training programmes are made available to all Network members.

Comments from Network members not yet engaged with the accreditation process, but with a choice of accreditation bodies due to the nature of their work, demonstrate a lack of clarity in their knowledge about the mapping process. Both AGCAS and the Guidance Council standards are mapped against each other. If they choose one accreditation route they are able to cross-reference their evidence against the other set of standards. There is a lack of clarity about the support Brighton and Hove IAG Project is able to offer in working towards the Guidance Council quality standards.

Recommendations:

- 2) The Network Coordinator needs to address this lack of clarity in the next phase of the Project.
- 3) The Executive Group should ensure that training guidelines are produced, as a matter of priority, which map possible routes towards accreditation. This would enable those Network members who have a range of accreditation bodies to choose from, due to the nature of their work, to be clear about the routes open to them.
- 4) An element of these guidelines should include commentary by members having experienced the process.
- 5) This commentary should inform feedback to the Guidance Council about difficulties encountered and potential areas for change which the Guidance Council need to address.

The lack of consideration within organisations regarding the level of support required during the accreditation process was a recurring issue for those allocated the job of compiling a portfolio of evidence. Organisations who have achieved accreditation could offer some support about the process to those going through accreditation in 2002 – this is a more cooperative approach.

Recommendations:

- 6) Organisations intending to develop portfolios for accreditation need to consider more carefully who should be asked to take responsibility for the task. Sufficient consultation before undertaking the task and time and support during the process should be ensured.
- 7) Explore accreditation support mechanisms available in larger organisations to identify possible models that could be developed across the Network, where appropriate.

3.2 Resources**3.2.1 Website**

The website is currently static and is not fulfilling any useful purpose for most of the network. It needs some focused attention in order to establish it as a dynamic resource that is able to both represent the Network's range of work and be responsive to changes.

Recommendations:

- 1) Develop an 'Assessment of use' questionnaire to identify the facilities available to Network members in order to access the network website; who might use it, when, how often; what would Network members like to see on the website; how would they use the website?
- 2) Appoint a Website developer to work in consultation with the Coordinator and Network members to re-work the current site as soon as possible.
- 3) The Project Coordinator to take responsibility for moderating and ensure the site is updated regularly, at least monthly.

3.2.2 Directories

The Directories have proved to be a well-regarded and useful resource acknowledged by Network members across sectors. However, they need to develop in order to continue their usefulness during the next phase of the Project. The directories should not remain as contact lists only and the suggestions to incorporate information about organisations and the range of services available should be considered.

Recommendations:

- 1) Address the issue of accuracy of information.
- 2) Involve Network members in developing entries for the next Directory that give additional information regarding the type of organisation, their client base and the range of services offered.

- 3) Ensure that the Directory of Learning Organisations is accurate and is circulated as soon as possible.

3.2.3 Newsletters

The newsletter needs to become a regular source of news and information. By moving the newsletter beyond reporting of the accreditation process and incorporating more coverage of material that consolidates the Network the newsletter should become established as a continuing source of current information. It should also be responsive to the changing needs and preoccupations of the Network.

Recommendations:

- 1) Produce the Newsletter regularly so that users know when to expect it.
- 2) Establish a regular deadline and ensure Network members submit short news items about current projects and future plans.
- 3) Explore the possibility of a co-editing rota with the Network coordinator working with Network members.
- 4) Review and update the circulation list to check for duplication of sites and numbers of copies circulated, as well as extending the circulation list.

3.3 Network

At present, information about the Network is channelled through the Coordinator; there is a need to establish a system that is not reliant on an individual and which encourages GAINS members to be more proactive in distributing information between organisations and sectors. It is also important to periodically review the purpose and direction of the Network and its relationship to the national agenda. The development of more statutory providers delivering Information and advice services in partnership with voluntary and community sector organisations should be explored in the next phase of the Project. This would be beneficial to both sectors and to potential clients.

Recommendations:

- 1) Develop focused Network events to promote the Network within and between different sectors and to inform potential future partnerships; the voluntary and community sector could present the range of their provision for the statutory sector, education providers could outline the IAG provision within their sector and the Employment and Careers service could present their work.
- 2) Use these activities to develop greater diversity in approaches to the delivery of IAG services.

One factor that could potentially make the development of this diversity more problematic is the dual role played by Sussex Careers as both Lead Body and a major deliverer & contractor of IAG services.

Recommendation:

- 3) The potential for a conflict of interest between Sussex Careers acting as Lead Body whilst also being a major deliverer of IAG services should be addressed by the Executive Group.

Some organisations saw the accreditation process that is a requirement of membership being forced upon them by proposed changes in funding regimes; without achieving the Guidance Council quality standard they would effectively be removed from the funding cycle. This has caused major resentment and a sense that the statutory bodies who have responsibility for overseeing these developments are imposing funding regimes upon the voluntary and community sector that are ill judged and inappropriate; small organisations feel both squeezed and threatened in the bidding process. Financial regimes deriving their structure from the statutory sector are not always entirely appropriate for voluntary and community sector organisations. Apprehension about the consequences of joining particular funding streams could skew the way some Voluntary and community sector services will put in future bids. The Executive group needs to be sensitive to these issues and carry out consultation with organisations from the voluntary and community sector in order to establish and continue meaningful dialogue. Services will not improve if organisations see the process as one-sided. It is useful to remember that the Learning and Skills Council has a wider remit, with goals related to widening participation.

Recommendations:

- 4) Regular opportunities for discussion of issues and concerns needs to be built into a consultation and review process within the Network between the Lead Body, Executive group and Network members.

3.4 Outreach Projects

General lessons:

The outreach project time frame of 4 months for initial work, setting up, review and reporting was too short to be useful –it led to frustration over lack of time to produce any demonstrable outcomes. Outreach projects, particularly those aimed at contacting marginalized groups, need a longer period of time to carry out initial research, develop networks, develop continuing support mechanisms and establish services. Short time frames only serve to cause frustration and waste resources, material and human.

Outreach projects are useful and valuable in reaching and engaging people on the 'borders', while the bulk of this work is delivered through the non-statutory sector and It is therefore important to avoid duplication: *Cross-*

agency work is essential –we can't achieve outcomes if we don't cooperate across agencies and work together. Overall, the key objective should be to demonstrate to learners the positive difference the IAG projects are making. There is therefore a need to develop a range of services appropriate to learners' needs across the whole range of interest groups, linking with other services and initiatives.

Recommendations:

- 1) Targets should be lower and more realistic when developing new services for hard to reach communities.
- 2) Ensure sufficient initial research is undertaken before starting new outreach projects aimed at marginal groups.
- 3) avoid duplication of effort through the development of cross-agency projects to reach marginal communities.
- 4) Funding for future outreach projects should be provided over a much longer period than 4 months.

3.5 Referral and Monitoring Systems.

In the DfEE specifications, there was a recognition that local partnerships were important as they were perceived as being able to provide more local knowledge about existing services and therefore knew what the current situation was and where the gaps might be. Local referral points have been shown to be more clearly focussed and meet the needs of local people more directly and appropriately. Although a commitment to quality is vital, it can manifest itself in different ways. Measurement of quality should focus on the degree to which a specific need is met and the variety of responses, not on absolutes. Communities of interest can be rendered invisible by some monitoring criteria. There is a need for consultation with Network members, in all sectors, before new monitoring forms and procedures are agreed.

Recommendations:

- 1) The Executive Group should establish a periodic consultation process focusing on the effectiveness of monitoring procedures and issues arising from their operation.
- 2) The Executive Group should respond to these consultations through annual reviews of referral and monitoring systems, with the possibility of change built into the review process.
- 3) The Executive Group should clarify with the Network membership the range of monitoring information needed and explain why it is needed.

- 4) This periodic consultation process with Network members should ensure that local communities, of both interest and geographic location, are rendered visible by the monitoring criteria being used.

The direction of referrals as well as their volume should be addressed in the next phase of the Project. This should be linked to a process of knowledge and awareness raising across the Network between the different sectors as discussed in 3.3

- 5) Monitoring of the direction of referrals should be linked to information sharing regarding the client base and nature of IAG agencies involved in the Brighton and Hove Network. This could be done on a 3 monthly basis.

It is important to monitor members' experiences and concerns about referrals through Learn Direct in order to offer feedback about potential changes and developments in local relationships with the central 'hub'.

- 6) Feedback should be sought from Network members on links and referrals to and from Learn Direct.

3.6 Support

The Project Coordinator currently has no dedicated administrative support. As the Network develops it will become increasingly difficult for the coordinator to administer effectively as well as develop and promote the Network.

Recommendations:

- 1) A project administrator should be appointed to take responsibility for routine administration, such as the maintenance of membership lists, organisation of network meetings, the circulation of Directories, Newsletters and the arrangements for training events as well as routine collation of data.
- 2) The Project coordinator's role should be re-focused on consolidation and growth of the Network, ensuring delivery of IAG services across the Network, the facilitation of consultation processes with members and developmental work.

The accreditation process can be complicated and confusing – a training consultant needs to be appointed to facilitate this aspect of the work and act as liaison between those organisations working towards accreditation and the Guidance Council.

Recommendations:

- 3) A training consultant should be appointed as soon as possible to facilitate the next stage of the accreditation process.
- 4) The training consultant should have additional responsibility for coordination across the range of training and accreditation provision and to offer guidance on progression pathways.

4 Conclusions:

This evaluation process has generally confirmed existing expectations regarding the relationship between the voluntary and community sector and statutory organisations. However, it has also raised issues of importance about those relationships. This final section summarises those concerns.

Clear differences of perception about others' roles have emerged between institutional IAG providers and those in the voluntary and community sector. Within the Voluntary and community sector, there are those organisations that are local branches of national networks that therefore have a common working framework and training culture. Others that are more locally based have a more problematic relationship with statutory bodies and funders.

There is recognition that IAG doesn't always operate in neat boxes isolated from other types of support. Local research carried out for the IAG project has shown that most information and advice that actually enables adults to access learning and jobs usually is part of a package of general support available in diverse settings where people actually are. Effective IAG takes place as part of vocational training, in adult and community education centres, outreach projects, community development, welfare rights work and housing advice rather than simply in dedicated advice centres

For many organisations in the voluntary and community sector the process of questioning the ways of offering advice and guidance, precipitated by the training and accreditation process, has provided an opportunity to identify and clarify how they work. It has also prompted many to ask 'what are we doing here and why?' The issues emerging from this questioning process have been predominantly about the ways in which changes in funding criteria and their impact on service delivery can, in many instances, obscure the original reason for the existence of many voluntary and community organisations –to reach people in specific marginalized geographic or interest communities.

Rather than attempt to make organisations from the voluntary and community sector fit into models of delivery developed within the statutory sector, the Learning Partnership and the Learning and Skills Council have to recognise the value of this sector in reaching 'hard to reach' communities' and develop flexible approaches to working with the sector without compromising the quality of services. By understanding and responding to the difficulties experienced by the voluntary and community sector, arising in the main from short term funding and its consequent insecurities and difficulties with planning cycles, funding bodies should become more enabling. This in turn will open up opportunities to offer appropriate services to marginalized communities in ways that have not been viable in the past.

The opportunity exists in the present fluid situation, as new structures emerge but still retain flexibility, for policy decisions to be made that recognise the

need for diversity of delivery and where outcomes are meaningful to the communities of interest rather than merely measurable by quantifiable criteria. The two are not necessarily incompatible, but there needs to be a balance between the need for hard outputs in situations where these might damage equality of opportunity and where a more qualitative, value-added assessment of outcomes might be more usefully employed by illustrating the positive changes in people's lives.

It is important for the Lead Body and Executive Group to evaluate their own work and critique the way they communicate and involve Network members in the current work and development of the IAG Network. It is clear that many of the uncertainties and concerns voiced during this evaluation process are the result of a perceived lack of meaningful and equal dialogue between the Executive group members and the IAG Network – in drawing up future strategy it is important that these issues are addressed actively in order that the development of IAG in Brighton and Hove, and across Sussex, is as effective as possible and draws upon the skills and expertise of its constituent members equally. This is also the only effective way of ensuring communities, of both interest and geographic location, have their advice and guidance needs met within the context of widening participation and inclusion through access to meaningful learning opportunities and work prospects.

Most of the responses received during this evaluation related to issues of consultation and lack of clarity or just not knowing what and how IAG services in Brighton and Hove would be organised, delivered, and funded in the next phase of development. The majority of recommendations relate to improved information sharing and the development of a more open dialogue with Network members in order that the Network is seen as owned by the member organisations and not seen as just a structure in place to administer systems of funding and quality control. Whilst these aspects are an essential part of the developing IAG service in Brighton and Hove, they should not dominate at the expense of effective dialogue and participation. Only through the development and maintenance of effective communication, will exciting and innovative practice continue to evolve to inform the work of the whole network.

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