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ABSTRACT

Recent Further Education Unit (FEU) research has provided clear evidence of technical college students' needs for career and educational guidance throughout their program of study. Inhouse technical college guidance services to individuals and institutions offer a number of benefits to both students receiving the services and the institutions offering them. Upon entering an FEU program, learners need accessible guidance services that provide clear information on program details/requirements, advice on finance and costs, information on alternatives within and outside college, and recognition of prior achievement. During their course of study, learners need details on courses, learning methods, and assessment that they can use to determine their options and reach decisions; support for learning; career education; and feedback on their progress. When preparing to exit FEU programs, learners need information on careers and progression, recognition of their achievement, and help with finding a job. Noncompleters need support upon exiting a program, and learners with disabilities and learning difficulties require special services throughout their studies. When developing guidance services, colleges must identify local needs, consider appropriate levels of service to be met, determine the range of students who require services, and determine who will provide the services. (MN)

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Learners' Needs in College-Based Guidance

Further Education Unit

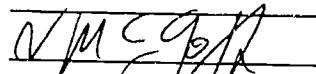
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LEARNERS' NEEDS IN COLLEGE-BASED GUIDANCE

INTRODUCTION

This is the first in a new series of FEU bulletins on Guidance and Learner Support. Forthcoming publications on guidance will focus on individual action plans, quality and organisational models. This bulletin draws on evidence from recent FEU research and consultation with practitioners in order to highlight learners' needs for guidance at the three stages given prominence in *Funding Learning* (FEFC, 1993):

- Entry
- On programme
- Exit

FEFC's circular on Funding Categories (93/20) suggests that both APL and preparation for exit are treated as on-programme activities. For the purpose of providing auditable evidence of completion, the third stage is now designated the 'achievement' element. However, in this bulletin we follow the common practice of designating the preparation for exit or transition, as well as the final recording of achievement as the third stage. The bulletin will be of interest to:

- senior managers
- managers of student services
- guidance co-ordinators
- careers specialists

and can be used to:

- review the institution's provision in the light of the three-stage model
- devise a learner entitlement for guidance
- audit the range of services on offer
- draw up agreements with external agencies and consortia for the provision of some services
- initiate development of quality standards

This bulletin describes the benefits and processes of guidance and identifies possible responses to learners' needs. Subsequent bulletins will draw on current FEU research to examine organisational, funding and staffing issues in greater detail.

BENEFITS OF GUIDANCE

Recent reports such as *Unfinished Business* (OFSTED/Audit Commission, 1993), *Staying the Course* (BTEC, 1993) and *Assessing the Need* (ALBSU, 1993) have suggested that guidance is central to raising completion rates. The Government and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) have become convinced that guidance encourages the take-up of training and achievement of National Targets (see

Economic Benefits of Careers Guidance, NICEC 1992). Matching people to appropriate courses is demonstrably cost-efficient, but more work is needed on establishing the long-term cost benefits of providing guidance. However the rapid development of in-house services shows that increasing numbers of colleges are already recognising its value.

Benefits to the individual

- learning about one's own abilities
- developing decision-making skills
- taking advantage of new opportunities
- identifying more appropriate individual learning programmes
- increasing the chances of success

Benefits for the institution

- better motivated learners
- higher retention rates (more informed choices and support for transfer)
- higher completion and progression rates
- greater efficiency
- enhanced reputation of the college, thereby aiding recruitment
- students acquiring core skills in planning and decision-making
- students taking more responsibility for choices and learning
- more information on local community needs

GUIDANCE AS A PROCESS

Careers and educational guidance professions have a tradition of being client-centred, which complements a learner-centred college ethos. Guidance helps people make decisions about learning and work, based on an understanding of their own skills, knowledge, circumstances, interests and values, and the options open to them. This is rarely possible in a single interview.

As students gain self-awareness and acquire decision-making skills and knowledge about opportunities, they are undergoing a learning experience. Once on their chosen learning programme, even a vocationally specific one, their aspirations may well change as they learn more about the subject and their own capabilities. So although one can make generalisations about needs at different stages, it is not necessarily a linear progression.

With the increase in more flexible learning opportunities, modularised programmes, supported self-study and other forms of resource-based learning, students will face many points of transition during their period in college when they may need continuing access to guidance.

LEARNERS' NEEDS**Accessibility**

- Open all year and some evenings
- Information available for browsing
- Friendly, informative telephonists
- Pleasant, visible guidance locations
- Visits to schools, ethnic groups, community centres

Clear information

- Programme details with entry requirements, induction times, modes of delivery and assessment, prospects and destinations, skills required and gained, exemptions, study time, fees, etc.
- Transparent admissions criteria and processes
- Information on other providers

Advice on finance and costs

- Cost of course, material and exams
- Concessions, grants, Career Development Loans, NVQ tax relief, effects on benefits
- Childcare and accommodation
- Flexible payment methods
- Information on availability of additional funding and Access funds

Impartial interview

- Information on alternatives within and outside college; referral onwards
- Time to explore options and personal factors
- Referral to specialist if needed

Recognition of prior achievement

- NRA, portfolios and other evidence, not just GCSEs, taken into account
- Exemption or credit for prior achievement
- Assessment and accreditation of prior learning
- Diagnostic assessment of skills
- Self-assessment programmes

CONSIDERATIONS FOR COLLEGES

- Flexible staffing arrangements
- Drop-in facilities and appointments
- Trained support staff
- Central and outreach sites, physically accessible, e.g. ground floor, ramps, lifts
- Liaison with schools, educational, careers and TEC guidance networks
- Standardised, regularly updated information
- Printed information checked for languages, gender and race stereotyping
- Translation into community languages
- Staff time to collect and update information
- Calculation of real cost to students
- Staff with special training and liaison with other agencies
- Regular re-appraisal of pricing structures
- Explore credit, instalment, telephone and postal enrolment
- Establish college hardship fund and clear criteria for Access funds
- Involvement in local guidance network
- Documentation of outcomes of enquiry; learner or action plan
- Areas for confidential interviews
- Mechanisms for follow up of referrals
- Distinction between guidance and selection interviews, clarity of function between departments
- Staff trained in interpreting NRAs
- APL advisers, portfolio workshops, trained assessors
- Clear fee policy on APL advice and assessment
- Help with recognition of non-UK qualifications
- Modular or CATS scheme operating
- Diagnosis to establish support needs or exemption
- Range of self-assessment tools; supportive interpretation of results

LEARNERS' NEEDS**Induction**

- Details on course, college, learning methods and assessment
- Time to choose or re-appraise options
- Support in reaching decisions
- Clear sense of personal learning route
- Help with transition: school to college or adult return to study

Guidance on option choices

- Explanation of course content, study modes, etc.
- Information on consequences of choices
- Credit for work completed
- Disinterested advice on transfer

Support for learning

- Help with study problems
- Access to personal counselling
- Learning support; numeracy, literacy, study skills, language
- Financial crisis support
- Access for part-timers to above

Careers education

- Exploration of personal options
- Links between learning and work; work experience opportunities
- Specialist advice and contacts
- Exchange of ideas with other students

Feedback and review

- Information on progress
- Opportunities to renegotiate targets
- Chance to influence course style

CONSIDERATIONS FOR COLLEGES

- Student handbook plus time allocated; induction for later starters
- Delayed decisions or extended inductions; taster slots, visits
- Early identification of tutor and specialist support
- Development of individual action plans, assessment of core skills, development of personal programme
- Co-ordinated induction programmes

- Information on modules as well as programmes
- Help with making coherent individual programme combinations
- Updated records of achievement, unitised accreditation, CAT; means of tracking students' progress
- Access to independent advice before drop-out or transfer
- Training for lecturing staff

- Named tutor offering support, extra support for resource-based learners
- Separate trained personal counsellor; specialists to help on particular needs e.g. cross-cultural issues, disabilities
- Entitlement rather than deficiency model
- Clear criteria for Access funds, well-informed counsellors
- Flexible timetabling, publicity and booking of services
- Referral contacts and procedure

- Development of self awareness and decision making through core skills
- Integrated assignments, mixed mode assessments, work placements
- Careers specialists, software and library; training for subject tutors
- Awareness-raising training for tutors
- Short courses on work choices
- Links with HE, TECs and employers

- Use of formative assessment
- Regular reviews with action plans
- Initial negotiation of course content, satisfaction surveys

LEARNERS' NEEDS

Careers and progression

- Recognition of changed aspirations
- Advice before end of course
- Information on next step whenever it is required
- Information on grants, benefits

Recognition of achievement

- Assessment of skills and knowledge gained
- Help with completing NRA and including personal achievement
- How to use the NRA for different purposes
- Award of certificates

Guidance for 'non-completers'

- Reasons for drop out acknowledged
- Personal support
- Recognition of time at college
- Reasons for exam failure acknowledged and options explored

Links to next step

- Help with applications
- Realistic appraisal of chances
- Ongoing access to advice after leaving college
- Help with finding a job

CONSIDERATIONS FOR COLLEGES

- Offer of careers guidance interview before end of course
- Accessible library of careers and educational information
- Written information on finances

- Variety of methods of assessment
- Timetabled attention to completion of NRA
- Advice on selected use at interview
- Record of achievement on MIS for funding purposes
- Using NRA for providing references
- Analysis of external examination results

- Follow up surveys on reasons for drop-out
- Potential drop-outs identified as soon as possible
- Constructive help in re-assessing options
- Partial accreditation, references provided
- Opportunities for further support, exam retakes, partial re-entry and other local opportunities

- Support with form-filling, interview techniques for jobs, HE or other FE
- Strategies for late applicants to HE, through UCAS clearing in summer
- References, accessibility of careers information and guidance services
- Information bank of Careers Service, Employment Service, Education Business Partnership and college links for placements
- Knowledge of labour market and unemployment

For further information on guidance, please contact Anna Reisenberger, Development Officer, Further Education Unit, Citadel Place, Tinworth Street, London SE11 5EH
Telephone: 071-962 1280 Fax: 071-962 1266

We would welcome feedback on any aspect of this bulletin in order to inform future FEU work on guidance and learner support.

THE ACTIVITIES OF GUIDANCE

Initial guidance at the pre-entry and entry stages includes not only **information**, **advice** and **counselling** on course choice, but **assessment** (whether informal, diagnostic profiling or assessment of prior learning — APL) and **advocacy** on behalf of clients, particularly those with non-standard entry requirements. Guidance workers will also be involved in **enabling** people to gain access to educational opportunities and **feeding back** information to institutions (Seven activities of guidance in *The Challenge of Change*, UDAEC 1986). On-programme guidance includes exploring the relationship between learning and work through careers education, making choices on modular programmes and CAT schemes, and support for independent learning. Individual action planning and recording of achievement are part of ongoing guidance. Exit guidance involves not only traditional advice on entry to HE or jobs but exploring alternative opportunities for potential drop-outs or those whose aspirations have been raised by their experiences as learners.

It is likely that there will be no earmarked funding in the short term for on-programme guidance, or for initial guidance not leading to an enrolment. Institutions may still wish to offer a pre-entry service, perhaps in collaboration with other agencies, as one that is acknowledged as impartial can be an indirect marketing tool encouraging more members of the community to come forward. An alternative is to set up guidance-based admissions which could maximise enrolments, but may lead to lower retention rates if clients are not referred to more appropriate alternative learning opportunities elsewhere.

Further Choice and Quality: The charter for further education (September 1993) gives students 'the right to expect informed, impartial, supportive and timely guidance and counselling organised by your college'. This includes guidance on alternative courses or places to study, and on gaining credit for work already undertaken for students who wish to change courses or institutions.

DIFFERING NEEDS

Not every student needs the full range guidance services and some, such as students with disabilities, may have particular requirements. School leavers and adults present broadly different needs.

School leavers will have had recent exposure to guidance and will want to have their action plans and National Records of Achievements considered. They will be less used to making independent decisions (the greatest influence on career choice being parents) and will need support in the transition to becoming more independent learners.

Adults may have prior learning which could be accredited or used for exemption; they are likely to have a wide range of motivations; they are less likely to have the formal qualifications or study skills so may need advocacy for non-standard entry. Their choices are more influenced by practical considerations, timing and child care and they experience more complex financial barriers, so will need help with these issues.

For a recent FEU project sixty self-financing adult learners were interviewed at the beginning, middle and end of their vocational courses in further education colleges (*Paying Their Way* FEU 1993). They showed a remarkable degree of satisfaction with programmes of study but far less with college support services. Over half had received advice before enrolling on their chosen programme, although this was mainly from academic staff relating to courses, rather than from guidance experts helping them explore different options. Most learners who did not receive pre-enrolment guidance, or advice on financial support, would have liked some. Eighty per cent of students had expected guidance on their learning needs, but found that lecturers were often too busy, or did not have the appropriate skills.

As courses progressed and expectations rose, adult students began to see careers advice as a pressing requirement, but there were few opportunities for guidance at the exit stage.

There are clear implications for colleges: to recognise the power of education to transform the aspirations of adult students once they have embarked on the course and to make guidance and learner support structures accessible to part-timers.

In order to meet the needs of certain groups, the college may have to identify particular requirements and audit existing provision. For example, in looking at the needs of black learners, the college may ask who articulates the needs of these clients? Does the publicity accurately reflect the local community? Are minority languages used and is outreach work undertaken? Is diagnostic assessment evaluated for cultural bias and language demands, and are qualifications gained abroad adequately valued? Do the staff, for instance, have predetermined views about the likely choices of or pressures on young female Asian students, or other black learners? The next step would be to identify responsibilities and resources for taking the strategy forward.

The following example shows how an inclusive guidance policy can accommodate the additional needs of students with disabilities and learning difficulties if attention is paid to enhancing existing provision.

Meeting the needs of learners with disabilities and learning difficulties

- Admissions policy whereby no tutor is allowed to reject a student on grounds of disability
- Physical accessibility, provision of interpreters (signers), information in large print and braille
- Determine whether and how parents, carers and advocates are to be involved
- Sensitivity to transition for young people coming from special schools and adults from long-stay hospitals
- Self-advocacy to be integral part of guidance policy, but guidance workers to advocate for integration
- Guidance workers to be aware of limits on choices but encourage high aspirations
- Clarify role of guidance workers *vis-à-vis* specialist tutors and support workers
- Plan and cost for more time at pre-entry and exit stages and link to assessment of support needs

FEEDBACK ON NEEDS

Data collected by the in-house guidance service can be compared with a community profile to indicate how far the college is meeting the needs of its locality. This could be by analysis of client groups seeking advice, subsequently enrolling or dropping out; by identifying barriers to access experienced by potential learners; or by logging unmet needs (e.g. for courses or modes of delivery) and feeding this back to curriculum managers. Information on enquiries can be used to help colleges argue for resources, for instance from local TECs.

Participation in the local guidance network with representatives from TECs and community agencies is a valuable source of information. Guidance services are often used as informal channels by students whose needs are not being met once on their courses; there should be some method of feeding back these 'client perceptions' to enhance the quality of provision. Various approaches to feedback are examined in *Educational Guidance and Curriculum Change* (FEU 1990).

Regular evaluation and review of the college guidance service can identify how far it is meeting users' needs and fulfilling learners' entitlements in local and national charters. The Further Education Funding Council's inspectorate intends to grade recruitment, guidance and learner support on the same five-point scale as programme areas and will expect institutions to have developed performance indicators and quality assurance mechanisms for learner services. FEU's forthcoming Quality Pack for in-house services and independent guidance agencies will provide a framework and case studies on setting standards and reviewing achievement.

ORGANISATIONAL ISSUES

Colleges may find *Flexible Colleges* (FEU 1991) and *Learner Support Services in Colleges* (FEU 1993) useful starting points for exploring the boundaries of guidance with other services. It is helpful to clarify the roles and training needs of support staff (clerical, information and library staff), guidance specialists and counsellors, personal and subject tutors, so that the college is presenting an integrated learning experience to the students. Effective guidance will depend on systematic links through procedures agreed between guidance staff and external agencies, such as free-standing educational guidance services for adults, TEC guidance networks, schools and careers services. Many colleges have found that contracting in careers staff can safeguard impartiality as well as providing useful links to employers. When the Trade Union and Employment Rights Act 1993 is fully operational in 1995, careers services will operate independently of local authorities and will have to enter into service level agreements with colleges to provide guidance and placement services for part-time adults on vocational programmes as well as full-time students under 20 years old. Colleges will still be responsible for providing students' careers education.

Clearly institutions cannot meet all guidance requirements by one-to-one interviews. Resource constraints will require prioritisation and colleges may consider the merits of working with groups for diagnostic profiling, APL portfolio preparation, careers education sessions, and work-oriented assignments. Individuals can be encouraged to access course

information databases, careers libraries and self-assessment tools, including computer-assisted guidance, but they will often need specialist help in interpreting the information. Careers and educational guidance specialists have much experience in using information technology for local and national course databases, and individual assessments and guidance. Systematic recording of guidance enquiries and outcomes, if linked to college management information systems (e.g. admissions modules), can form the basis of tracking students' progress, as well as providing feedback to managers and valuable marketing data.

NEXT STEPS

When putting the college considerations into action, colleges will wish to identify local needs, consider the appropriate level of services to meet, who will provide them, the range of students who will receive them automatically, or will have general entitlement, and who will carry overall responsibility. Whatever the level of service, the following points have to be addressed if an institution wishes to move from *ad hoc* provision to a cross-college strategic plan for developing in-house guidance:

- guidance entitlements of all learners, including part-timers and those with particular needs;
- confidentiality and client centredness;
- awareness of the range of needs and stages in the guidance process;
- cross-college strategy covering specialist functions and teaching staff roles;
- boundaries and communication between guidance workers and curriculum teams;
- clarification of the information, advice, guidance and counselling tasks;
- location of guidance services, both physically and in management structures;
- record keeping for tracking on MIS and feedback to curriculum planners;
- relationships with external guidance agencies;
- impartiality and referral within and outside the institution;
- means of ensuring quality;
- the potential tension between guidance and marketing objectives.

FEU is aware that resource constraints and the availability of trained staff will determine priorities for action and is currently undertaking a study of organisational models for delivering guidance and how they are costed.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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