Information, Advice & Guidance (IAG)
One in a series of six publications
About Us

The Linking London Lifelong Learning Network is a membership organisation of thirty two universities and colleges in Central, East and North London which aims to improve the progression opportunities for vocational learners. We are funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. In our first two years of operation we have concentrated in the following employment sector areas: Health, Sport, Education and the Public, Community and Voluntary Sector, as well as the work areas of information, advice and guidance and credit, and accreditation of prior learning.

The Publications
This publication is one of a series which aims to capture some of the issues, achievements and challenges we have encountered after two years of operation (2006 – 08). During the next two years we will be expanding our remit beyond Public Services into additional employment sectors of relevance to the employment needs of the capital.

We hope you find the publications interesting and thought provoking – they represent the views of their authors and their experiences.

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Introduction

This publication is one in a series and looks at Linking London work in the area of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG). It provides an overview of the IAG work that has taken place over the last year and the priorities for the remainder of the Linking London project.

The key aim of Linking London Lifelong Learning Network is to improve the opportunities for vocational learners and employees to progress into and through Higher Education. The original Linking London bid identifies Information Advice and Guidance (IAG), along with flexible learning, curriculum integration and credit relationships, as playing a key role in supporting the aims of the network.

An IAG paper, outlining the proposed focus and priorities for IAG, was presented to, and approved by, the Linking London Board in December 2007. The paper recommended that Linking London IAG activities focus on adding value to, and integrating, existing services where applicable rather than providing a direct learner facing service. It also stressed the importance of identifying good practice and encouraging innovative IAG work, supported by development funding. By “advising the advisers” through collaboration, providing opportunities for networking, improved resources and staff training Linking London will contribute to an improved advice and guidance service for vocational learners.

This publication provides an overview of the IAG work that has taken place over the last year and its priorities for the remainder of the Linking London project.

Improving information and advice available for vocational learners

Information on progression to HE is too often focussed entirely on the requirements of academic A-level learners. Information on entry for vocational learners, including BTEC and Access learners is often incomplete, missing or worse still, incorrect. Clear, up to date information on progression opportunities for those on advanced apprenticeships who are interested in HE progression is particularly scarce. It remains to be seen if this will also be the case for learners on the new 14-19 diplomas who aspire to HE. A lack of information in particular around part time HE progression
opportunities for learners has been identified as an area that needs to be addressed.

The very learners who need the most support to navigate through the complex “crazy paving” into HE are least well served by clear up to date and accurate IAG resources. In addition IAG resources published for use by advisers to support potential HE learners navigate their way effectively into HE have also traditionally focussed on A-level learners considering full time HE study to the exclusion of vocational learners. These gaps in resources have been identified by the Emerging Issues in IAG Forum held by Linking London LLN in October 2007, through the IAG OPG and in discussions with IAG staff in the network.

The following 3 examples outline how Linking London is addressing these gaps in IAG provision:

1) Improving information on full time HE course provision for vocational learners: Developing UCAS Entry Profiles

**Background**

“An Entry Profile (EP) is a collection of items of information, gathered from various sources, which when read together helps a potential applicant research their course options and make an informed decision about the course or courses they will eventually apply for.” (UCAS definition)

The Schwartz review of Admissions to HE refers to the importance of entry profiles in supporting fairness and greater transparency.

In the Consultation Paper Improving the HE Application Process (September 2005), responses from HEIs and other stakeholders showed that there was 99% support for UCAS to continue its work to encourage the provision of clear, comparable entry requirement information, with a view to moving toward 100% provision of information for students wishing to enter HE in 2009.

The Delivery Partnership was established in 2006 to implement reforms to the HE applications process following the Government’s response in May 2006 to the DfES led consultation on improving the HE

Applications process. One of its key aims is to enhance the provision of clear and transparent information for applicants. SPA (Supporting Professionalism in Admissions) chairs the UK wide Delivery Partnership’s Entry Profile Working Group formed in 2007 to meet this aim.

**Current Activities**

Asking HEIs in the network to recognise the importance of developing effective entry profiles formed a key part of the IAG paper that went to the Linking London Board in December 2007. At the Board meeting member institutions, in support of the aims of the network have agreed to:

- “recognise the importance of HEIs providing detailed and accurate entry profiles in helping to meet the strategic objectives of Linking London and agree that all HEIs in LL LN that are UCAS members work towards completing EPs for all their full time foundation degree and undergraduate courses”.

In addition Linking London, acting on behalf of all London LLNs, sits on the National Entry Profile Working Group chaired by SPA. Regular attendance at this meeting has provided an opportunity for LLNs to continue to promote the information needs of vocational applicants to HE through EPs.

While UCAS and SPA are encouraging and supporting HEIs to complete EPs for all courses, responsibility for content lies with individual HEIs. Linking London is supportive of the aim of 100% completion of EPs by September 2009. It is also concerned that the content reflects the information and advice needs of vocational learners.

At present the quality of information and advice on EPs for vocational learners is of variable quality. In its draft Entry Profile Guide for HEIs UCAS points out the further work that needs to be done:

- “What we want now are enhanced EPs including new 14-19 curriculum, competency standards, more on how HEIs make decisions – their internal processes,

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1 Alan Wilson Group Consultation on Improving HE Applications Process 2006
2 Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group (Schwartz) report: Fair Admissions to Higher Education: Recommendations for Good Practice 2004
more on vocational qualifications, progression agreements etc”.

Linking London has developed a template for EPs based on good practice nationally and from feedback from SPA and members of the EP working group. The template includes entry requirement information for applicants on:

- Access courses
- BTEC Nationals
- 14-19 Diplomas
- Apprenticeships

Additional information to include:
- Credit
- Mature learners
- Part time study opportunities
- What the HEIs are looking for in an applicant – what skills, qualities and experience will be beneficial to students on a particular course
- The admissions decision making process

This template, along with detailed information on the benefits of EPs (not only to learners and advisers but to HEIs themselves), has been circulated to UCAS/EP contacts at each network HEI that is a UCAS member. Information about how Linking London can support HEIs in this, including the potential for bidding for development fund money to support this work, has also been forwarded. At present several institutions have been visited and meetings with key staff have been held. Further meetings with all Network HEIs that are UCAS members are planned.

Currently the number of completed EPs in the network is of variable quality and incomplete. While some network members have EPs for all their undergraduate full time courses there are several institutions that have few, if any, completed EPs. Clearly there is some work to be done to convince HEIs of the benefits of good quality EPs not only for learners and advisers but for HEIs themselves.

2) Improving Information on Part Time HE Provision:
Proposal for Pan London Part time LLN UCAS Pilot

Feedback from the mapping of FE and HE IAG services in the Linking London network, conducted by the OU in April 2007 on behalf of Linking London, clearly demonstrated the need for improved IAG for potential part time HE applicants. Comments from IAG staff included:

“FEC staff lack awareness of the full range of progression opportunities from their course(s) for their learners, particularly around part time and distance learning”

“There is a lack of knowledge of part time and employment routes into HE amongst students and also advisers generally”

Linking London collaborated with the Open University and Birkbeck Stratford to run a Part Time Higher Education event in July this year to raise awareness of this often overlooked progression pathway (amongst IAG staff and FE tutors). Linking London delivered a workshop with IAG representatives from the University of East London and Nextstep to explore further the barriers and potential solutions to them. Two key themes emerged from the workshop:

- Need to raise awareness of potential learners, tutors, advisers about part time and flexible learning provision in HE
- Need for a centralised part time and flexible learning admissions and/or information database

Attendees universally agreed that the profile of this route needs to be raised amongst potential learners and advisers but were divided as to whether a full blown admissions service needed to be developed to help standardise the applications process and provide useful statistics for HE providers or whether a database listing part time provision and further links would be sufficient. Discussion was also had as to where this information would be housed, either embedded in an existing resource, eg UCAS, or stand alone.

Since this event Linking London has initiated a meeting with UCAS to explore their potential involvement in a Pan London part time distance learning resource pilot. Several potential solutions were discussed and formed the basis of a presentation by Jill Johnson from UCAS to the Pan London LLN Directors and representatives from Birkbeck and the OU in July. An action plan to move
this forward will shortly be drawn up and the proposal raised with the Linking London Steering Group and Board for further discussion.

3) Developing IAG resources for Adults in the Workplace:

Collaborative work with unionlearn

Over 18,000 unionlearn Representatives (ULRs) work with union members to promote a culture of lifelong learning at work. ULRs are trained to help identify training needs, provide information and advice about learning or training and liaise with the employer regarding these activities. This support includes advice on level 4 provision. Regular meetings with Pan London IAG LLN colleagues and unionlearn have explored how LLNs can support the work of ULRs specifically when advising employees on potential HE progression. As a result several areas have been identified, including input into the annual unionlearn conference in December 2008 in the form of a workshop on progression routes into HE. In addition a number of IAG resources to support ULRs in their work are being developed and research into how to add value to unionlearn’s new IAG resource for ULRs to support their work is being investigated. It is intended that these resources will be of use to any IAG staff supporting adults in employment who are interested in HE provision.

IAG ICT Developments

Linking London has been exploring potential ICT solutions to support vocational learners progressing into HE. Meetings have been held with several LLNs to find out more about their IAG online resources with a view to potentially investing in developing one for Linking London use. However it was felt that at present it was not in the best interests of the network to proceed, based in part on issues around when the resources would be ready for use and sustainability. A number of LLNs in England have invested considerable time and money in developing and marketing discrete online resources. HEFCE has called a moratorium on any further LLN ICT developments to allow time to review the value of existing resources.

A number of questions are raised by this approach to supporting vocational learners. These include issues around sustainability, usage and limitations based on geographical boundaries of LLNs. These geographical boundaries, which often make no sense to learners and employers, will mean that any LLN resource will only have local applicability. A great deal of time and money will also be needed to successfully market the resource to prevent low visibility. Further, the approach of some LLNs to use the resource primarily as a vehicle to advertise progression agreements (PAs) runs the risk of narrowing, not widening, learner’s options if alternative pathways not covered by a PA are not included. Linking London’s approach has been to identify where the key information gaps exist and explore existing IAG resources to see where the maximum impact could be achieved. Linking London’s proposal for a Pan London Part time HE provision web resource in collaboration with UCAS, if successful, will have a major impact on potential part time HE learners and advisers. In addition it would address the issues about LLNs approaches to ICT resources highlighted here.

Staff Development Events

In the last year five IAG staff development events have taken place which have been delivered by Linking London or in collaboration with other network members or other London LLNs. Events have focussed on IAG issues identified by members of the network through the emerging issues forum, IAG OPGs and feedback from events.

- Emerging Issues in IAG forum
- Pan London LLN HE Admissions Event
- Sector Skills Council, Skills for Health IAG Event in collaboration with SE LLN
- Pan London IAG Event – Supporting vocational learners into HE
- Part Time HE: The Real Alternative – a joint OU, Birkbeck, Linking London event

Forthcoming Events:

- Series of IAG OPG Good Practice Workshops
- 14-19 Diplomas: Progression Opportunities & Providing IAG
- Advising Adults in the Workplace
For further information on future events: www.linkinglondon.ac.uk

IAG Operational Practioner Groups (OPGs)

Since October 07 5 IAG OPG meetings have taken place. These meetings have proved invaluable in helping to shape the direction of Linking London IAG work and have provided an opportunity for networking and sharing good practice between Linking London FEC and HEI IAG staff and other stakeholders including Aimhigher, Connexions and Nextstep. Following on from the success of the staff development event which took place immediately after the IAG OPG in April, future IAG OPG meetings will include a staff development event to provide an opportunity for members of the network and key stakeholders to share good practice. The next IAG OPG will take place on the 24th of October and will be followed at 2.30-4pm by a workshop on supporting refugees and asylum seekers into HE to be delivered by RAGU (Refugee and Asylum Seeker Guidance Unit) at London Metropolitan University.

Development Fund Projects

Open University: A project which aims to develop the capacity of the Open University (OU) in London as a flexible and work based learning provider. It also aims to reach new HE learners from vocational backgrounds to study in the areas of education, health and the public and voluntary sector.

City & Islington College: This project developed online tours for the HE and Foundation Degree provision at the college. The aim was to illustrate online the range of provision, resources and the nature of the learning experience.

University of Westminster: This project aims to undertake research into the educational experiences and employment trajectories experienced by vocational learners who have entered a Higher Education institution from non A-level, Further Education backgrounds.

Open University: This project aims to address the range of challenges that learners face in progressing from level 3 vocational qualifications to level 4 in the Early Years sector by providing advice, support and mentoring for part-time learners within the Early Years Sector.

Potential projects also include:

- The mapping of existing Personal Development Planning practices and the development of a model of PDP that can be embedded across FE/HE that supports progression
- An e-mentoring scheme to support access learners in FE progress into HE

Supporting Progression Agreements

As more Progression Agreements come on stream a task for IAG will be to ensure that clear, accurate information is made readily available to inform staff and learners about current agreements. Through the progression agreement institutions are also strongly encouraged to ensure an effective IAG programme is in place to support learners make an effective transition into HE.

National Developments

The last year has seen a number of developments that impact on IAG provision both locally and nationally. These include the responsibility for the Connexions service transferring from Connexions partnerships, managed by Whitehall, to local authorities, which has in some cases meant a change of provider. The focus of these services is still likely to be on those young learners at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). The danger is that many advisers will not have had an opportunity to keep up to date with developments relating to progression to HE and will struggle to provide accurate up to date information to those learners who may have the potential to progress into HE. LLNs will need to establish closer links with these new services to identify and support staff development in this area.

A new Universal Advice Service for adults

A year ago, the Leitch Report recommended a new careers service for adults which
should be ‘universal’ as a key means of encouraging individuals at all skill levels to raise their aspirations and invest in developing their skills. The new adult advancement and careers service (AACS) will be fully operational by 2010/2011 and pilots are planned to commence in September 2008. At present the focus of the service appears to be on adults who are low skilled or unemployed. A key challenge for the government is to balance the tension between the need to target those adults in most need and at the same time ensure a universal service is available to all, including support available to adults keen to find out more about HE opportunities. LLNs need to continue to seek to be involved in the development of the service emphasising the need for adults to be able to access good quality IAG around HE opportunities. In addition it increases the importance of adults having access to high quality provision via the internet and for effective referral and signposting mechanisms to be in place to guide service users to the most appropriate source of support.

**Increased focus on apprenticeships**

Expanding and delivering apprenticeships is an important building block in the Government’s wider agenda of ensuring world class skills by 2020 and diversifying the learning offer to keep young people participating until age 18.

The Government has set a challenging target of increasing apprenticeship numbers to 500,000 by 2020, has promised an apprenticeship entitlement for every qualified young person who wants one, and has committed to a 25% increase in apprenticeship funding by 2010/11. LLNs can play an important role in bringing together Apprenticeship providers and HEIs to explore possibilities for developing progression pathways into HE and to explore solutions to the barriers to progression that may currently exist. IAG will play a crucial role in highlighting progression opportunities that become available through this work and in providing resources to help apprentices and staff, including advisers, support those that want to make the transition into HE.

**14-19 diplomas**

From September 2008 the first five diploma lines will begin. LLNs have been encouraged by HEFCE to work with their network members to help ensure these learners have clearly defined progression pathways into HE. Many of the students on the advanced level 3 diploma will be looking to progress to HE in 2010 and will need to make well informed choices during the first year of their course.

Central to this is the development of progression agreements from diplomas at sending institutions to HE. IAG has a crucial role to play in helping to ensure the success of the new diplomas. While most HEIs have provided positive statements with regard to the diplomas and have added this to their websites and to the UCAS site, these statements are generic and do not in the main provide details of specific progression pathways. Diploma learners need access to clear and accurate information and advice as to which undergraduate courses they can apply to and information about any specific requirements regarding any additional learning, eg A-levels, and the focus of extended projects etc.

Currently Linking London has focussed on the Society Health and Development (SHD) Diploma. Learners studying for the SHD diploma may face the greatest challenges when progressing on to related HE courses due to the specific requirements for science subjects. Diploma Learners applying for physiotherapy undergraduate degree courses for example may be expected to also be studying A level biology at many institutions, if indeed the diploma is accepted at all. An obvious concern is that learners will need to be made aware of additional learning requirements relating to A-levels before the course actually starts.

Linking London has been working hard to help address these issues and has established links with 14-19 consortia involved in delivering the SHD this year. Meetings have been held individually with representatives of the Hackney, Islington and Newham diploma delivery partnerships and the 3 partnerships were invited, along with a representative from Edexcel, to attend a joint meeting to share good practice and to explore how Linking London could support
their work. In addition the responses of network members to the diplomas has been mapped and shared with the three consortias. Linking London hosted another meeting in October 2008.

Linking London is also in discussion with Skills for Health around developing an IAG resource for teachers, and is working on producing IAG resources for diploma learners and advisers. We are also in discussion with the Institute of Education about the potential for developing a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programme for staff involved in the diploma.

**Future Developments**

The key focus of Linking London IAG work will continue to be “advising the advisers”. This will be done through a series of staff development events, the development of discrete resources to support their work, identifying and encouraging the sharing of good practice and adding value to existing IAG services. However, the 14-19 curriculum developments will focus the work on ensuring that diploma students and apprentices that wish to progress onto HE are supported by good quality IAG. Further work needs to be done to support adults in the workplace to make informed decisions about the HE opportunities open to them. As mentioned, this will include working with existing providers of HE advice to adults, including Nextstep, and learndirect, and building on the existing relationship with unionlearn to provide IAG resources and staff development for their unionlearn reps.

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