



RESEARCH PAPER

Smoothing the path: Advice about learning and work for disadvantaged adults

Report of a project undertaken for the City & Guilds Centre for Skills
Development and CfBT Education Trust

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Our international survey (2008) into attitudes and perceptions around skills development demonstrated that there are a number of key common challenges that need to be addressed globally:

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- Balancing the demand and supply of skills
- Enhancing the perception of vocational education and training
- Improving employer engagement

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About the Authors

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Judy Alloway worked for the educational guidance service for adults at the then Hatfield Polytechnic, moving to the Unit for the Development of Adult Continuing Education to take a key role in its pioneering work on adult guidance and access. As a County Adviser for Adult Continuing Education and as an Assistant Principal in an FE College, she was responsible for developing guidance and related support services. Subsequently at the Association of Colleges in the Eastern Region she researched the early development of the Ufl, in particular the role and purpose of learning centres and the guidance needs of users. Judy has worked for the FEFC Inspectorate, the Adult Learning Inspectorate and Ofsted. Recent work has included the EU Joint Actions Project, which supported the formation of the new EU Guidance Policy Forum and the guidance needs of older adults. She has been a NICEC Fellow since 2006.

Who should read this report?

This report will be useful to all those considering how best to provide careers advice to adults faced by particular challenges. This includes planning at a national level, but also at regional and local levels. It will also be useful to practitioners in such services and to their managers, whether in the statutory, independent or voluntary sectors. It should be helpful both to those who have no specialist background in careers advice, and those already working in the field.

It is part of a larger study conducted by the City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development and CfBT Education Trust. This includes an extensive literature review by Paul Gutherson, and a paper on the policy context by A.G. Watts, both available at www.skillsdevelopment.org/research. The 12 detailed case studies quoted in this report are also available on that website.

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Foreword



Chris Jones
Director General of City & Guilds



Neil McIntosh
Chief Executive, CfBT

This report seeks to throw light on current good practice in helping adults who are disadvantaged in various ways in the English labour market. It is aimed at those considering how best to provide careers advice to adults faced by particular challenges. This includes planners at national level, but also at regional and local levels. It is also aimed at practitioners in such services and their managers, whether in the statutory, independent or voluntary sectors. It should be helpful both to those who have no specialist background in careers advice, and those already working in the field.

The City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development and CfBT Education Trust came together to undertake this study for three key reasons:

- A literature review, coupled with conversations with a range of stakeholders, revealed that there was a distinct lack of research on how to effectively meet the careers guidance needs of disadvantaged adults.
- In the light of the Government's plans to develop a new universal adult advancement agency, we felt that research undertaken in this area would make an important contribution towards shaping the service.
- We wanted to help expose current good practices to a wider network of practitioners/bodies working with these groups.

The research which underpinned this report was undertaken against a changing economic climate. As the economic downturn hits and unemployment rises, there is perhaps an even greater need to focus on effective careers guidance provision for disadvantaged adults.

We wish to thank those who took part in the research, particularly managers and clients who shared their views and experiences with us.

Executive summary

“ Alongside core careers advice activities, effective services develop strategies to help with self-confidence, with basic skills including ESOL where needed, and with job placement and support in paid work and work experience. ”

Summary of findings

1. These findings are based on a study carried out during the second half of 2008 of 12 agencies that provide careers advice to adults with one or more disadvantages including:

- people with visual impairment
- people with learning difficulties
- refugees
- people living with mental illness
- homeless people
- older adults
- ex-offenders
- union members who are low-skilled, low-paid, part-time or shift workers
- people in urban areas with any of the above disadvantages plus poverty, unemployment, or being on incapacity benefit
- people with any of the above disadvantages who have difficulty in reaching advice services, including those in rural areas.

Some agencies were chosen on the basis of their target group, others on the basis of the way they addressed the needs of target groups.

2. The findings will be of interest to all working in similar or related fields. They will be of particular relevance to those planning the adult advancement and careers service (aacs) due to begin in 2010. The work described in this report embodies a number of the features of the proposed aacs:

- it is driven by the needs of the clients
- it often involves partnership working
- careers advice is often couched in services that address other needs
- it combines careers advice with activities to overcome any barriers to learning or work

- it bridges the activities of specialist careers advisers with those of professionals who have an in-depth understanding of different target groups.

3. The project asked ‘What are the critical success factors in such work?’ The report (and its recommendations) is drawn from a set of 12 case studies that are available independently at www.skillsdevelopment.org/research, and is illustrated throughout with extracts from those case studies. The aim is to demonstrate the richness and variety of effective provision at the same time as identifying features that such services have in common.

4. Critical success factors identified include:

1. *Understanding, assessing and meeting client need*

- Alongside core careers advice activities, effective services develop strategies to help with self-confidence, with basic skills including ESOL where needed, and with job placement and support in paid work and work experience.
- Personal relationships between adviser and client are particularly important.
- Where a team of staff is involved or group work used, a strong link is maintained with a particular staff member.
- Effective services take a holistic approach to clients’ problems and allow appropriate time-scales.
- Personal kindness, and patience in building up trust are important, as is the following up of clients after a period of no contact.

2. *Reaching the target groups*

- Effective services take an imaginative approach to marketing, using materials and messages appropriate to the target group.
- They take provision to where the clients are, through outreach and where relevant, inreach.

“Agencies that were working locally but within the framework of a larger (in some cases national) body found that some activities could be done better at regional or national level leaving the agency itself to concentrate on one-to-one work with clients.”

- The first contact is important and clients valued a warm and personal welcome including cups of tea and someone who ‘speaks their language’ (not just using a foreign language but showing that they understand the world that the client has come from).
3. *Encouraging progression*
 - Some clients may take time to move on, so an effective service is likely to help the client make realistic action plans with encouragement to follow them or review them as appropriate.
 - Some services ask clients (and their carers where relevant) to make a commitment to progression.
 - Effective agencies identify barriers and take steps to help clients overcome them, where appropriate setting up additional services to do so.
 4. *Staff*

Both sympathy and professionalism are important.

 - Some agencies preferred to recruit those with an understanding of the client group and then provide training in careers advice and other necessary skills.
 - All agreed on the importance of continuing professional development for staff.
 - Where numbers permit, a team approach is a real strength, for the client’s direct needs and also in encouraging discussion and learning between colleagues.
 - Many of the services made good use of volunteers alongside paid staff (some volunteers were former clients of the agency).
 - Flexibility and awareness of boundaries were also important.
 5. *Volunteering*

Voluntary work experience was given a high importance, and many agencies invited clients to help in a range of activities for the service itself. These ranged from reception duties, to publicising the service, to campaigning on behalf of the target group.
 6. *Working with employers*

Effective agencies explained how they work to convince employers of the value to their company of employing the agency’s clients.

 - They show them how adults with disadvantages can make good employees, and can also help companies comply with national and local government targets.
 - Effective job-brokering (helping with recruitment by matching job to client) reduces any risk to employers. It can involve ‘job carving’.
 - Staying in touch after the placement has been made to support the employer and other staff as well as the client is important.
 7. *Links with other agencies*
 - Network arrangements with other local agencies, or agencies with expertise in the needs of the target group, are important in order to meet client needs through referral, to provide professional support, to encourage partnership working including setting up new joint initiatives, and to keep in touch with funding opportunities.
 - Networks can be time-consuming to set up and maintain, and some agencies have found they get some of these benefits from working through already existing networks.
 8. *Effective management*

Organisational structures differed widely but some general messages emerged.

 - Agencies that were working locally but within the framework of a larger (in some cases national) body found that some activities could be done better at regional or national level leaving the agency itself to concentrate on one-to-one work with clients.

“ In spite of longer time-frames and the need for realism in setting targets for adults with disadvantages, the agencies demonstrated remarkable achievements in terms of progression into employment, training or voluntary work. ”

- Where agencies did not have that infrastructure they could sometimes gain similar benefits through links with relevant national bodies.
- Whatever the management infrastructure, autonomy for local managers was key.
- At a local level, the involvement of other relevant local agencies on management or advisory groups was found to be beneficial.
- Involvement of service users in developing the service led to a better understanding of user needs and an ethos of mutual respect.

9. *Quality assurance*

Agencies had different approaches to quality assurance.

- Some had achieved the matrix standard; for others it was not seen as relevant. Some were subject to Ofsted inspection.
- Seeking and attending to feedback from clients was agreed to be particularly important for these target groups.

10. *Funding issues*

Challenges included:

- a low overall level of resource
- the need to seek funding from more than one source
- that much funding can only be obtained for time-limited projects of an innovative kind with no sources of funding then to continue once the 'pilot' stage is over
- that even whole-service funding (such as *nextstep* contracts) is of a short-term nature
- the linking of funding to targets that are unrealistic or in some way distort the goals of the agency.

Strategies to address these involve being 'realistic, focused and fleet of foot'. (Richmond Fellowship manager interview)

11. *Evidence of impact*

In spite of longer time-frames and the need for realism in setting targets for adults with disadvantages, the agencies demonstrated remarkable achievements in terms of progression into employment, training or voluntary work. However they also achieved important 'soft outcomes', such as increased confidence, and argue that these achievements are significant in their own right.

Specific recommendations based on these success factors can be found in the report at page 48.

Besides the important issues relating to process, management and funding, the project team noted seven key messages that emerged from the case studies which appear to be features of effective careers advice work with disadvantaged adults:

- Help starts from what is immediately needed by the client.
- Careers advice is couched within a much broader programme of support.
- Help is closely linked to the client's readiness and need for help.
- Progress is achieved through small steps.
- Effective help involves persistence.
- Staff really care, and celebrate success.
- The advice empowers the client to help him/herself in future.

Section 1 – An overview of the study

“Being universal, the new service will include help for adults who encounter particular difficulties in getting on in the labour market, perhaps to do with disability, age, or other factors that can make it harder to find or keep a job.”

1.1 Background

The government is planning a universal ‘adult advancement and careers service’ (aacs) to start in 2010. Their aim is to offer help to all adults, not just to decide their goals for learning and work but also to achieve those goals. The service is to be universal in two senses: to help everyone whatever their current qualifications or lack of them, and to bring together advice about careers with advice and help on how to overcome practical barriers. It will bring together the work currently funded through *nextstep*¹ and the Careers Advice Service (CAS)², and link these more closely with the employment advice offered by Jobcentre Plus.

Being universal, the new service will include help for adults who encounter particular difficulties in getting on in the labour market, perhaps to do with disability, age, or other factors that can make it harder to find or keep a job. With this in mind, CfBT Education Trust and the City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development (C&G CSD) have collaborated in an exploration of the current best practice in helping adults who are disadvantaged in various ways.

Our report is aimed at non-specialists, particularly at those who are considering how best to provide careers advice services to adults faced by challenges of the kind described below.

The study described in this report should be seen as an exploration rather than a review. It limits itself to 12 different agencies (see appendix 1 for the methodology) each of which addresses the needs of people with one or more kinds of disadvantage. As a result many kinds of disadvantage are not included, nor

are all the many different agencies that help people with one or more kinds of disadvantage. This was partly determined by the scale of this particular project; but it would also be difficult to construct a truly representative sample for a field of practice like this.

Our aim has been to look for any aspect of effective practice in work with these target groups that could inform the new aacs. It should also be useful to other bodies already serving such groups, whether in the statutory, independent or voluntary sectors.

A list of the 12 agencies can be found in Box 1. Detailed case studies on these are available at www.skillsdevelopment.org/research. ‘Thumbnail’ descriptions are provided at pages 17 to 20. Illustrations from case studies and interview schedules are included throughout the report as box inserts.

1.2 What counts as advice on learning and work?

Terminology can present problems. The European Commission recently agreed a definition of ‘careers guidance’ (see Box 2 on page 13).

To explain the formal definition below, careers guidance attempts to answer the following questions:

‘What kinds of jobs are there? What are the prospects for each? What would suit me? Do I need additional training to apply for that? Can I volunteer? Is there anything else I need to think about? What do I do next?’

Or:

‘I don’t need a new job just now but I would like to learn something new. What is

Continued on page 13...

¹An information and advice service currently funded through the Learning and Skills Council targeted at adults with low existing qualifications. In 2008 the new contract with providers included limited services to adults with qualifications at level 2 and above (although in some cases those with level 2 qualifications are also eligible for the fuller ‘Differentiated Personalised Service’).

²An information, advice and guidance service delivered through telephone interview and web-based materials open to all adults (<http://careersadvice.direct.gov.uk/>). Until 2008, branded as *learnirect advice* and funded through the University for Industry; now, like *nextstep*, under the direction of the LSC.

BOX 1: Agencies taking part in the study

| Name of project | Disadvantages addressed | Location of the agency visited (and scope of service where different) |
|---|---|--|
| Action for Blind People | Visual impairment | Exeter (Cornwall and Devon) |
| Age Concern North Tyneside Service | Older adults | North Shields (North Tyneside) |
| Brent in2 Work | Range includes: poverty, unemployment, homelessness, mental health problems, ex-offenders, people on incapacity benefit | Brent, London |
| Careers Advice Service (formerly learndirect) | Service for all adults, but particularly useful to those with difficulties in travelling to face-to-face centres | Leicester and Sheffield (national service delivered by telephone and internet) |
| Centrepoint | Homelessness | Centrepoint is based at Aldgate, London. The service visited was Capel Manor College in Regents Park |
| nextstep Southwest (holds the regional contract for the nextstep service) | Chosen for its work with rural communities (though nextstep is a universal service) | Bude, Newquay and Bodmin |
| The Foundation Training Company | Offenders/ex-offenders | East of England and London |
| The New Arrivals project | Refugees | Sheffield |
| The ROSE project (Realist Opportunities for Supported Employment) | Learning difficulties | Havering College, Romford |
| Richmond Fellowship Employment | Living with mental illness | Walthamstow, London (serving that and neighbouring boroughs) |
| Suffolk IAG (delivering nextstep in that county, within the East of England regional contract area) | Arrangements through different kinds of partnerships to reach wide range of disadvantaged adults | Ipswich. Service delivered through six local centres in the county |
| USDAW Eastern Region and Unionlearn | Union members but particularly low-skilled, low-paid, part-time or shift workers | Tesco in Portobello Road, west London (USDAW and Unionlearn operate nationally) |

BOX 2: The European definition of careers guidance

In 2008 the European Commission passed a resolution on the need for member states to adopt strategies to ensure lifelong (careers) guidance. It defined guidance:

*'as referring to a continuous process that enables citizens at any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which those capacities and competences are learned and/or used. Guidance covers a range of individual and collective activities relating to information-giving, counselling, competence assessment, support, and the teaching of decision-making and career management skills.'*³

available? Would it interest me? What do I need in order to start? What will it lead to?'

For some people the term 'careers guidance' sums it up. For others the word 'career' is not helpful (it sounds as if it only applies to fast-track high achievers) and, for others, the word 'guidance' is wrong (it sounds too in-depth, like 'marriage guidance').

Each of the agencies in our study used differing terminology, choosing the words that to their target group meant the advice they wanted to progress towards learning or sustainable employment. We have used the generic term 'careers advice' in this report. How each agency presents its offer is discussed in more detail in the next sections.

Age Concern North Tyneside's 'Back on Board' project provides mainly one-to-one guidance, but group work is available through a one-day workshop entitled 'Making Changes'. Both one-to-one and group work include signposting, action planning, CV-building, job search, and discussion on age discrimination and how to challenge it. It is also an entry point to other Age Concern services such as benefit advice and opportunities for volunteering.

1.3 What is a disadvantage?

People cannot, and should not, be defined by their disadvantage: it is the inequalities to which these potential disadvantages lead that need to be addressed. A recent paper from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation identified five types of inequality⁴ all of which could apply to individuals with or without the kinds of disadvantage identified in our report. People suffering from any of these inequality types may need particular help with decisions about learning and paid or unpaid work.

Not all people with a disability think of themselves as disadvantaged, and many with one of the apparent disadvantages in this report get on fine without the kind of help described here. At one end of the spectrum, blind cabinet ministers, public figures who have overcome mental illness, refugees who go on to become millionaires, black presidents, testify to that. Others who are not such visible successes overcome difficulties through compensating strengths. But not all are able to do so and for them help is welcome.

It can be easy to think of 'disadvantaged adults' as 'them', even if you are truly sensitive

³ Council of the European Union (2008) Council Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies. 2905th Education, Youth and Culture Council meeting. Brussels: European Commission p. 2

⁴ These are:

- Political, legal or civic equality
- Equality of outcome (financial equality)
- Equality of opportunity (levelling of life chances)
- Equality of treatment (such as removing the means test) or responsibility (such as scope for making own decisions)
- Equality of membership in nation, faith and family

Mount, F (2008) 'Five types of inequality'. *JRF Viewpoint*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, p. 1

“ Many of our agencies and their clients agreed that if you respond to the apparent disadvantage and not to the person who is experiencing it, you will not be able to give the help that is needed. ”

to their needs and work hard to help them. The starting point demonstrated in all these services is to think about users as ‘people like us’. Some of the disadvantages covered in this report are only temporary. Many of the problems that our agencies focus on are ones that any of us could develop (such as blindness) or certainly will develop (such as advancing age). Others could be experienced by someone in our families. What help would we like for them?

Many of our agencies and their clients agreed that if you respond to the apparent disadvantage and not to the person who is experiencing it, you will not be able to give the help that is needed.

1.4 The agencies

Our research team’s visits consisted of discussions with managers, practitioners (professional staff who do the direct work) and clients⁵ at 12 different agencies (see Box 1). Thumbnail sketches are provided on pages 17 to 20, and the full case studies are available online at www.skillsdevelopment.org/research.

Clients

Most of these services are targeted at people with particular problems, although three (the two nextstep providers and the Careers Advice Service) are open to all but have developed a particular approach to clients with various disadvantages, for example through use of advisers who can speak in the enquirer’s mother tongue or in outreach work to people in rural areas.

Brent in2 Work is an umbrella organisation that not only runs its own programmes to support employability but also funds or contributes to employment-related activities in other agencies,

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for example: the Central North West Mental Health Trust, the Cricklewood Homeless Concern; Bravo (the voluntary organisations for Brent); an offenders project (delivered by a partner organisation); and a project for people on incapacity benefit.

Funding

Again, the variety in our sample reflects the range found in work of this kind. The three universal services as well as the Brent in2 Work programme are publicly funded; the ROSE project is in the public sector but also has grants from a charitable trust. Action for Blind People, Age Concern, Centrepoint, the New Arrivals Project for refugees and asylum-seekers and the Richmond Fellowship (for people with mental health problems) are all in the voluntary sector but receive some or all of their funding through public grants. These arrangements can be complex and are subject to change.

Age Concern North Tyneside’s ‘Back on Board’ programme started as a Jobcentre Plus outreach pilot to tackle worklessness in the over-50s. Now the aim is to improve the personal development, skills, confidence and employment prospects of this group. Adult guidance was a new area for ACNT and it is one of only ten of the English Age Concerns providing such a service.

Physical appearance

There is a wide variety within the 12 in what a user would see when they first visit the service. Some are designated rooms in a larger institution (such as the USDAW learning centre, or the Foundation Training Company’s centres in prisons); some have free-standing town-centre premises (such as the Richmond Fellowship’s centre in Walthamstow); some

⁵Each agency in the study had a different term for those who used their service. Some government agencies now refer to ‘customer’. Where we cite examples, we use their own term. In the main text of this report we use the word ‘client’ or ‘user’ to mean ‘service user’. We do not wish to imply either is in any way a preferred term, just that they are the shortest words to cover that role across the different contexts.

“The range of services in one place is so helpful, like benefits, wills, insurance, advice etc.”

make use of the premises of another agency (such as nextstep Southwest’s work with rural adults that operates from Jobcentres and Connexions premises); one (ROSE) is based in a college. One operates entirely through the telephone or internet (CAS) and others (such as Action for Blind People) use the telephone among a range of other ways of helping their users.

Age Concern North Tyneside has sole use of the Bradbury Centre, directly accessible from the shopping area in North Shields. The public use the bright cheerful café opening onto the reception area.

Size and structure of the organisation

The agencies’ organisational structures vary too in size and shape, from large government programmes covering all of England (for example nextstep) to small, local voluntary sector agencies (for example New Arrivals). In some cases we visited the local office of a voluntary sector agency with national coverage (for example Action for Blind People), or with other offices elsewhere (for example the Richmond Fellowship). Others had organisational structures which are not easy to characterise, in size, location or scope, such as Unionlearn, Brent in2 Work and the Foundation Training Company (see Box 3).

Purpose

Some of these agencies offer careers advice explicitly and as their main purpose (such as the national telephone Careers Advice Service at one end of the size spectrum and the ROSE project for adults with learning difficulties at the other). Others offer it as part of a broader programme of support which may have much more fundamental survival as their main purpose (such as Centrepoint’s work with young homeless adults).

Of the agencies that provide careers advice as part of a broader programme, some integrate it into that broader programme (Centrepoint) and others have set up separate small sub-units to focus specifically on employment issues.

Age Concern North Tyneside’s Back on Board programme is embedded in the Age Concern North Tyneside organisation. The latter offers other services, enabling a holistic approach to helping clients deal with other issues that affect their quality of life and capacity to find and keep work. Help is immediately available in crisis situations such as housing and benefits, and volunteering options are available in house. *‘The range of services in one place is so helpful, like benefits, wills, insurance, advice etc.’* (Client)

It is this experience in linking careers advice with the other support needed by vulnerable people to make real progress in their lives that makes the findings from this project particularly relevant to the proposed adult advancement and careers service.

| BOX 3: | Less usual organisational structures among the case studies |
|--------|---|
| | <p>The national Unionlearn works with individual trade unions at national level. It is those unions that develop activities at a very local level on a shopfloor.</p> <p>Brent in2 Work supports a range of activities of its own, as well as giving funding to several voluntary sector agencies with similar goals, all in one London borough.</p> <p>The Foundation Training Company works with offenders still in prison, mainly in the east of England, but also has two centres to support the same individuals post-release, both in London.</p> |

Multiple disadvantage

Although we have selected agencies to explore work with a range of disadvantages, many are helping people with more than one. Some disadvantages can be linked to others, or even lead to others.

Richmond Fellowship clients (with mental health problems) are most commonly aged 30–40. There is no cut-off but employment prospects are more limited with increased age. The ethnic profile of clients broadly reflects borough profiles but there is an over-representation of black ethnic communities and an under-representation of Asian communities (this is replicated in national research). There is a 60:40 ratio of men to women, despite women-focused initiatives. Some clients are refugees.

The lack of some skills, such as literacy, numeracy and spoken or written English, can be seen as cross-cutting disadvantages that need to be addressed urgently before or alongside other activities leading towards employment.

Thumbnail sketches

| The Organisations | |
|--|--|
| 1. Action for Blind People | |
| www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk | exeter@actionforblindpeople.org.uk |
| <p>Action for Blind People is a large voluntary sector charity, providing tailored support on a range of issues affecting visually impaired people, their families and employers. It was founded 150 years ago as the London Association for the Blind and has recently announced a strategic alliance with the Royal National Institute of Blind People, combining their expertise at national and regional levels to give an even better service.</p> <p>Action for Blind People runs four specially designed hotels for blind people and their families and 29 multi-sports clubs for children and young adults. There is a national freephone helpline (12,647 enquiries in 2007) and a Mobile Sight Loss Information Service. Regional teams provide employment, education and careers advice in 12 areas of England. The case study was based on the South West Action Team which works with visually impaired adults over 16 years of age and employers in Devon and Cornwall. This team of 11 includes employment coordinators, specialists in self-employment, welfare rights and housing, general advocates and an assistive technology coordinator. The SW regional team saw 500 new users last year.</p> | |
| 2. Age Concern North Tyneside | |
| www.ageconcernnorthtyne.org | www.ageconcern.org |
| <p>Age Concern North Tyneside, ACNT, is a voluntary sector charity based in North Shields. It provides a range of services and activities for, and campaigns on behalf of, older people living in North Tyneside. It has 150 staff and 200 volunteers.</p> <p>Age Concern grew out of wartime concerns for the welfare of older people at national and local level and acquired its current name in 1971.</p> <p>Nationally Age Concern is a federation of independent organisations. The four national Age Concerns for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales take a more strategic role supporting the locally based organisations.</p> <p>The case study centres on the Back on Board (BOB) adult guidance project, within ACNT. BOB aims to improve the personal development, skills, confidence and employment prospects of over 50s, through 1:1 guidance and group work, seeing around 100 people a year. ACNT is one of only ten Age Concerns providing this service.</p> | |
| 3. Brent in2 Work | |
| www.Brentin2Work.co.uk | |
| <p>Brent in2 Work, Bi2W, is a partnership of employment-related organisations helping local job seekers and businesses in the London Borough of Brent. It is especially concerned with the Wembley redevelopment programme.</p> <p>Bi2W is involved in three main types of activity: networking of 32 local agencies, employers and training providers providing local people with local jobs; several training, employment and advice related projects, including an English language programme, recruitment and training courses and funding/ contributing to work in other agencies working with disadvantaged groups. There are 48 staff and some volunteers across all projects.</p> | |

Careers advice is not offered as a discrete element of the service, but is integrated into almost everything that Brent in2 Work undertakes.

The case study looks at the service provided by an umbrella networking body, which also undertakes direct delivery of services and support for recruitment and training for local businesses.

4. Centrepoint

www.centrepoint.org.uk

Centrepoint is a charity working with socially excluded, homeless, vulnerable young people aged 16–25. Many have few or no qualifications or have drug, alcohol or mental health related issues. About a third are refugees or asylum seekers.

Centrepoint offers accommodation and support from overnight up to two years. It has about 800 beds in London, a service for young people in NE/Derwentside and peer education projects in Worcestershire. It offers capacity building support to small organisations in every Government Office region.

Its service promise is 'not just a bed'. Each young adult is individually supported and given advice, intensive health-related support and learning opportunities both inside and outside the organisation.

This case study explores the role of advice and guidance for young adults living with Centrepoint. There is a special focus on a partnership programme between Centrepoint and Capel Manor College for land-based studies, in London.

5. Havering College – The ROSE Project

www.havering-college.ac.uk

www.rose-havering.org.uk

The Realistic Opportunities for Supported Employment, ROSE, project is based at Havering College in Essex. It works with adults aged 16+ living in the London Borough of Havering who have learning disabilities and want to gain independent employment. Since its launch in April 2006 it has placed over 40 clients, 37 of whom are now in self-sustainable employment. The project works with individual employers to identify aspects of a job which are possible for a person with learning difficulties and to ensure understanding of the benefits for the business.

Two project managers who job share and three part-time job coaches provide the service. A regular Parents' Forum discusses needs and suggests developments. A Steering Group provides links with other agencies and promotes networking with organisations with similar concerns. One significant aspect of collaboration has been local and national lobbying. Funding comes from both the college and external bodies.

6. The New Arrivals Project

Scotia Works, Leadmill Road, Sheffield S1 4SE

The New Arrivals Project, NAP, a voluntary sector agency, is based in Sheffield and offers advice and support to asylum seekers and refugees over 18 years of age. In addition to providing advice to individual clients and referring them to other agencies and organisations, the service also matches refugees with professional skills to volunteer work placements, including work shadowing, and runs support groups for refugees who are teachers or engineers. NAP works in collaboration with others to develop ESOL programmes and an annual listing of ESOL provision. NAP sees between 300 and 350 clients per year.

This case study focuses on the information and advice service, which helps asylum seekers and refugees gain access to education, training, work placements, funding, childcare and work; and provides the support needed to help clients address the wide range of barriers which face them.

NAP staffing comprises a project manager, an administrator and two project workers.

7. Richmond Fellowship Employment Service

www.richmondfellowship.org.uk

Richmond Fellowship, founded in 1959, is a voluntary sector charity working across England with adults from the age of 18 with mental health problems. Its core business is supported housing and residential care. There are about 800 staff nationally, supporting around 4,500 clients annually.

In some areas, such as the Waltham Forest/ Redbridge area of London, the focus of the case study, Richmond Fellowship has developed an employment service that aims to improve the employability skills and confidence of its clients and help them gain and stay in employment. This branch also runs the 'Retain' service supporting job retention for the client group. Richmond Fellowship has a number of other 'Retain' services in various locations in England.

Advice and guidance is at the heart of the service, which sees 200–300 clients a year and has a project manager and seven staff. 1:1 sessions are supported by training workshops, support groups and work placement.

8. The Foundation Training Company

www.ftctraining.org

The Foundation Training Company, FTC, is a not-for-profit organisation specialising in crime reduction through resettlement and reintegration of offenders.

FTC works in category C and D prisons across East Anglia and at HMP Wealstun, Yorkshire. Two community-based training and resource centres recently opened in Hackney and Lambeth, providing a seamless service for offenders being released into the community. Fifty per cent of offenders using FTC services in prisons are released to London. These centres will support over 3000 offenders a year. Most will be released from prisons where FTC has a presence and will build on the action plans already created in custody.

The case study is based on work in HMP Highpoint, Suffolk and the Hackney centre, looking at how FTC services provide a more coherent and seamless transition for offenders, supporting them at each stage of their journey from prison into the community.

FTC provision is based around a 4–5 week resettlement programme supported by individual assistance. To date 10,000 people have completed FTC resettlement courses.

9. The Careers Advice Service

www.careersadvice.direct.gov.uk

The national Careers Advice Service, CAS, provides free, impartial information and advice to individuals on nearly a million learning opportunities across the UK, as well as advice and guidance on careers, returning to work, funding for learning and childcare. CAS is delivered by telephone, through the web and via email.

The service is accessible to the general public, anonymous and instantly available. Advisers work with a huge range of material, mostly web-based, that is constantly updated and developed. The range of clients' stories is a rich training resource and is used anonymously to inform service development. The service philosophy is that clients should feel they have found their own direction.

Clients learn about the service through referral, advertising or browsing the internet. Some use the website before they telephone, others call first.

This case study identifies the potential strengths and benefits of the telephone advice service when working with disadvantaged groups.

10. Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, USDAW

www.usdaw.org.uk

www.unionlearn.org.uk

USDAW is a large trade union, affiliated to the TUC and representing workers in private-sector retail, distribution and food manufacturing. USDAW has seven regional Learning Project Workers who meet regularly with Union Learning Representatives (ULRs). ULRs are voluntary activists supported by paid project managers, funded nationally by the Union Learning Fund (ULF). The ULF was set up in 1998 to help trade unions develop and diversify trade union learning. Unionlearn was established in 2006. ULRs work with many disadvantaged groups, but particularly with low-skilled, low-paid, part-time or shift workers.

This case study explores the role of ULRs in informing, motivating and advising potential learners in the workplace and in brokering appropriate learning opportunities. It is illustrated by the work of the ULR at the Tesco Learning Centre, Portobello Road, London, with staff in the retail sector. USDAW has 50 ULRs in the Eastern Region.

11. Connexions Cornwall and Devon – *nextstep* Southwest

www.nextstepsouthwest.org.uk

Connexions Cornwall and Devon Ltd holds the *nextstep* regional contract for the South West of England. The service provides practical help and careers advice about learning and work for adults aged 20+, in work or unemployed. It includes a helpline.

Under the regional contract *nextstep* provides a universal service for all adults via a single, group or face to face session and a more in-depth, targeted offer known as the Differentiated Personalised Service, DPS. The DPS is targeted mainly at adults without a level 2 qualification and some without level 3. DPS offers three face-to-face sessions with an adviser and follow-up support over several months.

The case study focuses on the role of the *nextstep* Adviser working across the northern third of Cornwall, a mostly rural, fairly isolated area with poor public transport. Learning and work opportunities in the area as a whole are limited.

12. Suffolk County Council – *Community Learning and Skills Development*

www.suffolk.gov.uk

www.nextstepeastofengland.org.uk

Suffolk County Council holds the regional contract to deliver *nextstep* services in the East of England. The case study is based on the County Council's Community Learning and Skills Development IAG adviser team which is a subcontractor under the regional contract. Currently this team only receives *nextstep* funding.

Under the regional contract *nextstep* provides a universal service for all adults via a single, group or face to face session and the more in-depth DPS (see Case Study 11).

The service is delivered in community venues, mostly rural and often closely linked to community learning provision, and reaches a range of disadvantaged adults not usually using mainstream services.

The team consists of ten advice and guidance workers, two full-time and eight part-time.

Section 2 – What are the critical success factors in work with disadvantaged adults?

“ I remember like yesterday – I was completely lost – I didn't know what I want to do. I wanted to find direction and start my life again... but I can't do it without help. ”

This section explores the elements identified as effective practice by the users and staff in our 12 agencies (and are to be found in many other services elsewhere), which could be tried or adapted by others. It is divided into eleven topic areas which inevitably overlap; where this happens we indicate other places where the topic is covered.

As part of our fieldwork we asked agency staff if they had messages for others offering careers advice for disadvantaged adults. Their recommendations are included at the end of the topic area to which they are most relevant.

2.1 Is careers advice for disadvantaged adults different?

2.1.1 Client needs

What do clients from disadvantaged groups need by way of careers advice? Some of our services described client needs which sounded like the needs of most adults thinking about changes to their careers.

The Suffolk IAG service advisers find that people usually want a change of career or will visit the service to deal with other major changes in their life and circumstances. They may have been out of work for some time due to ill health or have family and caring responsibilities. Frequently, people will have no idea what they want to do and will need a lot of help to orientate themselves and make decisions.

But besides assessment of their skills and aptitudes, and information and advice about the opportunities open to them, for many their main need is help in overcoming low self-confidence.

Centrepoint's young adult clients lack self-confidence and social skills. Many are institutionalised and reliant on the system. Their self-professed needs are generally to get their own flat and to earn enough money. But this is unrealistic at the start of their stay: their behaviour and ways of living are frequently chaotic. The root cause of problems may be masked and this has to be sought and addressed.

For some the sense of abandonment is overwhelming and simply having someone willing to try to help is a great step forward.

'I remember like yesterday – I was completely lost – I didn't know what I want to do. I wanted to find direction and start my life again... but I can't do it without help. I cried a lot on my first day – but after that I felt very relaxed. We worked together and now I know what I want for myself. Things in my head are very clear now.'
Richmond Fellowship client, a refugee with mental health problems

Others may lack fundamental skills, which need to be addressed before learning or work can become realistic goals. Particularly important is the ability to speak English. Many told us what a high priority it was to enable clients who did not have it as their first language, to improve their language skills through ESOL classes.

The Foundation Training Company reports that offenders need time, space and the opportunity to talk and build their confidence. They may have had little responsibility for looking after their daily needs for a long time. So in prison they may need life-skills support to enable them to cope with daily life once released (e.g. cooking, washing clothes, dealing

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“The adviser lets you talk and is interested in what you say. He listens. He is also very knowledgeable and has plenty of useful information to give you.”

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with letters etc...). They are likely to have multiple issues. For example, they may need to deal with alcohol or drug addiction, anger management or domestic violence, or need counselling for sexual abuse or bereavement.

USDAW service users are likely to be low-paid, part-time or shift workers. In large stores, many will be women, specifically older women returning to work and people from ethnic minorities including migrant workers. They may not have achieved qualifications in school or been able to validate overseas qualifications, and may need help with literacy, numeracy or language skills. The target group may also have negative perceptions of learning and lack confidence.

Many users of the national telephone advice line, CAS, are not disadvantaged in the way understood in this study. But as a CAS staff member pointed out, anyone wondering what to do next, or how to get a job, has similar needs. And no-one wants to be defined by a single set of characteristics.

Sometimes CAS clients do not know what they want to achieve. They just know they are unhappy, stuck, confused. Help in just identifying a way out of that is a common reason to call and advisers have to be sensitive to this:

‘Some things are common to all client groups. Clients want to be understood; access specialist information or support; help playing out possible futures; experience a positive ‘instrument of society’ dialogue; feel valued; find options; get some new perspectives, revisit talents, values, dreams etc... These things can be as important as, or even more than, client-group specific approaches... Some clients are pleased to be considered ‘human’ rather than as a member of a group that they feel they never actually joined; others want to be clearly seen through that group’s lens.’

For clients who live in a remote area their main disadvantage may lie in the lack of opportunities available locally.

nextstep Southwest staff note that while there may be sufficient learning opportunities in Cornwall for the size of the population as a whole, these are not necessarily in the right place for individuals. Public transport is limited and the population is spread over a large area. Living in a rural area such as this limits opportunities for those who are unemployed or on a low income far more than if they were living in an urban area, with good public services.

Careers advice in specialist services for adults with disadvantages is more likely to include an element of job placement and in some cases job-brokering (where the agency assists employers with recruitment as well as helping clients find suitable employment) than in generalist services. This is covered in more detail under Working with employers (page 33).

2.1.2 Assessing client needs

How do you help clients to explore and disclose these needs? In many of the services a client is linked to a specific staff member.

nextstep Southwest clients noted the importance of the right adviser, who is able to relate to their concerns and has the necessary knowledge to hand. *‘The adviser lets you talk and is interested in what you say. He listens. He is also very knowledgeable and has plenty of useful information to give you.’* (Client)

In others a team of staff with different skills and experience will share responsibility (see under Staff, page 29). One will carry out an initial assessment and start to work on an action plan, bringing in others to help with specific needs or as new needs emerge.

“ I had to write a statement. They arranged a meeting. We talked about me and the areas of work I was interested in – I thought I'd love to do IT. And how I would cope in general. It was a mix of the kind of opportunities ROSE could find and I would be able to do. ”

The choice of coordinator for a first visit from Action for Blind People is made according to that user's immediate priorities, which could be finding a suitable home, adapting a home or working with an employer to adapt working conditions, improving their financial position by ensuring they are claiming all available benefits, or finding ways to develop a better quality of life through social engagement, learning and/or employment. Employment Coordinators work within an 'Action Team' model, which also includes specialists in self-employment, welfare rights and housing coordinators, general advocates and an assistive technology coordinator.

In some agencies, a questionnaire or other assessment tool is used.

A questionnaire has been developed by the Union Learning Rep at the Portobello Road Tesco to establish learning needs and allow people to sign up for courses on offer. Workplace surveys are regularly undertaken to establish group needs. The most urgent need is for qualifications. Popular learning options in the region are computer skills, literacy, ESOL, foreign languages and British Sign Language, and it is part of the role of the ULR to broker these courses.

Other approaches include use of group work, which then may or may not be followed up by one-to-one support.

Under the current nextstep contract the Suffolk IAG service can offer priority groups⁶ a long one-to-one interview and follow-up support. This process may begin with participation in a 'universal' group session

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which may focus on different aspects of preparing to look for a job or to start a training course. It would then be possible for people to get further help by telephone or email by being referred to the national Careers Advice Service for adults.

In some services the initial assessment can include 'significant others' such as parents, in the case of clients with learning difficulties.

For each new arrival at the ROSE project an initial interview will be set up to include parents or carers and a key worker if applicable. Clients are involved in a detailed assessment that covers their interests, how serious they are about paid employment and the day(s) they are available. Sometimes it is clear that individuals will have a problem 'complying with a work ethos'. This requires the project managers to be frank and direct about employer expectations. ROSE seeks to be realistic: a key question is about an individual's capacity and will to become independent. A client told us 'I had to write a statement. They arranged a meeting. We talked about me and the areas of work I was interested in – I thought I'd love to do IT. And how I would cope in general. It was a mix of the kind of opportunities ROSE could find and I would be able to do.'

At a more practical level, there may be health and safety issues particularly associated with some client groups, either because they are especially vulnerable or (in exceptional cases) where they may present risks to staff or other centre users. The Foundation Training Company recommended individual risk assessments for their clients.

⁶These are adults without a level 2 or 3 qualification, particularly low-skilled adults (particularly women) who are locked in low-skilled, low-prospects jobs; adults experiencing worklessness; older people; people on benefit; offenders and ex-offenders; people from ethnic minority backgrounds and people with a self-declared learning difficulty or disability.

“Personal kindness alongside a more formal contractual relationship is valued by clients and may be an ingredient in their motivation and confidence to pursue their goals.”

2.1.3 Meeting client needs

The action plan plays a key role in most careers advice services, but in many of the specialist services the time-scale for the plan can be more generous and realistic.

Action for Blind People service users develop a detailed action plan at first interview, including contact with one or more team members, depending on need. The plan could include: guidance on learning and employment or self-employment, practical support to enable new or continuing employment, and housing or benefits advice. The action plan is adapted with time and users receive support as long as they wish, 5–10 years on average, until the action plan is completed. The engagement can be reactivated whenever needed.

The concept of the holistic approach recurs throughout our case studies.

At Brent in2 Work clients may take an intensive 8-week course to help them get back to work, or receive support on a more individual basis. Either way, the approach is a holistic one aimed at trying to deal with the whole range of problems which may be preventing them from getting a job or back into work.

Helping strategies are not limited to the serious and formal. Informality and laughter are also used.

Action for Blind People offers small group work. Leisure learning can help reduce isolation. *‘We have a laugh together and share practical advice, like how do you tell if food is cooked? I like meeting others like me. We are all different, but we have something in common.’* (User group member)

Personal kindness alongside a more formal contractual relationship is valued by clients and may be an ingredient in their motivation and confidence to pursue their goals.

A key strength of the Suffolk IAG service is that advisers help to build people’s confidence and self-esteem and realise how important this is. A user of the service, who is blind and disillusioned with services received elsewhere, was introduced to the service through a community learning course. He commented that staff are ‘kind and genuine and approachable’ and provided a comprehensive, accurate and supportive careers guidance service. He has followed up all suggestions and taken up all referrals to course providers and sources of work experience so far and they have ‘all worked’. His recommendation is that every organisation should have an adviser like his. He felt that she cared about him.

Some clients have to overcome understandable barriers to relating even to the people who are trying to help. A certain level of disclosure is essential to start the process off, and staff need to be patient. Refugees are a good example of people who have to learn again how to trust others.

New Arrivals clients may need a chatty prelude to an interview to put them at their ease and may not open up until they have attended more than once. Clients may not understand the role of different agencies in supporting them, but once the service remit is explained, an action plan is developed. Staff aim to reach joint decisions with clients, who are often unwilling to choose from a range of options, not having the points of reference for making comparisons.

The great advantage of a service that is funded to provide in-depth help is that it can respond fully to its clients’ needs.

The Richmond Fellowship manager identified the quality of in-depth guidance as a key strength: *‘Advisers are very experienced. We can do ‘real’ guidance – it is almost a luxury to take the time it needs. We expect to do follow-up interviews – whatever is needed.’*

“ I really like the occasional phone call to see how I am doing. It means he [the Adviser] is interested and it reminds me to get on with it! ”

Telephone and internet play an increasingly important part in guidance with all adults, and these target groups are no exception. The CAS service is offered entirely through telephone and web, and other services make use of these in a range of ways (the telephone skills needed are considered below in the section on Staff). Here is an example of the way email and an internet-based tool can be used to enhance a face-to-face service.

The use of ICT is an important factor in the delivery of the USDAW service. Email is used extensively by ULRs and the Unionlearn website is a useful way of communicating. USDAW was one of the unions who piloted the TUC Unionlearn 'Climbing Frame', an innovative and attractive electronic tool for ULRs which has two main functions. It provides information and resources for the ULR through its learning themes, which can be tailored for the union and the sector, and a learner management section, which allows the learner and the ULR to record progress and can generate statistical information as evidence of success for the union. USDAW ULRs have found that although personal data is protected, members enjoy sharing their Climbing Frames and working collectively to review and celebrate each other's progress. A fully online version is eagerly awaited, and the Eastern Region will then be able to make much more use of it in stores and distribution centres.

Another feature of good practice in all careers advice is that the service follows up clients after a period of no contact to find out how they are getting on. This can be an important part of the help for the client, showing that the service still genuinely cares about them, or a reminder of what came next in their action plan. But learning 'what happened next' is also an important source of professional development for staff. The quality and service improvement aspects of this are covered separately under Quality Assurance.

At the nextstep Southwest first interview for the differentiated personalised service (DPS) an action plan is developed and the adviser is required to make a further contact at 1 and at 3 months, if the client has not been in touch. 'I really like the occasional phone call to see how I am doing. It means he [the Adviser] is interested and it reminds me to get on with it!' (Client)

We asked the agencies for their advice to others. They said:

- Build a strong relationship with individual clients, showing them that you understand their aspirations and the challenges they face.
- Allow plenty of time.
- Work holistically.
- Be prepared to care and stick with it.
- Support clients in learning to help themselves.
- Be flexible in responses, identifying them as and when new needs emerge.
- Do not underestimate the importance of small things.

2.2 Reaching the target groups

2.2.1 Letting people in the target groups know about your service

This can include publicity (including both to potential users and to other agencies), referral from other agencies, and recommendation by word of mouth.

New Arrivals has produced a set of publicity leaflets: about the IAG service (aimed at clients), about the professionals' work placement scheme (for employers and clients), and a general information leaflet aimed at other agencies and funders. These have been distributed to all agencies and organisations in contact with refugees and other public facilities such as libraries, community centres, health clinics, GPs etc. in areas where refugees live.

But printed leaflets are not the only way of reaching potential clients. Going out to meet

“ People may see advisers in community education centres, libraries, jobcentres, and in the workplace (including residential nursing homes, care homes, hospitals, and workplaces where redundancies are planned). ”

people, and use of local broadcasting and other media, are important.

The USDAW service is promoted informally through a range of different types of activity. As well as placing posters and leaflets in workplaces, calling into shops and stores to talk to potential learners, attending store forum meetings, and setting up and working in the union learning centres in the workplace, USDAW ULRs have been engaged in a ‘Checkout Learning Campaign’, working jointly with a range of learning and guidance providers to attract new learners. Regular open days are held at Distribution Centres. These can often attract 30 or more new learners.

The Age Concern North Tyneside’s Back on Board project has been supported by a high-profile marketing campaign, including press advertisements, radio and TV coverage and local publicity and events. *‘They seemed to be about people like me, older people not just youngsters.’* (Client)

Referral is perhaps the most important route for people with some form of disadvantage to find out about a service specifically for them. This requires ensuring that potential referral services know about the service.

Referrals to the ROSE project come from Havering College, Connexions, Jobcentre Plus, social workers and the Social Services Adult Disability Team. Some clients are already at Havering College: *‘One of the teachers in the IT Dept told me about ROSE – he saw me struggling to find work.’*

Action for Blind People service users are normally referred e.g. by Social Services, the Jobcentre or the Action helpline, few approach directly.

2.2.2 Taking your service to the user

Outreach can include offering your service in settings that the target group already use, perhaps in partnership with another agency

offering something else that the clients need, or actually taking it to the client in their own home. Although there are health and safety issues which can exclude this, in some cases it is the only way potential clients could benefit from a service.

The Suffolk IAG service is delivered in a range of different venues in the community, where groups of people can be found or feel comfortable visiting. People may see advisers in community education centres, libraries, jobcentres, and in the workplace (including residential nursing homes, care homes, hospitals, and workplaces where redundancies are planned).

For some clients it helps if the specialist service is linked to an organisation they already know and trust. A ROSE client said that the fact that the service’s being ‘part of a college made me trust them – more reassuring.’

Taking the service to people within an organisation or institution, or ‘inreach’, can be equally important.

The service provided by USDAW as a trade union through its Union Learning Reps and Learning Project Workers is an effective way of reaching people in the workplace and encouraging or motivating them to take up learning and to progress in their careers.

2.2.3 The welcome

This is the moment of transition between hearing about a service and deciding to give it a try, and really engaging with it. Many clients spoke of how important the welcome had been to them.

The first contact with the client is seen as absolutely crucial. When staff from other agencies, e.g. Jobcentre Plus, ring to refer ex-offenders to the Hackney centre, FTC staff speak directly to the client and ‘use some prison jargon, so that he knows that they have some common ground.’ Those coming for the

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“There’s a cup of tea offered – that’s rare. It was a very good welcome – I felt cared for, respected and valued.”

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first time may be distrustful, not yet ready to change. A welcome by a peer, who has also been in prison and ‘done it all’, gives reassuring messages and helps with initial engagement and bedding in with the centre. Support workers ensure that clients are not waiting too long. Being offered a drink on arrival was a memorable part of this welcome. As one user commented, ‘There’s a cup of tea offered – that’s rare. It was a very good welcome – I felt cared for, respected and valued.’

The welcome does not have to be face-to-face.

The national Careers Advice Service is delivered over the phone, through the web and via email. The welcoming atmosphere to clients who phone the service is ‘virtual’ rather than face-to-face, and relies on adviser skills. In addition to the English service, information and advice is provided in eight community languages: Punjabi, Sylheti, Somali, Polish, French, Farsi, Urdu and Gujarati.

The physical environment can be as important as the greeting they receive.

In prison, the Foundation Training Company centres have created an informal environment, not surrounded by uniformed prison staff. Of particular importance to offenders is that they are called by their first name, so that ‘we’re not just a number’; and that they are treated with ‘a bit of respect, a bit of politeness’.

Having already experienced the FTC programme in prison and met FTC staff, offenders going through the gate are already familiar with the FTC ‘brand’, reinforced by a similar layout, decoration and furnishing of the FTC community-based centres.

We asked the agencies for their advice to others. They said:

Provide a service that is adapted to the needs of the target group in terms of location, timing, pace and format in which information is delivered.

2.3 Encouraging progression

Careers advice is clearly aimed at helping people move on. We have seen that it is likely to involve some form of action planning. Individual clients’ satisfaction, as well as service funding, will depend on whether goals are achieved. This is as true for the special target groups in our study as for any users of advice services.

However, particular problems can arise with disadvantaged groups. Obviously their disadvantage makes progression harder in spite of the efforts of the service to help them. But also, the welcome they receive from people who really understand them and sympathise could lead to a wish to linger a bit longer than strictly necessary with the advice service.

Does the help make them dependent? Perhaps temporary dependence is what they need? There is an important judgement to be made between giving a client long enough to gain the confidence and skills they need, and encouraging them to take the next steps to independence.

The Richmond Fellowship practitioner interviewed stressed the importance of giving support but challenging the client as appropriate, especially when being unrealistic. Clients can also get too comfortable and make no progress.

‘There’s a lot of listening... you put it back to the client – point out potential difficulties, like medication makes you sleepy in the mornings. ... You have to identify barriers – put together stuff they’ve told you at different sessions. And there’s reality checks, such as loss of benefits. We have to sometimes be honest and say something is outside their – for example, if you have a conviction for armed robbery you’re not going to get a job in security. ... It can get to be a revolving door. With a very few it seems as if it will never change. Case meetings help if you get stuck. We will put it to them that maybe they need a change – a fresh outlook or approach.’

With some of the client groups, the goal is not simply achieving progression but preventing regression. For people with the kind of mental

“Action for Blind People service users and staff spoke positively about the emphasis on a service which is driven by users’ needs rather than short-term targets.”

health problem whose symptoms are likely to recur, progression into the labour market may not be realistic. With offenders, preventing re-offending is a prime goal, though this is clearly helped by progression into the labour market.

2.3.1 Realistic action planning

A recurring feature in our case studies was the importance that action plans should be realistic in goals and in the pace at which they can be achieved. This is where small steps and persistence are most important.

Action for Blind People service users and staff spoke positively about the emphasis on a service which is driven by users’ needs rather than short-term targets. Evidence from action plans indicates that users have long-term issues to address and need the time and necessary support to do so.

2.3.2 Client commitment

Service users need to be ready before they can move on (see section 3.3). Some services ask them to show that readiness in some form of commitment.

Centrepoint offers a holistic and individual-centred service: ‘Relationship and rapport on a day-to-day basis’. But young people must sign up to ‘The Deal’ under which joint responsibilities are articulated and the young person commits to participate to create their own self-sustaining future.

Having reached and supported a client who has experienced many difficulties, a service may need to persuade them, and in some cases their carers, that they can and even must move on to achieve their goals.

Parents of clients at the ROSE project are asked to commit to the aim of achieving independence in employment. Sometimes this is the most difficult aspect of the process. Parents have spent a lifetime protecting their child from hurt and disappointment and have schooled themselves to supposing that the best option that can be hoped for is day care arrangements.

2.3.3 Identifying and addressing immediate barriers

Staff are often able to identify the obstacles that face the individuals and groups they work with, and work out solutions with them.

ROSE clients are offered ‘travel training’ on public transport. This makes a huge difference to confidence and independence. The job coach accompanies the client from home to work and back until the client is able to manage this on their own. The client can take up this offer at any time.

2.3.4 Setting up supplementary services to help progression

Sometimes supplementary services have to be set up to support progression. The clearest example of this is the Foundation Training Company’s centres set up in East and South London to support prisoners post-release that are designed to pick up exactly where the prison-based services left off, helping clients progress towards independent living. But many of the agencies were responsive to their users’ needs for additional support.

Tesco has an internal scheme called ‘Options’ to allow staff to achieve internal promotion. The USDAW Union Learning Rep has been working with staff from ethnic minorities and migrant workers to help them to improve their language skills so that they can overcome barriers to progression at work and access this programme.

We asked the agencies for their advice to others. They said:

- *Be motivating.*
- *Offer ‘reality checks’ so that goals and plans are achievable. Review this on an ongoing basis to ensure that these have not changed and that clients are still engaged.*
- *Challenge the barriers confronting clients.*
- *Celebrate success and show the benefits of learning.*

“Some individuals have these qualities without formal training but even when they do, the ability to be reliably friendly and understanding through the working week to all comers requires a professional approach.”

2.4 Staff

2.4.1 Recruitment

All services agreed that a major key to their success was appointing the right staff. Familiarity with their users' environment and knowledge of the barriers they face, and using the right language were all important. This does not just mean the mother tongue of those born overseas, but also whatever vernacular will help the new client believe that the service really does understand where they are coming from. While this empathy with the target group is essential, so too is the ability to keep some separation. Some individuals have these qualities without formal training but even when they do, the ability to be reliably friendly and understanding through the working week to all comers requires a professional approach.

USDAW members frequently comment that they trust their ULRs to understand their needs and situation and to support them if they decide to take up new opportunities. The fact that many ULRs have only recently come back to learning is a great encouragement and means that they are perceived as being at the same level as their colleagues and talking with, rather than at, them.

2.4.2 Qualifications

However, the services varied in their attitude to formal qualifications. For some they were seen as essential (see the Suffolk IAG example under section 2.4.3, A team approach), for others, broader human qualities were more important. Some recruited staff for their personal qualities and then trained them towards advice and guidance qualifications.

Every Brent in2 Work client is allocated a personal adviser who will work with them to help them get back to work. While these advisers often take the IAG NVQs it is not a requirement for the job. Personal advisers are recruited much more for their attitude and their commitment to the work than for their qualifications. Careers information and advice is integrated with all the other advice and support that is provided.

2.4.3 A team approach

Some of the larger services aim to ensure they have a team of staff which as a whole can provide the full range of knowledge and skills needed by clients, rather than trying to recruit or train individuals who can work across all client needs.

Suffolk IAG staff have been recruited because they are well qualified (all but one have NVQ level 4 in Advice and Guidance), have good communication skills and have specialist experience in working with the priority groups, and in working with groups in a community learning context. The team as a whole come from a range of backgrounds, including teaching, counselling, higher education and industry. Each adviser works in different parts of the county and has their own networks and specialist local contacts.

This team can then enhance the skills of all its members and the team approach can be carried through to service delivery.

The Action for Blind People 'Action team' includes different specialist skills and works within the common system for logging user needs and progress. *'The action team approach helps us develop our own skills and refer to others when needed. It is also good to get mutual support.'*

Some agencies (Foundation Training Company, USDAW Union Learning Reps, Richmond Fellowship, for example) recruit some staff who have themselves come from the target group. This reflects an ethos of accepting clients as equals and learning from their direct experience. It may work best where a team approach can be adopted, to ensure that a client can talk to advisers who share their own perspective, but also talk to those with a different one.

2.4.4 Induction training

Formal induction training is available in many of the services, often integrated into a longer-term staff development plan.

“Where staff do begin to move into careers advice, a common route is to aim for NVQs.”

New Arrivals uses a standard induction programme for staff joining the service, based on a checklist which is then customised with reference to the individual's preferred learning style. There are opportunities for work-shadowing existing staff and there are frequent one-to-one discussions with the manager in the initial stages.

2.4.5 On-the-job training

Services that are large enough are able to put their own training in place. Several agencies mentioned the difficulties of providing time and funding for training, and this was a particular problem for smaller organisations. Levels of funding are critical here, but also continuity: the CAS service demonstrates what can be achieved in professional development policies where funding can be guaranteed over a longer period (see under Funding below).

All staff on the Careers Advice Service have to be qualified to the level of service they are working at – e.g. Information Advisers (NVQ Level 2), Learning Advisers (NVQ Level 3) and Careers Coaches (NVQ Level 4). The latter group have also recently had the opportunity to take a post graduate (Level 5) programme in telephone advice.

Where staff do begin to move into careers advice, a common route is to aim for NVQs. Other agencies (as in the USDAW example on the next page) regarded the NOCN qualification as more directly relevant to careers advice.

The Richmond Fellowship manager introduced training for the adviser role following an assessment by the OU. NVQ Level 4 is now standard and, as it is difficult to recruit, the most common route is for staff to be trained once in post. A range of training opportunities are available, some offered free by other organisations. The manager makes time for staff to train. Advisers have a training budget and agree development at appraisal. The organisation has accreditation from both Matrix and Investors In People.

2.4.6 Continuing professional development (CPD)

This was seen as important by all services, for face-to-face workers and for managers alike. Some services are able to arrange their own CPD programme, and some mentioned appraisal schemes.

Suffolk IAG staff are encouraged to engage in CPD, some of which is provided internally and some through nextstep, and have regular meetings to share information, resources and good practice. Recent examples of in-service training include sessions on general disability awareness, deaf awareness, mental health and telephone advice (delivered by the Citizens' Advice Bureau and a GP).

Some use team meetings between practitioners to share learning.

All Foundation Training Company delivery teams have weekly meetings to discuss and highlight areas of concern or good practice. Minutes of these meetings are sent to central office and are used to create the agenda for the monthly meetings of the senior management team and project managers. Staff with personal experience of prison and resettlement services are therefore amongst those who help to shape services through ideas and feedback to management.

2.4.7 Training for volunteer staff

Training for all volunteers is essential. While many of the agencies made use of volunteers as well as paid staff (see Volunteering, below), the USDAW case is distinct in that the union learning reps are all volunteers. Unionlearn project managers are paid through the Government's Union Learning Fund, and they support the ULRs. But the ULRs are all volunteers, and it is they who deliver the service.

ULR training is an important factor in equipping ULRs with the skills and knowledge to carry out their role confidently and effectively. With

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“Even if a client can get by in English, advisers need to be very skilled in communication – including listening, checking understanding, and summarising.”

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the agreement of their employers, USDAW ULRs complete training courses designed by the TUC and validated by the National Open College Network (NOCN). These include a five-day basic training course, and additional two-day modules about working with employers, Skills for Life, supporting learners through information and advice, and using the union learning 'Climbing Frame'. ULRs also learn by shadowing experienced representatives.

ULRs may then go on to do NVQs and other nationally recognised qualifications, including those relevant to advice and guidance, and assessor training for learndirect accredited courses and NVQs. USDAW as a union is very supportive of ULRs and project workers and promotes their professional development.

2.4.8 Specific skill needs

Skill needs can be determined by the nature of the target group (for example language or other communication skills), or by the medium through which the service is delivered (as with the telephone service provided by CAS).

New Arrivals staff have to 'bring people up to where you expect people born in this country to be. Just telling somebody about going somewhere, they might not know the names of roads, systems in buildings, reception – the things we take for granted.' (Project manager)

Even if a client can get by in English, advisers need to be very skilled in communication – including listening, checking understanding, and summarising.

'It was easy to make good connection. Becky [the project worker] made this to be easy – not our capacity to make conversation.' (Client)

'Staff have to be careful when ... talking about options that they do not raise expectations and confuse these with certainties – awareness of how they are using language and nuances of meaning is important.' (Project manager)

As there is no face-to-face contact in the national Careers Advice Service, advisers cannot make any assessment as people present themselves, how they might fill a form in, whether they look happy or sad or even generally their facial expressions during the intervention. They have to rely totally on audio clues which makes the skills of the adviser – especially with clients who are less confident – critical.

2.4.9 Staff flexibility

This was particularly mentioned in connection with the clients' employment situations, either in relation to work goals in the case of ROSE clients, or in the current work situation in the case of the USDAW service.

A key success factor at ROSE is flexibility of work hours. The clients' employment hours are determined by the employer because it is a real job. All job coaches are part-time but are asked to offer hours to meet these varying needs. At present, the service is small so there is a limited capacity to accommodate coaches' preferences. All staff are willing, in effect, to be on call.

Flexibility is crucial at USDAW. Union Learning Reps are often available for colleagues to contact 24 hours a day, and work with day and night shifts and at weekends, providing access to services for those who cannot easily visit or contact mainstream agencies. Some of the USDAW ULRs are based in large stores, but many are mobile and cover a group of small retail outlets.

2.4.10 Boundaries

Also mentioned was the need for advisers to be aware of the limits of their own skill.

At the Foundation Training Company the wide range of support and advice needed by offenders requires staff to be able to recognise their own boundaries and refer, but also be able to search for information, particularly on the internet.

“They seem to appreciate what I can do to help, I feel wanted and that they need me.”

New Arrivals staff recognise their own boundaries and refer appropriately for help when what is required lies outside their own expertise.

We asked the agencies for their advice to others. They said:

- *Recruit staff who are committed and sympathetic to the clients (including front-line staff).*
- *Advisers should work collaboratively to ensure and maintain quality.*
- *Specialist information and skills are essential. Provide training and continuing professional development for advisers.*

2.5 Volunteering

There are several ways in which volunteering is important in work with these target groups. As described, the Unionlearn system of Union Learning Reps relies completely on trained volunteers. Another approach for a service whose main staff is paid, is to involve volunteers from the wider community who have specialist skills to help clients.

The New Arrivals Project has a small number of teachers and engineers who use their specialist knowledge and expertise in their field to support refugees trained and seeking work in these professions.

Another approach, and most common among the agencies in this study, was to invite clients and former clients to help in the service as volunteers, to build their self-confidence and develop employability skills. As well as the two examples given here, New Arrivals clients volunteer their services as interpreters, Richmond Fellowship clients sometimes act as receptionists at the service, and the Foundation Training Company trains volunteer service users to provide one-to-one support to other clients, and to meet and greet in the community-based centres.

Age Concern North Tyneside as a whole has over 200 volunteers on the books, many of whom are service users. The volunteer undergoes a short training and is then attached to a member of staff who works out a programme with them. One Back on Board volunteer has achieved NVQ Level 2 in advice and guidance. There is a volunteer forum within ACNT and volunteers are asked to reflect on the quality of the service provided, giving informed feedback on a range of issues.

‘They seem to appreciate what I can do to help, I feel wanted and that they need me.’
(IT volunteer)

‘I got involved in the Age Concern shop, working there one afternoon a week. At first I just steamed clothes and hung them up, but now I talk to customers and other staff.’
(Client)

The Centrepoint ‘Youth Educators’ course trains interested young people in the skills needed to develop and run sessions that form part of the core Centrepoint staff training programme. This staff training aims to help staff better understand the issues and experiences of homeless young people so that they can more effectively tune their information, advice and guidance and practice. Youth Educators also act as peer role models.

In some agencies, clients progress through volunteering to become agency staff themselves.

In the USDAW project, many people who come back to learning through their union, learn new skills, gain qualifications and progress their career by becoming a union representative themselves.

Volunteers can also be used to publicise the work of the agency.

“As well as helping them with job search skills such as CV-writing, the use of the internet for job searching, and interview skills, the agencies serving disadvantaged adults often also work directly with employers.”

Foundation Training Company clients are also occasionally invited to speak at conferences and appear on the FTC DVD sharing their perceptions of the FTC services with others working in the field.

At ROSE there have been notable successes in raising the profile of the work through lobbying local MPs, government and key influencers. Clients take a full part in this activity and have participated in the making of a DVD to disseminate the project.

Supporting clients to take up voluntary work in other organisations is covered in the section on Working with employers (below).

We asked the agencies for their advice to others. They said:

- *Volunteering for all these target groups is important.*

2.6 Working with employers

The aim of most clients is sustainable employment. As well as helping them with job search skills such as CV-writing, the use of the internet for job searching, and interview skills, the agencies serving disadvantaged adults often also work directly with employers. This can range from campaigns in general about the employability of people with a specific disability, through job brokering services for clients and employers, to negotiations with a specific employer over the needs of an individual.

Some clients come to the agency with previous bad experiences.

'I asked for help when I was working for [a public body]. Despite promises they did nothing and it was very disappointing. Eventually they told me I could no longer do the job and I left. I think other staff complained.' Action for Blind People service user.

2.6.1 Making the case

This is not just a matter of convincing them that a disability does not have to stop someone doing a good job. Employers too can positively welcome help in meeting targets set by local or national government perhaps for hiring people with a disability or who live locally.

As a result of a Section 106 agreement local developers have to commit to employing local people and they do this through the auspices of Brent in2 Work. As a result it is responsible for coordinating recruitment for the Wembley National Stadium development through both the construction and the operational stage. Brent in2 Work is working closely with the local FE College to make sure that local people will be in a position to take up the potentially 7000 permanent vacancies which will emerge in the next couple of years.

Local government targets for economic development can bring Borough, City or District Councils in as more direct partners.

New Arrivals works with Sheffield City Council to set up teaching placements, including undertaking Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks. This includes organising a familiarisation course for 19 refugee teachers, who spent one day per week in schools and one day per week taught in groups, with tutors provided by Sheffield College and facilities provided by Sheffield Hallam University.

Agencies working with adults with physical or mental disabilities can demonstrate to employers that they have something positive to gain from employing their clients. ROSE project managers ensure that employers are confident that support will be available from the start and appreciate the benefits for the business.

There is also a 'bottom line' case to be made. The Unionlearn team must convince employers there is a positive gain to the company from promoting learning and career advice. But Union Learning Reps also work with employers in a different way, to negotiate learning options for their members.

“Some agencies also provide a fully-fledged job-brokering service, helping the employer with recruitment while meeting client needs for placements.”

One aim of the USDAW programme is to develop constructive relationships with employers, demonstrate the benefits of learning and of career guidance and negotiate with employers to provide facilities, resources, opportunities and occasionally, time off for learning.

2.6.2 Job-brokering

Through these activities, which can then lead to work experience placements or actual jobs, most of the agencies in our study build up a network of sympathetic employers.

Centrepoint forges links with potential employers and agencies such as the Royal Parks, National Trust and the Princes Trust ‘Getting into parks’ project.

Developing the link with employers can involve awareness training for existing staff of the needs of staff with a disability, and advice on any technical aids.

Action for Blind People employment support includes help for the client (such as travelling with them as they get accustomed to the route to work) but also to the employer. A specialist team from the national office offers awareness training and practical support to employers, including a full assessment of practical needs. Assistive technology can range from adjustments to lighting to high-tech equipment.

Agencies can also suggest more radical approaches to staffing. One example is ‘job carving’, which frees up existing staff thereby making better use of everyone’s time.

On the basis of an initial assessment of a client, ROSE project managers seek out a potential employer. They ask if job carving is an option: is there part of a job that their clients could do? Employers are asked to examine existing jobs to see where a current employee’s time could more profitably be invested in alternative tasks, thus freeing up the aspects of the job which are possible for a person with learning disabilities.

Some agencies also provide a fully-fledged job-brokering service, helping the employer with recruitment while meeting client needs for placements. At the time of our visit the Foundation Training Company was planning the project described here for employment of offenders.

The Foundation Employment Project will be a collaboration with employers to match clients’ CVs to job vacancies. A client database has been developed which includes fields giving details of offending behaviour, any history of anger or violence, last failure of a drugs test, skills, and industries in which the client would like to work. This database can interrogate a parallel company database with the same fields, so that once a vacancy is notified, any clients matching the employer’s requirements are identified. Employers involved include Relay London Jobs, Lewis Day, Park Royal Jobs, Streetleague, and Greenwich Leisure Ltd.

2.6.3 Work experience

Setting up unpaid work experience placements, and supporting volunteers in the workplace are as important as supporting newly employed clients. Links with employers over volunteering placements could also lead to actual jobs.

The New Arrivals Project matches refugees with professional skills to volunteer work placements, including work shadowing, and runs support groups for refugees who are teachers or engineers. The agency worked with the Institute of Civil Engineers and Sheffield City Council education advisers to establish the support groups and help identify placements. Host agencies, such as Sheffield City Council, engineering companies, schools and a wide range of other local companies in different employment sectors set up voluntary work experience placements.

2.6.4 Supporting the client

Once a placement is agreed, the agency can then support their clients in a range of ways. These include initial training for managers and colleagues in the workplace, advice and

“All careers advice services must forge links with the agencies that could refer clients to them, or take referrals from them, or simply advise them on their work.”

practical help about journeys to work, and then ongoing coaching and support.

The job coach is on hand over the first few months to help with any problems. Initially the job coach works a shift doing exactly what the client is about to do, to get an idea of what is involved. When the client starts, they work whatever hours have been agreed at the interview. This could be as little as 3 hours right up to full time. If a client's initial hours are low, ROSE will aim to get them increased as client confidence and capability improves. At the point at which work exceeds 16 hours, the financial impact on a client's benefits has to be carefully considered.

The Richmond Fellowship runs a monthly 'In-work support group' which has guest speakers and a 'Way forward' group for those not in work. Each is facilitated by a client who is trained and supervised by one of the advisers. In addition, work placements can be set up at best to align with client preferences, especially if the client has no or no recent experience of the labour market.

We asked the agencies for their advice to others. They said:

- *Work with employers.*

2.7 Links with other agencies

2.7.1 Benefits of networks

All careers advice services must forge links with the agencies that could refer clients to them, or take referrals from them, or simply advise them on their work. Services for adults with disadvantages must tailor their networks to reflect the needs of their target groups.

Networking and building close partnerships with other organisations is essential to the success of the USDAW programme. Partnerships are formed with Trade Union Studies Centres, Colleges, Community Learning providers such as the City Lit, the WEA, the CAS, public libraries, nextstep and other providers.

Networks can be particularly useful for small services.

The Age Concern North Tyneside's Back on Board adviser said network support is especially important for guidance staff working on their own.

Besides referral, networks can be a source of information about funding options.

Action for Blind People have developed links with any organisation which can provide funding for a service they want to offer e.g. nextstep, Jobcentre Plus and local learning providers. The team judges the effectiveness of these links in terms of the willingness of other agencies to work with them and the respect and confidence they receive from the statutory agencies.

Networks can also lead to partnership activities for the target client group, including co-location opportunities.

The Suffolk IAG service works in close partnership with a wide range of other organisations to make it easier to offer services to different groups. Partnerships have resulted in:

- Co-location of services, offering them where people go, for example in Jobcentre Plus offices, in prisons or at the Suffolk Centre for the Deaf
- Referrals coming from Mencap, MIND, supported housing schemes, carers' charities and many others, and nextstep services being offered on the premises
- The service directing people to places where they can get specialist help, e.g. the Citizens' Advice Bureau, GPs and Dyslexia associations.

Networks are also a way of addressing the problem of competition between agencies. This can arise when several agencies compete for funding from the same source, or are seeking to meet targets from the same pool of potential clients.

“Has good pluses and pitfalls ... some work really well – you need to choose bedfellows very wisely.”

However, it takes time to find out which are the potentially useful agencies. Networks are costly in time to set up and maintain, and some agencies achieve the same aims through networks run by other organisations.

‘Has good pluses and pitfalls ... some work really well – you need to choose bedfellows very wisely’. (Richmond Fellowship Manager)

Richmond Fellowship maintains links with other agencies mostly through attending meetings or network events, such as the Disability Forum convened by Jobcentre Plus, undertaking presentations, for example to GPs, and developing relationships stimulated by the one-to-one work with clients. Some links can result in a substantial project, for example, staff from NELMHT and their Solutions Team have worked with Richmond Fellowship to develop a programme called ‘Staying well in work’. A member of staff from each organisation has run training at Harvey House for their clients and clients from other organisations. This has given extra strength and independence to NELMHT work. The second course is now set up and Richmond Fellowship is looking at how the model might be rolled out to all Richmond Fellowship services.

2.7.2 Arrangements for referral

Referral of clients is a complex process and it is not easy to ensure that a referral system is working well. Sound referral arrangements require both a good, shared understanding of client need and of the service available from other agencies. Referral also raises issues about confidentiality. It can be painful for clients to repeat their story over again to each new helping service; but on the other hand, there are legal constraints as well as risks involved in passing on too much.

When the referral is internal to an agency working in two locations as with the Foundation Training Company’s work with offenders, passing on full details can ease the problem of repetition.

Foundation Training Company referral forms are very detailed, covering client’s legal and accommodation status, custody information, from where the referral has come, and resettlement needs; they specify what clients want to focus on. By giving a comprehensive picture there is less need for offenders to re-tell their story and more emphasis on addressing issues. Once received, referral forms are entered into a database, which enables the community-based services to advise the referring centre or agency that the offender has made contact.

The Foundation Training Company is now experimenting with a job-brokering service with specific employers under which very sensitive client information is exchanged, demonstrating to a potential employer that the client is sincere in their wish to move on (see under ‘Working with employers’ above).

We asked the agencies for their advice to others. They said:

- *Make and use links with other agencies.*
- *Be ready to offer your specialist understanding to agencies that offer careers advice to all adults.*
- *Referral has to be effective and take-up should be checked.*
- *Don’t re-invent any wheels, but identify gaps and build on what already exists before deciding whether to establish new services.*

2.8 Effective management

While the agencies we studied were very different in all the ways outlined in section 1.4, in all of them strong and thoughtful leadership was clearly key to a robust and effective service.

One way in which the agencies in our study varied most was in the scale and scope of their organisation. These included:

- agencies delivering a national service (the telephone service of the CAS)
- agencies delivering a local service but within a national structure or umbrella organisation either in the public sector (the nextstep

“ *Being target driven now dominates our work, but we have a 95% satisfaction rating so something is right.* ”

contractors in the Southwest and in Suffolk), in the voluntary sector (Age Concern or Action for Blind People) or in the trade union movement (USDAW's work with Unionlearn)

- agencies delivering a local service but under an umbrella organisation that operated across a region or definable area (Richmond Fellowship, Centrepoint, the Foundation Training Company)
- agencies delivering a service across a local authority area (Brent in2 Work)
- small one-off local services (New Arrivals, the ROSE project, although the latter sits within a large college).

While the management of the day-to-day service to adult clients would have much in common across these structures, there will be differences in many other aspects of management between these different kinds of agencies. We were not able to go into this in great detail, but some general points emerged.

2.8.1 Benefits of national or regional organisational frameworks

National or regional structures can work well where the national office takes responsibility for activities that benefit from sharing resources, but leaves local managers with the autonomy to make decisions about their immediate target group.

The national Action for Blind People office, based in London, is responsible for line management, quality control, funding and financial management. They monitor budgets and contract compliance and the national quality team makes random checks on the database of action plans and contract files. They also run mobile information and advice buses that visit the South West three times a year supported by a media campaign in the local press.

The national office also employs national development officers with specific areas of expertise such as in Employment, Housing or Learning and Development, who run training forums for local coordinators. Some central specialist teams have been dispersed to regions, e.g. the self-employment coordinator

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team, adding this area of expertise to regional teams, while others such as the visual awareness team (providing direct support to employers) remains for now centrally managed.

Action for Blind People staff welcomed a management approach that allowed them considerable autonomy within a clearly structured, supportive framework. *'I am trusted to get on with my job.'* (Employment coordinator)

Action for Blind People practitioners meet weekly with their line manager to discuss their caseload. The Team Manager checks progress on action plans and is required to sign it off when completed. Nationally based staff monitor budgets, contract compliance and individual action plans.

This can also work between regional and local levels.

At nextstep Southwest both manager and adviser noted that all actions are focused on meeting targets, but there is a great deal of autonomy given on how they do this. *'Being target driven now dominates our work, but we have a 95% satisfaction rating so something is right.'* (Manager) Within this tightly managed framework *'a good staff team are used to taking action on their own initiative.'* (Manager) The adviser feels it is especially helpful to have this autonomy in developing work across a rural area. Staff are still enthusiastic about their work despite the pressure to achieve targets and changing compliance measures. *'Essentially we just grin and bear it. We are all in this together so that helps.'*

In addition to financial management, quality assurance, and training, CAS and nextstep benefit from a central national information base, and Age Concern benefits from centrally produced information as well as national lobbying on behalf of older people.

Even where there is no structural arrangement with a national agency, small services can build links with national or regional bodies that can take on one or more of these roles.

The New Arrivals Project has a particularly close working relationship with the Northern Refugee Centre: the managers of each discuss the impact of government policy on refugees, jointly chair the Sheffield multi-agency Refugee Forum, and are involved in joint funding bids.

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Central Service User Pool, who help with projects, planning conferences, testing the website, developing publications etc. Service users routinely take part in interview panels.

2.8.2 Management arrangements at local level

Arrangements that involve local partners can have the double advantage of benefiting from expert advice from other agencies and also strengthening the referral network (other aspects of working with local partners are covered under Links with Other Agencies).

The ROSE project Steering Group includes membership from all the relevant agencies. At present it is held every six to eight weeks to facilitate information and practise exchange.

Involving service users in management and service development can have many advantages (see also under Quality Assurance for ways of involving service users).

Action for Blind People have systematic procedures in place to ensure that service users really do influence the development of the service.

At regional level all service users are asked to quarterly group meetings, to help set targets and review progress. This group receives, for example, draft plans and budgets and feeds back into the larger meeting explaining how these were reached and why. *'I have been invited to a meeting next month. I had a written invitation. They are going to ask us about their plans for next year and what they will be spending money on. I am going.'* (New user)

Service users are encouraged to attend staff team meetings if wished. There is also a

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2.8.3 Responsive restructuring

Organisations need to be alert not just to the immediate needs of their clients but also must be aware of changes in the wider economic and social climate and how these may affect their work. This requires them to be open to the idea of closer collaboration with other bodies working in the same field.

During the course of the project two of our case study organisations began a fundamental reorganisation by merging or affiliating with other major bodies working with their target group. Age Concern has merged with Help the Aged, and Action for Blind People has announced a strategic alliance with the Royal National Institute for Blind People. This is a complex task at all levels, and change is never easy for those directly involved. But these significant and far-reaching decisions may be the most rational and effective way of continuing to meet the needs of the client group. These two examples are at national level (with regional and local consequences), but the same responsiveness can be required of regional and local organisations.

2.9 Quality Assurance

This is a key issue for all services whatever their scale of operation. The matrix⁷ standard is recognised by the public sector agencies and funding can depend on it. Some voluntary sector agencies may be unaware of it, or would not see it as relevant to their work: they provide their career advice within a broader service and would regard matrix as too specialist.

The national public-sector bodies in our study are subject also to Ofsted inspections. Advice

⁷The *matrix* standard is the quality framework for the delivery of information, advice or guidance on learning and work (see <http://www.matrixstandard.com>)

“ We have had cases when we have phoned up and people are destitute and the conversation is very inappropriate because of the circumstances.”

services that are part of other institutions may be subject to the quality assurance procedures in those institutions (for example ROSE is based in a further education college which will itself be inspected by Ofsted). This can put a strain on time and other resources but the benefits are clear.

Arrangements within the CAS for quality assurance are robust. Apart from the fact that the whole service has to undergo Ofsted inspection and be matrix accredited, there is an ongoing commitment to making sure standards do not drop. Quality coaches work with advisers to ensure quality of service; time is spent developing, sharing and recording information resources and advisers are encouraged to help and support each other.

nextstep Southwest has specified procedures for following up client progress which are monitored by managers, and the service has the matrix standard. There have been inspections by ALI and the organisation will be subject to an Ofsted pathfinder inspection early in 2009.

Using feedback from clients to improve the service is a feature at many of the agencies in the study. While it is in theory an advantage to any public service it has particular significance where sensitivity to the service users' needs is one of the key critical success factors. Some of the agencies adopted additional approaches.

Centrepoint uses feedback from students not enrolling after the induction or leaving early to make changes to the programme and the way it is delivered.

The ROSE project runs a Parents Forum every six to eight weeks that clients also attend, along with parents/carers of those on the waiting list. This generates views on needs and wants. Feedback has prompted the setting up of a support network and the delivery of sessions on budgeting and supported housing.

Collecting reliable feedback is not straightforward. Written questionnaires that seek enough detail really to inform service provision ask much of people who have other problems on their minds. Follow-up interviewing is labour-intensive for small agencies. And it is not easy for clients to know what would be reasonable to expect. The problem here is generally that people are too easily satisfied. But some target groups present particular challenges.

Collecting feedback from refugees (at the New Arrivals project) can be very superficial because they have little or no point of comparison – and obtaining it can be difficult due to language problems. Clients are usually tracked and contacted after three months. Some clients may feel that they are being checked up on, which may have negative associations for them, or their circumstances may have changed for the worse. *'We have had cases when we have phoned up and people are destitute and the conversation is very inappropriate because of the circumstances.'* (Project Manager)

The service has got better at collecting and using client feedback since their assessment against the matrix standard. This has led to the designing of a simple 'Tell Us What You Think' form.

We asked the agencies for their advice to others. They said:

- *Effective practice requires creativity and honest evaluation. Change immediately if things are not going right.*

2.10 Funding issues

2.10.1 The challenges

Services of this kind are particularly vulnerable at times of recession because they may take the brunt of funding cuts. Since our fieldwork has been completed, this has already affected some of the agencies in the study. It is very unfortunate, because these specialist services are even more important during such times.

The national telephone and web-based service, CAS, has benefited from funding that

“ We can't develop certain aspects of the service because of the short-term funding or take risks and plan ahead. ”

is unusually long-term and substantial for work of this kind.

The CAS has had core, central government funding for last ten years and will become an integrated part of the new adult advancement and careers service in 2010.

This is in contrast with the funding challenges faced by most other careers advice services.

These include:

- a low overall level of resource
- the need to seek funding from more than one source
- that much funding can only be obtained for time-limited projects of an innovative kind, with no sources of funding then to continue once the 'pilot' stage is over
- that even service funding (such as nextstep contracts) is of a short-term nature
- the linking of funding to targets that are unrealistic or in some way distort the goals of the agency

The challenges of short-term funding include maintaining continuity of the offer.

Centrepoint's core funding comes from the Department of Communities and Local Government on one- to three-year contracts that fund accommodation with some flexibility to spend on achieving outcomes related to 'worklessness'. However funding for learning and other specialist staff resources has to be sought continually. The Capel Manor project has three years funding from the London Development Agency. Securing all of this requires successful achievement of targets, completion of reports and appropriate evidence for Supporting People inspections (a quality assurance programme led by the Audit Commission of accommodation provided to enable vulnerable people to live independently).

Insecurity leads to high staff turnover which increases clients' insecurity, particularly damaging for people who have other

disadvantages. It also introduces extra costs in training new staff, and undermines any CPD programmes the agency is able to offer.

Only being able to offer staff contracts lasting a year has prevented the New Arrivals service being able to recruit staff qualified at NVQ level 4, so they have had to train them up once in post. The service has also lost staff because of the short-term nature of the funding. It also creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and impairs the service's ability to plan.

'We can't develop certain aspects of the service because of the short-term funding or take risks and plan ahead.' (Project manager)

Realistic levels of funding are required which take account of the need to cover core costs and management support: some funding streams only cover the cost of interventions with clients.

Small and short-term funding leads to seeking funds from many different sources at once, and this greatly complicates the task of the agency manager.

Currently Age Concern North Tyneside's Back on Board service is supported by eight different contracts all with their own compliance requirements. Some of these seem more interested in numbers rather than overall client progression. *'We juggle contracts to ensure they help achieve the central aim of encouraging progression for the service user. This takes a lot of time and energy. We need to identify more flexible funding sources. This is not going to be easy and as yet there is no obvious solution.'* (Manager)

Short-term funding can actually increase the cost of running a service.

At New Arrivals management time devoted to securing resources is not then available to spend on service development. Short-term funding increases the costs of marketing, when the services being offered are changed and publicity has to be re-designed.

“ Good practice seems to reside in a combination of ceaseless applications for a wide spread of funding sources balanced with a steady eye on the needs of clients and the mission of the service. ”

Even mainstream services on government contracts have insecurities. The current nextstep contract (two years only, finishing in 2010) had to be competed for, and contracting for the aacs will again be on a competitive basis. So nextstep contractors too have to look for additional sources of funding.

nextstep Southwest seeks funds from as many sources as possible and being target driven now dominates the work. The service keeps taking on new contracts and staff must get to grips with new requirements (for example the service has contracts with OLASS for working with ex-offenders and provides support for employees through companies). As soon as they do the contract seems to change or finish. It is difficult to keep on motivating even the most committed staff.

There are similar challenges for those on local authority funding.

Brent in2 Work was set up in 2002 with funding through the London Development Agency of £3 million to support local people into employment. This comes to an end in 2009. After that they will receive 'working neighbourhood funding' until 2011, which will be slightly less. Additional funds are sought for specific projects: for example, its South Kilburn Outreach Office is funded through the New Deal for Communities programme.

2.10.2 Strategic responses

Each manager has to devise ways of addressing this tangle of problems. Good practice seems to reside in a combination of ceaseless applications for a wide spread of funding sources balanced with a steady eye on the needs of clients and the mission of the service.

The Richmond Fellowship manager responds to the difficulties with an approach that is realistic, focused and fleet of foot:

'I know we are voluntary sector but we have been forced into a business model – we are always looking at trends and ways of meeting the needs of clients and of policy and the next funding round. You are constantly looking at that... I think we do it brilliantly... There are times when I turn down funding... if it takes us off track or places unnecessary demands, such as for unrealistically high outcomes.'

Centrepoint managers seek to address these problems by trying to embed skills so that a specific project is not needed; by starting to make contingency plans up to one year ahead; and being opportunistic – re-inventing, spotting any emerging and different needs and identifying where the organisation needs to change.

Being part of a larger organisation can help smooth over the discontinuities of short-term contracts.

The national Action for Blind People fund-raising team raises approximately £22–25m per year through door-to-door campaigns, charitable trusts, legacies, sponsorship and statutory contracts at a national level. The regional team will seek funding contracts locally where these support Action for Blind People's own performance targets. Careful negotiations are carried out to ensure that both Action for Blind People and funding partners have gained. Having core funding with no strings other than good practice makes it easier to handle short-term contracts.

Many careers advice workers have professional expectations for their own work for which funding simply does not exist. Some are willing to give that extra support to clients even though they know they will not be paid for it. This is regrettably a widespread necessity, but cannot be part of a sustained solution.

“ I completed the course and got qualified... It opened up a lot more opportunities... I'm semi-independent now – in my own flat and on my own... and I know myself better. ”

At the beginning to make sure ROSE worked the two project managers put in their own time.

Where a parent body is involved, it may be possible to 'lose' costs of a service in the host organisation's infrastructure. Again, a strategy that is not sustainable for long.

In the Suffolk IAG service (part of Suffolk County Council Community Learning and Skills Development) the strong focus on individual needs is more important to staff in their day-to-day work than simply meeting targets. Advisers try to offer an individually tailored and personalised service to everyone, even though it is not always possible to claim nextstep funding for all activities.

Once again, the experience of the USDAW Unionlearn project echoes other providers but with an interesting difference. Although they say 'a lot can be accomplished without money' because they work through volunteer Union Learning Reps, funds are essential to support that team and the service itself, and then to provide learning opportunities for members.

Project funding for the USDAW project is currently accessible annually through the Union Learning Fund. Bids are made regularly to Unionlearn and to national sources such as Adult Learners Week grants. Funding to support matrix accreditation is also needed.

The main challenge is that there is insufficient funding to offer courses free or at a subsidised rate to those who need to progress, and to fund advanced training for ULRs who wish to develop their skills.

We asked the agencies for their advice to others. They said:

- *Do what is necessary to ensure secure funding.*

2.11 Evidence of impact

What evidence do we have that these services are meeting the needs of their clients? It is unrealistic to expect any advice agency to find work for all its clients, however high the quality of its advice, because the circumstances and goals of their clients are subject to constant change. Similarly it is not always easy to attribute cause when service users do achieve the sustainable employment they seek.

Client satisfaction is an important 'soft' measure, and the way in which services seek feedback is covered under Quality Assurance.

In our visits to agencies we asked for any figures they could give us to demonstrate their achievements. In spite of the difficulties faced by all the client groups in our study, achievements were impressive.

In the first four terms of the Centrepoint course, 35 young people started and 18 completed the qualification. Nine young people have gone on to employment, some on an Apprenticeship scheme; one is getting business start-up advice from the Princes Trust; four are volunteering or have done work experience; four have gone on to or have applied for level 2 at Capel Manor and three to other education or training. One said: *'I completed the course and got qualified... it was really like WOW – I have one. It opened up a lot more opportunities... I'm semi-independent now – in my own flat and on my own... and I know myself better.'*

The New Arrivals statistical data indicates that much is achieved, given the level of staffing. For the 14 months ending in October 2007, the Information and Advice Service received 265 referrals all of whom were contacted at least once; 192 of these were given face-to-face assessments and 50 received information by post and telephone. Twenty-one refugee engineers and 26 refugee teachers were involved in activities to help them towards employment and volunteer placements were set up for 24 refugee professionals.

“ *Most important of all, because it carries over into all aspects of their lives, is increased confidence.* ”

With clients that have extra challenges, targets have to allow for the difficulties in finding sympathetic employers, appropriate training opportunities, the extra time it can take to achieve a desired outcome, and in some cases the inescapable fact that some clients will have relapses that prevent them pursuing their goals.

The Richmond Fellowship reported that for most contracts, about a third of clients go into some sort of employment, about a third into training and about a third 'drift off' – they may be unwell or it wasn't what they were expecting. A number of clients have become volunteers with Richmond Fellowship and one is now in a paid post.

The ROSE project supports approximately 20 clients a year into paid employment but works with many others preparing them for employment. About 80% of clients have been retained in work.

Besides their achievements over training and employment some agencies were able to show other important outcomes from their work.

In 2006/07 over 8,000 resettlement interventions were carried out by the Foundation Training Company and by October 2008 10,000 people had completed FTC resettlement courses, 95% of whom have achieved at least one nationally recognised award from the Open College Network Eastern Region (OCN) or the Oxford Cambridge RSA (OCR). Even before the community programmes were introduced in 2006, Home Office research had shown that FTC prison-based programmes cut re-offending by 7%. With these now open, FTC is aiming for a 15% cut.

Training and work experience outcomes are particularly important for these client groups and need to be recognised by funding agencies alongside employment targets. Most important of all, because it carries over into all aspects of their lives, is increased confidence. All those working disadvantaged adults said how important it was to find a way of recognising it among the outcomes, and targets, of their work.

Section 3 – Key messages for work with clients

“It was not the needs of the organisation and what they do that mattered but what I wanted.”

Among both the ‘specialist’ and ‘universal’ agencies in the study, and independent of the process, management and funding issues outline above, there were features that were particularly valued by users of the services.⁸ The research team identified the following features as being especially important to the relationship with clients in supporting disadvantaged target groups.

3.1 Help starts from what is needed by the client

A user of the Suffolk IAG service commented that there was a strong focus on what he needed and wanted and the adviser went to a lot of trouble to find out what this was. This was in contrast to other services he had tried.

This may be easier for specialist services in the voluntary sector because they can choose their own mission in relation to their specific target group.

‘It was not the needs of the organisation and what they do that mattered, but what I wanted.’
Action for Blind People service user.

The funding they seek is for work with that group alone, and within a realistically-defined geographical area. To fulfil that mission, it is they and not a more remote funding body that decides the range of help such people need. As a result they have more freedom to tailor that help to what is needed by the individual. In applying for grant aid voluntary sector agencies may also have more freedom to negotiate realistic targets (some of these features also apply to the work of locally-funded and -tailored public sector initiatives such as those under the Brent in2 Work programme).

Smallness of scale might seem key to this, but we have also seen there are advantages in delivery at local level supported by national structures. Where that is the case, autonomy for service managers to respond to local need rather than national targets may offer the best of both systems. The same argument may apply in turn to practitioners who need a level of autonomy within a clearly defined framework to be able to meet individual customer needs.

3.2 Careers advice is couched within a much broader programme of support

Centrepoint’s service promise is ‘not just a bed’: each young adult is individually supported and has facilitated access to advice; intensive, health-related support; and learning opportunities both inside and outside the organisation.

For people who have really dropped through the meshes of society, such as young homeless people, holistic help that includes basic living skills is essential. For others where gradual social exclusion is felt across several aspects of their lives, as with some older adults, they need the confidence and optimism that comes from other activities as a basis for re-entering the labour market.

For New Arrivals clients, practical and cultural issues may have to be prioritised or may determine what course of action can be followed: for example, clients may not have sufficient money to pay for buses to reach a centre offering classes at their level of English – or may require single sex classes.

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⁸These features are not unique to the services in the study and can be found in the work of many other agencies. Importantly, their absence is not necessarily a result of lack of awareness of staff. Sometimes a public service commitment and low level of resource can make it impossible to provide the support that staff know their clients need.

“A key aim is to maintain the young person’s focus on long-term sustainable independence through tackling small-scale activities that accrue to achieve small steps forward.”

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Advisers need to be skilled to identify potential limitations. Advisers may need to sort out transport to venues, make appointments and accompany their clients.

Where there is this broader programme of support, the advice on learning or work can be attached to or done through another activity.

The Foundation Training Company aims to give support to the individual across all of the Seven Pathways.⁹ FTC achieves this by dealing directly with the problem or referring the individual to an agency that can help with their more specific needs. It is expected that when the individual has taken advantage of the referred service they will return to the FTC centre for further support. This process could take a week or six months depending on their needs.

3.3 Help is closely linked to the client’s readiness and need for help

With some of these target groups, simply the fact that they have a disadvantage does not mean they are seeking work or training, and the offer (and especially an obligation) to take up such ‘help’ can be counter-productive. Where an agency can spend time getting to know a client, they build up trust so that when that person is ready for it, the help is effective.

This involves an element of opportunism on the part of the advice worker, noticing when someone might be ready and raising ideas in a way that is acceptable to them.

Centrepoint staff find that issues present themselves through interaction and that opportunities should be seized by staff in the moment. A key aim is to maintain the young person’s focus on long-term sustainable independence through tackling small-scale activities that accrue to achieve small steps forward.

With some clients, such as those with mental health problems, the need may be episodic: some mental illness symptoms can recur after a period of steady progress.

Many Richmond Fellowship clients have a mental illness whose symptoms can fluctuate. So the service has to be responsive: ‘Doors are open, they can come back’.

In other cases, the client may be settled in a job but then some crisis means that they need help again. A long-term relationship that continues after the initial goal has been reached can be critical in establishing sustainable employment.

Lack of motivation, following from trauma or depression, can result in New Arrivals clients not pursuing agreed actions – or being unable to agree these during an interview. Clients often need a project worker’s support to encourage them and address these issues. If an asylum-seeker is given refugee status, the priority may change in a very short period of time from seeking work (often the immediate priority once refugee status is granted) to bringing their family to the UK.

⁹The pathways are:

1. Accommodation
2. Education, training and employment
3. Mental and physical health
4. Drugs and alcohol
5. Finance, benefit and debt
6. Children and families of offenders
7. Attitudes, thinking and behaviour

Ministry of Justice, (2004), *Reducing Re-offending: National Action Plan*.

<http://noms.justice.gov.uk/news-publications-events/publications/strategy/reducing-reoffending-action-plan?view=Binary>

“ It is not just clients who benefit from this ethos of celebrating success. ”

3.4 Progress is achieved through small steps

Again this is possible only in the context of a long-term approach, as in the Centrepoint example in the previous paragraph or this example from the ROSE project.

ROSE project managers and staff stressed the individual nature of learning disability and the complexity of needs. In general, clients are likely to take more time to learn and can need things explained step by step, in different ways and perhaps repetition. One project manager gave an illustration of a young woman starting a job where all employees had to clock in and type their number. This client cannot read or write so ROSE asked for the clock-in and -out to be colour-coded green/red for her and for her number to be a sequence of 12345. This she practised at college and at home through her mother setting up entry to the fridge using the agreed system. In this way, she was able to become familiar with the system and manage it confidently.

3.5 Effective help involves persistence

When a helper is ready to stay by a client, and see them through in spite of any setbacks, it is much appreciated by the client.

The Centrepoint mentor is present in almost all sessions and sets up one-to-ones as needed to talk through personal issues affecting learning and next steps. Referrals can be made to the Centrepoint drug and alcohol worker or mental health team. Following through on this can be critical to retention and the Centrepoint mentor will accompany to appointments if asked. She also helps to keep each young person attending, phoning them up on college days to encourage them to get there. With young people who do not complete, the learning mentor consistently provides support and advice to encourage them to re-engage.

As Centrepoint staff put it, 'do not underestimate the importance of small things.'

'Ringing you to encourage you to wake up and come. Or text. Rebecca was always so early and so happy... It really made me want to get up and come or I would not have... They got us all lunch, teas and all that – it all helps to get us through the day.' (Centrepoint client)

3.6 Staff really care, and celebrate success

A recurrent theme in our case studies is the involvement that advice staff and the whole organisation feel in the achievements of clients and the personal encouragement. All personal achievements are rewarded in some way, ranging from warm and enthusiastic congratulations, to events and presentations.

Underpinning all the work of Brent in2 Work is the fact that they care. They care what happens to local people, they care what happens to individuals who come into contact with their services and they care what happens in their community.

The Foundation Training Company gives offenders a taste of success through OCN accreditation and celebrate this. They find it is motivating, particularly for those with little previous attainment. One participant commented: *'the course has made me realise that I had skills and qualities I didn't know I had'*. Tutors give participants positive feedback and tell them when other offenders get work – which encourages and keeps them on the right track.

It is not just clients who benefit from this ethos of celebrating success.

The work of the USDAW ULRs and the achievements of learners are celebrated locally and nationally, through events to present

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certificates, social gatherings with a learning theme, conferences and award ceremonies. The mobile ULR interviewed won the NIACE National Learning Works Award in May 2008. Her work has helped to promote mutual awareness and understanding among ethnic minority groups at work and to involve senior management in celebrating the achievements of union members.

All Age Concern North Tyneside's Back on Board clients have a business skills assessment and are encouraged to take an in-house eight-session introduction to computing if needed. There is always a tutor or volunteer present to help. *'I had not worked for years and could not use a computer. You seem to need them for all jobs now and often have to apply online. I have done my CV on the computer and can now mail it with job applications. I can use the facilities here whenever I want and there is always help in doing so and on job search.'* (Client)

3.7 The advice empowers clients to help themselves in future

The aim of all good careers advice is to help clients see how better to manage their own careers, and encourage independence: not to withdraw support, but to help them acquire career management skills gradually. People with different kinds of disadvantage have their own special skills to acquire as well as those needed by all adults.

The nextstep Southwest service ethos is to encourage clients to carry out their own research into learning and work opportunities. This helps people to take control of their own lives and sets a clear focus for the adviser's time and expertise.

'I have been given lots of things to follow up myself so I feel in charge of things. The adviser helps you help yourself. I may not be able to do exactly what I wanted, but I am moving forward and I know now what I will need to do.' (Client)

Often this empowerment in managing a career is established through learning skills such as use of computers or other technology: it helps directly in job search, and is a skill that employers are looking for, but most importantly confidence in doing that leads to confidence in acquiring other new skills.

Conclusion

“The systems, processes and ethos of all 12 agencies are directly applicable to the development of the aacs.”

This report seeks to describe effective though not necessarily innovative practice. It is based on 12 case studies but many points will be familiar to others running similar services.

In the case of the nine specialist agencies such as Action for the Blind, the initiative to provide help came directly from a concern for the target group itself, harnessing powerful, altruistic energies and often involving personal cost and risk. The services they provide are impressive and often little known or understood outside their immediate networks. In the case of the generalist agencies such as nextstep, the fact that they have been able to reach disadvantaged groups is the result of empathy with client need and imaginative use of resources, operating within public funding frameworks and targets that are not always easily compatible with the needs of clients. The systems, processes and ethos of all 12 agencies are directly applicable to the development of the aacs.

The fieldwork for this study was completed before the full implications of the gathering economic recession were felt by the agencies. Without doubt their work will be affected, by loss of funding in some cases and by all in the fall in the number of employment opportunities and increase in competition for training places and volunteering posts. The findings reported here are no less important, but may for a time be harder to implement. Service users will need extra support through this difficult time, particularly in understanding the many additional factors that may impede their progress. The focus in some cases may have to be on what can be done to improve skills and self-confidence while waiting for the economy to recover.

Recommendations to managers and practitioners

1. *Personal dimensions of the work*

Kindness, and patience in building up trust, are fundamental building blocks for successful help. What can be done to improve these?

- (a) **The importance of small things.** Provide welcoming cups of tea, and staff or volunteers who ‘speak their language’ wherever possible.
- (b) **Celebrate the success** of service users and develop an ethos where staff genuinely delight in progress made.
- (c) **Time** for these activities is essential and managers should build it in to the working day.
- (d) There are implications in this for the **recruitment, training and support of staff** to encourage this way of working.

2. *Encouraging progression*

All the agencies nurtured their clients, but for all the goal was to help them move forward (in some cases, also preventing regression). This includes:

- (a) Proceeding in small steps
- (b) Understanding when the client is ready for the next step
- (c) Asking clients to make a commitment to change
- (d) Challenging the client where necessary
- (e) Following them up, to remind and encourage
- (f) Helping them to help themselves.

3. *Careers advice within a broader framework of support*

All these agencies understood the broader support needed by their particular client group to progress into training or work. This requires:

- (a) a holistic approach in the agency itself
- (b) insights into what it means to have each disadvantage, so as to be able to identify what additional support is needed when, and when a client is truly ready to make the next step
- (c) referral networks specifically constructed to support people with that particular

disadvantage. Universal services cannot assume that one general referral network will cover the needs of all disadvantaged clients. They will need to identify specialist agencies of the kind described in this report, who will understand what additional support is needed (see under 'Management', below).

4. **Basic skills**

The additional support needed by service users included developing some skills that underpin all others, especially English language skills (ESOL), literacy, numeracy, and, increasingly important, computer skills. This could be addressed through closer working arrangements with local colleges and/or use of volunteers.

5. **Staff training and CPD**

While agencies differed over whether they recruited staff on the basis of their professional skills or their personal qualities, all were agreed on the importance of:

- (a) **ongoing training once in post**
- (b) **retaining staff** so their experience and expertise is not lost (linked to the need for ongoing, core funding).

6. **Work with employers**

This is particularly important for vulnerable adults. Agencies need to work with local employers to:

- (a) explain how employing the target group could **benefit their company**
- (b) arrange **work experience and volunteering** opportunities
- (c) **broker actual jobs**
- (d) provide a range of appropriate **support for clients** employed in the company.

7. **Management**

The organisation must ensure a flexible response to client need.

- (a) **Strong and thoughtful leadership** is key to the success of all these agencies.

- (b) **Local managers need autonomy to respond to the varied needs of their service users.**

- (c) Strong referral networks are crucial (see 3c above). **Time must be allowed for staff to build, maintain and extend these.** In some situations, existing networks may be meeting most referral needs: **where this is the case, staff need time to locate them and make use of the help they offer.**

- (d) Managers should look for ways of **using existing regional or national structures, or entering into new partnerships**, to relieve practitioners of some tasks, thereby allowing them more time for direct work with clients.

- (e) **Managers should involve service users in developing the service**, through quality assurance, participation on management groups, in marketing, and in service provision, by training them as volunteers and where possible seeking to employ some.

8. **Funding**

- (a) **Core funding is essential** to ensure continuity of provision. A service cannot be sustained on a sequence of short-term grants. Where these are a significant element of an agency's funding, measures must be in place to reduce the impact of the end of the grant period.

- (b) Short-term or project funding should **not be sought where the terms deflect the service from its key mission.**

9. **Evidence of impact**

Agencies need to **maintain records** of '**hard**' outcomes, such as employment or enrolments, but also develop indicators for '**soft**' outcomes and record this alongside the others. Negotiation with funding bodies may be needed to show them the importance of these (see below).

Recommendations to funding bodies

1. *Short-term funding*

Sudden removal of a service is particularly damaging for vulnerable groups. Some use of project (and therefore fixed-term) funding is inevitable, but **the funding organisation should help applicant agencies consider how provision might be sustained if the initiative is successful in meeting client needs.**

2. *Targets*

- (a) For employment and training. Where funding is linked to employment or training targets **these should be realistic for the client group** and recognise the opportunities available which may be limited in, for example, rural areas and areas of high unemployment.
- (b) Soft outcomes. **Targets should also include measures of soft outcomes** such as increases in client confidence.

Appendix – Methodology

1. Selecting the agencies

In January 2008 Paul Gutherson prepared a literature review for CfBT of existing research on careers advice work with disadvantaged adults, and in April 2008 Tony Watts prepared the paper 'Career Information and Guidance for Disadvantaged Adults in the UK: Policy Framework'. In that same month Ruth Hawthorn drafted a paper drawing on this research that identified some of the issues faced by the agencies involved. This 'Conceptual Framework' also included a suggestion of the particular target groups that might be included in the study, with possible national bodies and other experts who could be consulted in identifying agencies that demonstrated good or interesting practice. That list was discussed by the project steering group (consisting of representatives from the City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development and CfBT Education Trust) and a shortlist of types of disadvantage was drawn up.

Judy Alloway, as fieldwork coordinator, then recruited a team of fieldworkers on the basis of their knowledge and understanding of work in these particular fields and with their advice a final list of agencies was agreed.

The study was limited to England. The range of agencies in relation to size, funding, target group, and generalist vs. specialist is described in Section I of the report. There was also an attempt, to some extent achieved, to obtain a geographical spread but this was constrained by the small number of agencies and the wish for variation across the other factors.

The questionnaires

A draft list of questions to be explored with agency managers, advice practitioners and service users was included in the Conceptual Framework, each question closely linked to the issues raised in that paper. From this more detailed drafts were prepared and used by the fieldwork team. The actual questionnaires used are available at www.skillsdevelopment.org/research.

The case studies

When fieldwork had been completed in November 2008, each fieldworker drafted case study overviews of the work of each agency based on the completed questionnaires. These were sent to the agency in draft form for comments and amended accordingly. The case studies were then prepared and these edited versions have also been checked with agencies themselves to ensure that no distortions have found their way in.

This report

When the case studies had been confirmed, the full project team met with Heidi Agbenyo from the City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development and Andrew Morris, consultant to the project, to advise on the shape and content of the project report. This report has been based on suggestions made by the whole group. In particular, the key messages in Section 3 were those agreed by the team of experts that had conducted the interviews with the agencies.

When the report was in draft form, an Interpretation Workshop was held at the City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development, attended by a group of 15 people that included practitioners, managers, researchers and policy makers. The group welcomed the report and its findings, and made a number of helpful comments that have contributed to the final version.



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