

Skills, Work and Lifelong Learning: The Role of Guidance

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A partnership between



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Within the UK, much attention has been given to focusing on the skills of the workforce and identifying adult skill shortages within traditional, new, and evolving economies. An in-depth analysis of labour market demands and skill shortages is presented which provides strong evidence that in order to ensure the future success of the UK economy, a significant increase in the number of adults engaged in learning is crucial.

It is suggested that if we are to persuade more adults to participate in productive work-related learning, help them make appropriate choices relative to their interests and capabilities, and support them to persist and succeed, this will require a wide set of capabilities within future adult guidance provision. This has significant implications for the development of adult guidance services in the UK, and offers real challenges to policy-makers and practitioners to find innovative ways of inspiring and motivating individuals and employers to invest in learning and personal development.

The Centre for Guidance Studies was created in 1998 by the University of Derby and five careers service companies (the Careers Consortium (East Midlands) Ltd.). The centre aims to bridge the gap between guidance theory and practice. It supports and connects guidance practitioners, policy-makers and researchers through research activities and learning opportunities; and by providing access to resources related to guidance and lifelong learning.

CeGS aims to:

- conduct and encourage research in to guidance policies and practice;
- develop innovative strategies for guidance in support of lifelong learning;
- provide resources to support guidance practice across all education, community and employment sectors.

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I was both surprised and delighted to be invited to give the 2001 CeGS Annual Lecture, in significant part because those invited to give the previous lectures were either experts from the guidance sector or policy-makers talking about developments in, and the future of, careers education and guidance. I begin this talk therefore with a degree of trepidation, and a need to warn the receiver in advance that this talk will not be informed by a deep knowledge of the history of careers advice and guidance, nor by a sophisticated analysis of the theory of guidance, nor by a detailed scrutiny of the evolution of the careers profession within the politics of education and training.

My approach this evening is, instead, that of a stakeholder, or partner in need, dependent upon the reach and quality of careers provision for my own customers, but not an expert in the theory and practice of guidance. I come therefore as an enthusiastic amateur supporter, looking in from outside – a critical, not unthinking and I hope normally constructive, member of your fan club. I will attempt, therefore, to make up for what I lack in depth and knowledge through enthusiasm and the strategic value of an external perspective.

When David Blunkett first invited me to chair the National Skills Task Force, he insisted that we took an unashamedly economic focus. We were to concentrate on the skills of the workforce within the evolving needs of the UK economy, and the adequacy of the post-16 education and training system in anticipating and meeting these. We were not investigating the value of learning per se (though we recognised it); we were not assessing the adequacy of our system of learning for broader life and leisure.

The Economic and Social Context

On beginning our initial analysis, we realised that the UK had a choice. The pace of global economic and technological change, whilst it appeared as an economic and technological raging torrent which carried all before it, in fact left room for countries to make choices about the route they would follow. Far from being out of control, in this flood of change, the developed countries in particular had oars and a rudder, they could make choices about the type of economy they wished to become, but those choices required positive and determined action as the path of least resistance would almost certainly not serve us well.

In our first report, therefore, we asserted our choice for economic direction, and invited our stakeholders

to challenge us. “At the centre of [the current economic] transformation,” the Task Force wrote, “lies the progression from the industrial society, based at its heart upon the physical capital of land, plant and machinery, to an information and knowledge based society built upon intellectual capital, the knowledge, imagination and creativity of our people. To compete effectively on the world stage, employers need access to the best educated and trained workforce; to compete effectively in a dynamic labour market, individuals must acquire the necessary skills.”¹

The choice with which the UK was (and still is) faced was whether we rose to that challenge to become a high skill, high value added economy, or whether we ‘settled’ for what we described as a ‘low skill equilibrium’ – producing low value-added products and services from a lower skills base.



In our view, the choice was clear and unequivocal. Whilst a low skill equilibrium “may be an acceptable option for a small number of firms or in declining sectors, it is totally unacceptable and would be economically fatal to adopt such a philosophy for the economy as a whole.” Positively, (and thankfully), virtually all our respondents agreed with us.

But what skills? What occupations would grow, what decline? How equipped were we to meet those needs? How could we ensure we did?

I think there has been much scepticism in careers guidance services over the extent to which skills projections or forecasts are either accurate or useful. One of the first pieces of work the Skills Task Force undertook was an international conference on skills forecasting, investigating with colleagues from Europe, the Americas and Australasia the extent to which skills projections could be relied upon to reasonably inform planning.

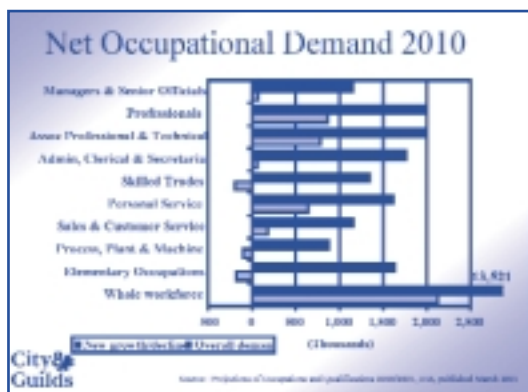
The answer was clear-cut. Whilst no skills forecasts

¹ Towards a National Skills Agenda: First Report of the National Skills Task Force, DfEE 1998, para 2.4

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could be completely reliable, modern techniques developed during the previous decade had proved far more accurate than systems used in the 1970s and 1980s, and did provide a reasonably reliable and useful tool for planning.

However, most such analyses in the UK had tended only to report upon 'new' demand – how the actual growth and decline in the labour market would be constituted – rather than the overall labour market as a whole which would include both new demand plus what is called 'replacement' demand, the impact of retirement, mortality, and career change. Slide 2 below demonstrates this through the latest data from the Institute for Employment Research released earlier this year.



A number of significant messages can be derived from this data. Firstly, we expect overall employment to increase by around 8% or around 2.2 million new jobs by 2010. Employment levels in the UK (the percentage of adults of working age who are economically active) are currently running at about 75% for males, and 70% for females (this latter being the third highest proportion in the world). The 8% employment growth will increase employment levels to almost 80% for both genders, as the growth in female employment is forecast to be double that of males.

Secondly, the youth cohort in the UK has been declining since the mid-1980s and will grow only marginally over the next decade. Whilst the number of jobs in the labour market will grow by 2.2 million, the number of young people aged 16-25 will increase by less than one third of that figure. In other words, most of the new jobs in the next ten years will have to be filled by adults already of working age.

Adult Skills and Shortages

Yet widely recognised data on the skills of the current population of working age confirm that

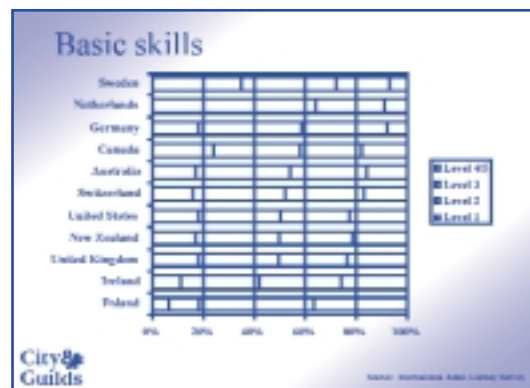
Britain continues to suffer from a trailing edge of under-achievement in learning and qualifications amongst our adults of working age.



At the same time, changes in the balance of occupations, and rising skill needs within occupations, are anticipated to alter the labour market to the point where, by 2010 around 65% of jobs will require Level 3 skills, and 90% of jobs are likely to require Level 2.

The Moser Report² also reminded us that one of the most significant barriers to raising the skill levels of adults will be the low capability in literacy and numeracy demonstrated by too many adults in the UK. Whilst recent innovations in primary education are making significant headway in raising literacy and numeracy levels amongst children, fifty years of elitist education has taken its toll on many adults whom the system has fundamentally failed.

Recent research and publications have sought to point out that many of the adults considered to have poor basic skills have adapted to their situation and perform well in the occupations or employers of their choice, which is of course true. But such individuals are poorly equipped to cope with change, and often unable to participate successfully in further training and development.



² 'A Fresh Start' (The Moser Report), Basic Skills Agency, 1998

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Thirdly, the figures shown in Slide 2 for overall demand belie many of the messages that public opinion has been communicating over the last decade, and demonstrate why relying on 'new demand' data to understand the changing labour market is inadequate. Despite the anticipated decline in skilled trades jobs over the next 10 years, there will still be 150,000 more vacancies over the next ten years than in sales and customer service, and the same number more than vacancies for managers; associate professionals and technical staff vacancies, typically Level 3 or higher, will be virtually the same as graduate professionals; despite the drop in numbers, there will still be 850,000 process, plant and machine operative job vacancies, and around 1.6 million unskilled opportunities, to be filled in the same period.

Decline in job volumes doesn't mean that there is no future in those occupations – merely that the balance of jobs in society is changing. Indeed, the detailed analysis the Task Force undertook suggested that retirement from an older workforce, combined with low levels of enrolments by young people in such learning programmes, would lead to one of the most major skills challenges the UK will face – a shortage in skilled trades occupations of over 800,000 by 2010.

These long-term figures are supported by comprehensive medium-term data from employers. Published in September 2001 was the second major employer survey on skills – a follow-up to the first which was commissioned by the Skills Task Force.

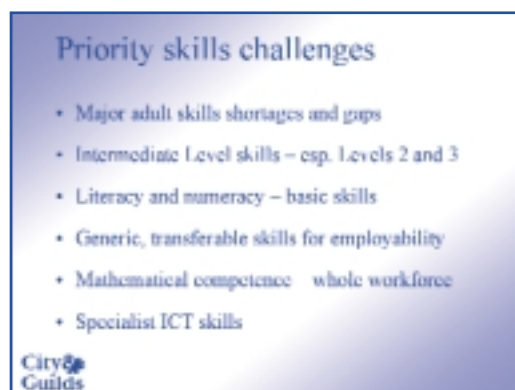


This not only confirmed skilled trades as the current priority skills shortage for employers, but highlights associate professional and technical occupations as the second.

Priority Skills Challenges

It was the combination of these influences – rising

skills demands, significant employment growth, increasing demographic dependency on adults for future vacancies, a significant trailing edge of low-skilled adults, and increasing skills shortages at intermediate levels (primarily Levels 2 and 3) in skilled trades and associate and professional qualifications – that led the Task Force to identify the following as the priority skills challenges facing the UK over the next decade.



The recently completed report on Workforce Development by the Performance and Innovation Unit of the Cabinet Office³ reached similar conclusions, and endorsed the Task Force analysis and many of its key proposals.

I hope the analysis so far provides a sufficient justification for my decision to focus for the remainder of this paper on the implication of the first three challenges for the education and training system, and the role of guidance for adults within this.

Engaging Individuals

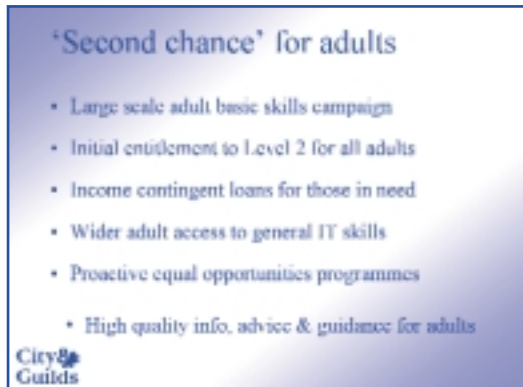
The scale of the adult skills challenge must not be underestimated. 35% of adults of working age, over 8 million people, lack formal qualifications at Level 2, a key 'passport' to future employment opportunity; 20-25% or 5-6 million people may well lack the necessary basic skills to successfully attain such a passport. This represents a fundamental failure of the education and training system to provide equity of opportunity to those individuals, and has been a significant contributor to social exclusion.

It is essential that the starting point for reform be an acknowledgement of that failure by the state, and the acceptance that society owes a 'second chance' to those adults. Government must ensure that any adults at this level, who seek to improve their skills and advance their career opportunities, will be faced

³ In Demand: Adult Skills for the 21st Century, Performance & Innovation Unit, Cabinet Office, November 2001

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with an education and training system offering minimal policy and funding barriers to access.



The Basic Skills Support Unit, working with the Learning and Skills Council, is driving forward on a programme of work to promote participation and attainment in basic skills amongst adults, including free access to all such courses. Job Centre Plus programmes are building in basic skills training for all unemployed clients who require it.

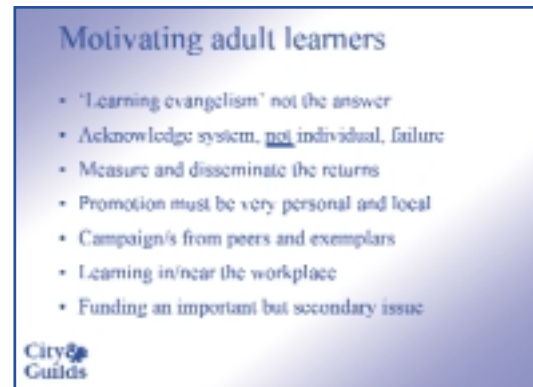
Pressure is growing on the government to provide a full entitlement for every adult to fully funded learning programmes to attain their first Level 2 qualification. The CBI and TUC joined forces in November 2001 to support the original Task Force proposal, and submitted such a recommendation directly to the Chancellor, as did the Performance and Innovation Unit report on Workforce Development.

In his Pre-Budget Report, the Chancellor recently confirmed the government's intention to explore an adult entitlement through an initial investment of £40 million in pilot projects from September 2002⁴. However, the scale of annual investment required to make such an entitlement universal is likely to be at least 10 times this level, particularly if full learner support is to be provided, in addition to a pro-active 'outreach' programme to ensure equal opportunity across both gender and ethnicity.

At the heart of any such programme must lie a high quality and comprehensive information, advice and guidance system for adults, tailored to meet the needs of this client group (discussed in more detail below), but even this will not be sufficient.

The National Adult Learning Survey⁵ found that a large proportion of low-skilled adults, and particularly those who have been away from learning for more than ten years, are highly reluctant to participate in learning, with many indicating a

lack in confidence, time or interest. Whilst opening up access to learning through entitlements, encouragement, advice and support are essential supply-side measures, we will not succeed unless we also address what is in many ways a more intractable problem – motivating low-skilled adults to seek formal learning opportunities.



Evidence from a range of large and small-scale projects⁶ which have succeeded in persuading adults to re-engage in learning suggest that the following elements contribute most markedly to that success:

- successful promotion is most effective when close to the community or workplace;
- the best encouragement comes from friends, peers, recognised exemplars or trusted mentors, not learning evangelists;
- practical evidence of the economic return for the time spent in learning adds significant value;
- funding is secondary to motivation – it is a necessary but not sufficient condition.

This research carries significant messages for adult information, advice and guidance services which I will return to later – but a question that I will pose at this point is “What role can and should careers services for adults be playing in the motivation of the reluctant adult learner?”.

Even where funding and resources are addressed, and the individual adult is motivated and guided to participate in work-related learning, inflexibility of provision can still provide a substantial barrier to participation.

Recent major research⁷ confirmed the increasing trend for employers to move away from narrow occupational classifications for many employees towards generic job titles against customised skill sets, often mixing occupationally specific skills with IT, management, project management, marketing, customer care or other cross-cutting skills.

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Flexible learning

- Mixed skill sets, including IT & management
- Incorporating informal and personal learning
- Flexible by time, pace, place and learning style
- Particularly at or near the workplace
- Bite-size – but appropriately!
- Unintegrated qualifications – mix and match capacity
- e-Learning via community & workplace

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At the same time, demands of employment, home, family and leisure mean that individuals want to gain recognition for their prior learning and experience, fit learning in with the other demands upon them, mix and match modules and units over time for credit towards qualifications, and access learning at a time, pace and place of their choosing, rather than the choosing of the learning provider.

The implication for adult guidance service providers is that they will require a deep understanding of a far more complex education and training provision than currently exists. There is much evidence from Further Education Colleges and projects like *learnirect* that the learning supply side is beginning to respond to these demands – it is far less clear that careers providers have recognised and are responding to them.

Engaging Employers

Before turning to discuss information advice and guidance services for adults in more depth, there is one more ‘leg’ of the system that needs to be examined. The state, individuals and learning providers all play a part in stimulating and supporting adult demand, but the needs, role and contribution of employers are still paramount. So let me look at these in a little more detail.

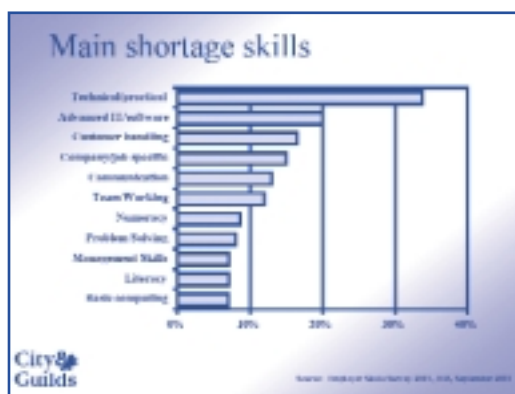
Firstly, in which sectors are the major skills shortages appearing?



Whilst Business Services is the sector facing the highest levels of skills shortages, this primarily reflects the UK element of what is a world-wide shortfall in IT skills, in which there is already growing UK investment in both promotion and learning provision (e.g. 80% of all provision via *learnirect* is in IT; the substantial Job Centre Plus Ambition: IT project).

This is not the case in the next four most significant skills shortage sectors – manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade, health and social care, and construction – where inaccurate perceptions about opportunities in the sectors, and far lower levels of investment, are but two contributing factors in a significant decline over time in enrolments in Further Education.

Misconceptions also exist about the types of skills in short supply. Over the last five years, there has been an important and welcome recognition of the value of transferable employment skills through the new emphasis on the ‘Key Skills’. However, there are signs recently that education and training providers, and many careers service providers, believe that generic transferable skills are all that individuals require for successful employment. The facts belie such a perception.



The recent Employer Skills Survey reveals that whilst employers are reporting some shortages relating to the Key Skills, the four major types of skills in short supply are the technical and practical skills of the occupation, advanced IT practitioner skills, customer handling and company or job specific skills.

Those providing guidance to adults must have access to detailed and comprehensive information on sectoral/occupational opportunity as well as clarity on evolving skills needs. Whilst it may be reasonable for young people to allow for a substantial degree of serendipity in their future

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career development, this is much less the case for an older worker with perhaps less than 20, or even 10, years of their working life in front of them. Their horizon is far more limited, and their desire for career certainty and focus far stronger.

The key to this knowledge is to ensure there is a far greater engagement with employers by those providing information, advice and guidance, both to young people and adults. Work is already underway on many of the key recommendations by the Skills Task Force.

Major improvements are in hand on elements of a more effective and comprehensive labour market information system through an enhanced Labour Force Survey, the new Projections on Occupations and Qualifications, and the two Employer Skills Surveys in 2000 and 2001. The challenge now will be to integrate such information into a coherent system which can cascade and/or disaggregate data to sectoral, regional and ideally sub-regional levels.

Such a system also needs to be fed by more detailed analysis and foresight on sectoral and industry trends which will be the responsibility of the new Sector Skills Councils announced by the Department for Education and Skills on 17 October 2001.

Engaging employers

- New labour market information system
- Strengthened NTOs with larger role
 - now Sector Skills Councils (SSCs)
- Skills Foresight programmes in each SSC
- Sector workforce development strategies by SSCs
- Training & best practice on work organisation
- Urgent ICT campaign and skills programme

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At the UK level, the Sector Skills Councils should be able to provide far better strategic guidance on skills and training to employers in their sectors than the smaller and less well resourced National Training Organisations (NTOs); their extended responsibilities will also include providing more comprehensive information and support to training providers and careers guidance services.

Changes in work organisation by employers to incorporate modern work practices such as multi-skilling, team-working, devolving decision making, and benchmarking, together with the transformations wrought by information and communication

technology, are known to have a substantial impact on businesses provision of training for all staff. The Small Business Service has a substantive programme of work with smaller firms to support their adoption of such beneficial working practices.

But high level work by groups like Sector Skills Councils will not be sufficient to produce the impact on employers that addressing our major skills gaps will require. The bulk of the challenge faced in the UK is amongst the lowest skilled and in the smaller firms as Slide 14 confirms.

There is a marked inequity of access to continuing training and development correlating clearly with prior learning attainment. Those who already have the highest levels of prior learning are those in whom employers invest the most; more disturbing is the dramatic drop on access to training for those below Level 2.

At the same time, the regularity and frequency of training, indeed even the likelihood of provision, by firms with less than 25 employees is less than half that of all firms with more than 25. Yet firms with less than 25 employees account for around 21% of the workforce, or around 5 million individuals overall.



Understanding the characteristics of such firms, together with the reasons underlying their low investment in training, provides many pointers to winning their commitment to training. Firstly, detailed examination of the Labour Force Survey reveals that a surprisingly high proportion (31%) of small business owner-managers themselves have no formal qualifications equivalent to Level 2. In other words, many of the key decision makers in smaller firms suffer from the same disadvantage as their employees, and do not themselves have a positive perception of the value of training and development.

A British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) survey ⁸ in

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1999 identified that “only 21% of businesses with under 50 employees have a dedicated personnel resource, compared with 71% of businesses that employ 50 or more.” Such a resource is commonly the only source of advice on training and development typically available in a small firm.

BCC and the Federation of Small Business (FSB) have also estimated that of the order of 80% of smaller firms are located in local ‘clusters’ – business parks, industrial estates and the high street – as well as, in some cases, supply chains. In other words, they can be accessed in bounded geographical groups through common facilities and shared investment.

Reaching smaller firms

- Smaller firms often lack expertise, not will
 - 31% of owner/managers have sub-level 2 skills,
 - 80% of SMEs have no internal training capability, but
 - 80% located in local ‘clusters’
- Clear messages & evidence on benefits
- Supply chain or cluster networks, large to small
- Small firms incentive/s (e.g. tax credits)
- Partnerships with suppliers

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It is this combination of features that almost certainly explains the significant success of a large number of local projects conducted by TECs with smaller firms during 1996-1997. Both sets of projects were designed to explore innovative approaches to increasing the investment in training by such businesses, and both succeeded to a significant extent.

The first⁹ sought to provide a nominated manager or key employee in small firms with training and support to enable them to play the leading role in the business for staff training and development. The project was rated by the CBI as one of the most successful training initiatives ever conducted with small firms.

The second programme, entitled Skills Challenge, provided TECs with local initiative funding for projects designed to substantially increase the involvement of small firm employees in lifelong learning and workforce development. Skills Challenge funded a number of projects which linked together small firms in collaborative groups – geographical and supply chain – to operate highly successful local employee development schemes similar in concept to the well-known Ford EDAP programme.¹⁰

These projects demonstrated that providing firms with clear messages on the benefits of training, working with them in groups to achieve economies of scale and/or synergy of outcome, and providing relatively low cost incentives can dramatically increase small firm and employee commitment to training.

The Chancellor’s announcement in his Pre-Budget Report that he was examining tax incentives for small firms investing in workforce development, and would fund pilots in 2002, was the first positive step in this direction since the original Task Force proposal to this effect in 1999.

The important message for adult guidance from this work is that small firms also need information, advice and guidance on occupational change and training – and that in many cases, the individual owner-manager may themselves be a critical client for personal guidance and development.

Implications for Adult Guidance

I want now to discuss the impact of my analysis on the development of adult guidance provision in the UK, including the capabilities that should be available through such a service, and then to draw out a number of policy implications that may well not sit comfortably with the current thinking in England.

Capacities in adult guidance

- Encouragement and motivation of adults
- Labour market knowledge relevant to adults
- Assessment of prior learning and experience
- New diagnostic tools for skills & capabilities
- Assessing the returns to learning
- Understanding of flexible learning provision
- Career planning & management
- Support for employers, especially SMEs

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The overriding conclusion from this analysis is that the scale of adult participation in career development and learning over the next decade must increase dramatically if the UK is to achieve the economic and employment growth that appears possible. And it is clear that the major challenge will be to engage with literally millions of adults who have low skills and may have been effectively disengaged from formal learning for 10 years or more.

If we are to persuade such adults to participate in

⁹ RR27, TECs and Small Firms Training: Lessons from Skills for Small Businesses, GHK Economics and Management: DfEE, 1997

¹⁰ RR28, Evaluation of Skills Challenge, York Consulting: DfEE, 1997.

productive work-related learning, help them make appropriate choices relative to their interests and capabilities, and support them to persist and succeed, then this will require a wide set of capabilities within the scope of adult guidance provision:

- (i) Adult guidance services must be in the vanguard of those encouraging and motivating adults to engage in learning. Whilst this may not involve adult guidance services in the direct promotion of lifelong learning to individuals, it will require front-line services to have staff sensitive to the perspectives of reluctant learners, and sufficiently knowledgeable and capable to identify successful inducements to participation.
 - (ii) Assuming government, with employers through the Sector Skills Councils, creates a more comprehensive labour market information system, adult guidance services must still work closely with regional and local agencies like RDAs and Learning and Skills Councils to make that information accessible to local employers and individuals alike.
 - (iii) A range of new diagnostic tools for assessing skills and capabilities will be required, tailored to the characteristics and expectations of adults for whom many of the mechanisms designed for young people, like the current key skills tests, will be either inadequate or unacceptable. Other areas where tools will be of value are in basic skills, occupational skills needs analysis, entry level IT, and learning styles analysis amongst others.
 - (iv) Adults who have maintained gainful employment over time despite a lack of formal qualifications have undoubtedly developed a variety of successful coping strategies as well as relevant informal skills and experience. Such adults not unreasonably expect to have such prior learning and experience recognised, both through the guidance they receive, and the learning then required of them.
 - (v) Many adults will require to be convinced that their commitment to the daunting path to recognised skills will be repaid in economic advancement. Evidence from existing projects suggests that the closer the case for a personal return for learning can be made to the individual's particular circumstances, the more persuasive such an intervention will be. Adult guidance services need to be able to advise clients in this area.
 - (vi) Because of the different priorities in their work, family and leisure life, adults will expect to be able to access highly flexible learning on their own terms. The clear consequence of this is that the overall pattern of provision in vocational education and training will become far more diverse and confusing over the next few years. Individuals will expect guidance to direct them towards provision that is consistent with their personal circumstances and interests, including preferred learning style/s – and expect individual advisers to have the breadth of knowledge necessary to achieve that.
 - (vii) Most support available to adults tends to be restricted to occupational and/or learning information and advice e.g. learndirect, rather than deeper guidance, or training in career planning and management. Yet, in the analogue of international aid programmes, offering only the former to an adult is the equivalent of providing a disaster victim with a fish rather than a net. One of our key aims within workforce development must be to develop a greater capacity for self-sufficiency on the part of each adult worker, and an understanding of the broad principles of career planning and management will be an important weapon in an individual's lifelong learning armoury.
 - (viii) Finally, and a huge and diverse area in itself, is the need to make appropriate advice and support available to smaller employers, particularly those with less than 25 employees. Such advice and support might include training for managers in the basic principles of company training plans and training needs analysis; assessing future training requirements, identifying suitable local provision; designing customised learning programmes for individuals; providing in-company mentoring and coaching, etc. – the list is long.
- Does all this capacity have to be provided through a single agency or can these capacities be accessed through partnership arrangements with other local organisations? As the list of capacities is long and complex, it would make sense to look to partnership to provide different constituent capacities. Yet the nature of both small firms and reluctant learners suggest that this might in fact be neither desirable nor workable in many situations. Experience through TECs, Chambers of Commerce and the

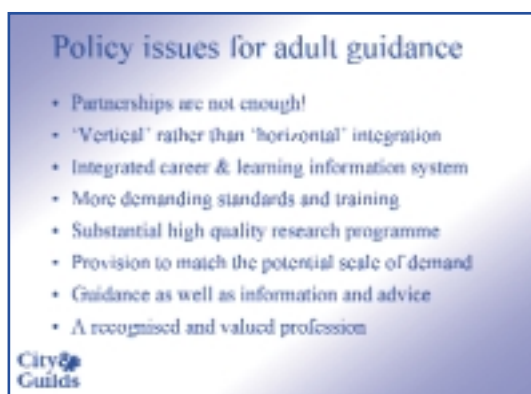
Small Business Service suggests that small firms benefit significantly from a single point of contact, an integrated 'account manager' approach which guarantees 'joined up' service and reduces the risk of initiative or contact fatigue.

Reports from many projects with reluctant adult learners suggest that they have the same expectations, and that the more referrals to other agencies or individuals that are required, the greater the likelihood that the learner will 'drop out' of the programme.

Policy Issues for Adult Guidance

This last point leads directly to my first policy issue for the development of information, advice and guidance provision for adults.

- Whilst partnerships will be important to ensure that the many actors in lifelong learning provide a coherent service to individuals, it is far less clear that Information, Advice and Guidance Partnerships as currently constituted are the most effective route to high quality adult guidance provision. As already highlighted, it is highly questionable whether it is possible for a plethora of organisations, no matter how 'joined up' they try to be, can provide the same quality, coherent and focused service to small firms and adult learners that should be the offer from a single professional and local organisation.



- Why, if the horizontal integration of youth provision in the English Connexions service is so logical, have Wales and Scotland consciously rejected this approach in favour of a vertically integrated 'all-age' guidance service? There are clear concerns being raised in many parts of England about the loss of local coherence of guidance provision, and claims of a significant reduction in service to the majority of able young people as well as adults. Where is the evidence that the holistic Connexions approach

is improving or even protecting the service previously available to the overall client group?

- Whilst underpinning labour market information is being improved, the primary learner information and advice system – *learnirect* – principally offers information and advice on learning, not on careers. Most career information systems where they do exist are narrowly concerned with occupational support rather than career development. If we are to serve the adult client group effectively, then I believe it will be essential to integrate career information and advice with learning information over time, to support career planning and management.
- The set of 'capacities' proposed for the new information, advice and guidance services for adults in the previous section of this paper, suggest the need for a radical review of the standards for adult guidance counsellors or advisers, and for a more diverse range of core competencies and options to be included in future evolutions of the standard.
- Any national programme of work seeking to achieve a major programme of cultural change of the scale discussed here would normally be supported by a well-funded research programme designed to inform both policy and practice. Whilst there are undoubted centres of expertise, such as this one in Derby, there is no sign of the coherent underpinning research strategy that one would normally expect to find supporting a project of this scale. What does the lack of such a programme say about the reality of government commitment as distinct from the rhetoric?
- At the moment, information, advice and guidance for adults is perceived as an optional 'add-on' to education and training provision through the Learning and Skills Council. The volume of opportunity for adult guidance represents only a small proportion of the demand that would result if the scale of adult training and development identified in this report was to be stimulated. In seeking to meet its statutory responsibility for adult guidance, the Learning and Skills Council will have to particularly explore the relationship between adult guidance providers and Further Education colleges who deliver the bulk of entry level training.
- There appears to be a perception held by the Department for Education and Skills, shared by at least some interests at the Treasury, that whilst

the State may be able to bear the cost of career information and advice for adults, the cost of in-depth, high quality guidance would be prohibitively expensive. Both this, and the previous issue reflect a major weakness in all current thinking on adult guidance – it represents either a failure to recognise the current social cost of ignorance, or to count the cost of the waste represented by high rates of drop-out, or it fails to acknowledge and address the need of how we might create a market for information, advice and guidance over time.

- Finally, I have a real concern that the ability of the UK to deliver a more skilled workforce will depend in significant part on building a cohort of highly skilled and committed adult guidance professionals who can help the very large number of disengaged adults to make genuine progress. From current government initiatives, I see a strong potential at the moment for the fragmentation and, in some cases, demoralisation of the relatively small cadre of professionals operating at the leading edge in adult guidance, at precisely the time when what we need to do is grow that cohort geometrically.

Conclusion

At one level, I am very optimistic. Here we are, at the end 2001, with, for the first time, a new and powerful body in England (the Learning and Skills Council), with a statutory responsibility for workforce development and information advice and guidance for adults. We have a pre-budget report from the Chancellor supporting the principle of an adult entitlement to learning, tax incentives for smaller firms, the potential for paid time off for employees (with full recompense or better for employees) and support for the creation of an 'extended' programme of adult guidance.

But a note of caution is necessary. Once more, the rhetoric for lifelong learning and adult guidance is extremely positive, and yet the real progress over the last two years has been very limited, if not negative.

Is this a moment for great optimism, or simply yet another false start? I think the answer to some degree must lie in the drive and energy that the adult guidance community and those who are its champions invest over the next twelve months to capitalise on the opportunities which are currently presented to us.