

Research briefing 03

Information, advice and guidance

This is one of a series of briefing notes exploring key themes from the Welsh Government's Learner Voice Wales survey. It summarises the positive and negative views expressed by learners, and messages from research on information, advice and guidance (IAG). We've used this to suggest action points for providers to consider, and further resources for those interested in exploring the topic in more depth.

What did learners say?

- Many learners praised the quality of pastoral support they got from their provider. They described staff as friendly, approachable, patient and willing to answer questions.
- Others, particularly in further education (FE) and work-based learning (WBL), wanted more advice on progression routes into further education or employment and help with university applications (e.g. personal statements and interview practice). Conversely, some students wanted recognition that not everyone wants to progress to university.
- Learners in all sectors felt that prospectuses didn't always include clear and sufficient information for them to make informed decisions, citing that they need to know things such as term dates, course structure, qualification, location, workload, and cost of materials. Furthermore, a number of students were not told that they would be enrolled on the Welsh Baccalaureate as well as their chosen main qualification (FE).
- Following enrolment some learners in all sectors experienced problems with the pre-course information they were given, which didn't accurately reflect start dates or location. In some instances this resulted in missed classes.
- Some learners in all sectors said they would appreciate a 'road map' detailing topics coming up and progress to date, so they could prepare and plan their time better.
- Welsh for Adults (WfA) and adult community learning (ACL) learners in particular felt that their providers could do more to advertise courses and opportunities available to them. Many learners only heard about these opportunities through their friends.
- In FE and WBL some learners wanted more support identifying and arranging work experience, placements and apprenticeships.

Effective strategies for supporting learners

The strategies below are drawn from a range of publications on information, advice and guidance which in turn are based on extensive research into 'what works' in post-16 settings. For further reading, see the 'Resources' section at the end of this briefing.

Pre-entry information

Learners' feedback on pre-entry IAG focused on the lack of course information, such as start dates, content, and costs. [Research conducted by CFE¹](#) stressed the importance of good quality and timely IAG. Poor IAG can impact on retention, achievement and progression, which in turn can affect the supply of skills to the labour market.

"They do not provide enough information about what the course will cover and if it's suitable for your level".

Other learners commented on how hard it was to find out about courses in the first place. [Research by NFER³](#) found that a quarter of young people interviewed said they would have done something different if they had known about all the options. Almost half didn't know about the apprenticeships available in their area. These findings highlight the importance of advertising in engaging and accessible formats so as to reach the widest range of people.

"Open days well advertised for all adult education courses. I only found this course because someone else who had a leaflet gave me one. I didn't know the course existed".

The **Learning and Skills Development Agency** identified that information was often omitted from prospectuses and course leaflets, such as:

- full information on the financial commitment involved, e.g. to buy resources and go on trips, and the concessions available, etc.
- the support available, including:
 - financial
 - transportation
 - childcare
 - hardship
- whether the course is part-time/full-time and the number of contact days
- number of guided hours
- start dates and length of programme
- level of programme
- location/site of programme
- mode of study
- course content and options, including any requirements to retake essential skills, Welsh Baccalaureate
- workload
- dedication required
- progression routes.

[Adapted from *Making the best match: Improving the quality of pre-course information, advice and guidance*²](#)

(Learning and Skills Development Agency, 2002)

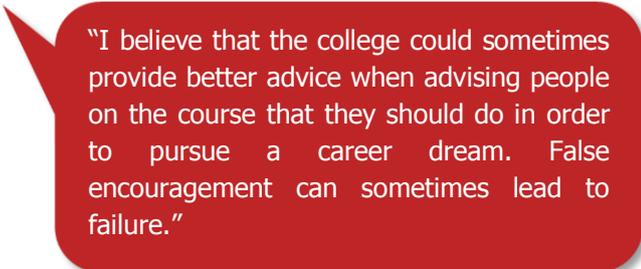
This is also reinforced in the recently published [Estyn annual report for 2014/15⁴](#) which states overall advice and guidance for learners throughout their education does not provide enough opportunities for learners to develop a good understanding of the labour market and employment opportunities. This means that many learners do not appreciate the importance of considering employment opportunities when they choose their college course.

[The National Union of Students⁵](#) suggest talking to learners in their own language via social media as a way of 'talking over' schools to ensure learners are given the full picture of what is available to them. Other tried and tested means include taster days, careers fairs, advertising in doctors surgeries, helping prospective learners meet current or past learners so they can hear first hand what it is like to learn at college or in a work-based setting.

Challenging stereotypes

IAG is not only about providing correct factual information, it is also about exploring and challenging learners' aspirations, beliefs and self-perceptions. [Research by CFE⁶](#) has shown that one of the main reasons learners do not access IAG is not from lack of awareness, but because they don't believe they need it. They may not, but the consequences of poorly informed decisions are far-reaching. Aspirations, subject choices and career interests are influenced at an early age and can often be stereotypical and self-limiting.

The Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce ([RSA⁷](#)) found that many learners are unaware of the diversity of jobs; their understanding may be restricted to the most visible roles such as those often seen on television, e.g. a barrister, doctor, vet, police officer. As a result learners' aspirations may not be determined by their ability. Therefore IAG needs to challenge learners' preferences, encouraging them to explore a wider range of options. However the [Equality and Human Rights Commission⁸](#) caution against encouraging a 'go for it!' mentality; unless furnished with all the information to make an informed decision learners may have false hope which can ultimately lead to disengagement from learning.



"I believe that the college could sometimes provide better advice when advising people on the course that they should do in order to pursue a career dream. False encouragement can sometimes lead to failure."

Advisers need to be aware of their own unconscious bias. The [Equality and Human Rights Commission⁹](#) suggest that while not many people are without aspiration, those with previous low achievement may, for example, have conflicting priorities. The role of the adviser is to tease out these issues and help the learner identify suitable options. For example, [NFER found¹⁰](#) that care leavers, or those with young children, may be more likely to engage with a work-based route if they need to earn right away.

Data

An [Estyn remit study into learner support services¹¹](#) identified the important role data can play throughout the learning journey. Putting in place

data-sharing protocols with schools ensures staff have access to important information that can help them assess the suitability of learner choices at enrolment. By reviewing past performance and attendance they can help learners reflect on the appropriateness of their choices objectively.

While in-learning, learners' attendance, progress and performance data can be used to identify those at risk of dropping out so that providers can put in place additional support. This data should also be shared with learners themselves, to encourage them to take control of their learning – seeing distance travelled can be a strong motivator.

Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)

Linked to data, ILPs are a really useful tool to help learners take control of their learning by becoming an active and motivated partner in learning. ILPs should be a personalised and active route map to guide a learner's journey, detailing the resources, support and guidance they can access to help them on their way.

[Research¹²](#) by CfBT and the Campaign for Learning has shown that encouraging learners to take control of their learning like this helps them become learners for life. Lifelong learners typically have a range of skills including self-organisation, communication, teamwork, reflection and self-awareness, all of which are valued by employers. The better equipped learners are in these areas the more likely they will be able to make effective and well-informed choices with minimal face-to-face intervention.

Social capital

[RSA¹³](#) identified that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds do not have access to the same social networks as their peers, making it harder for them to find work experience or access the right kind of personal support. Social capital charities can help to 'spread' social capital by matching learners with suitable mentors with whom they identify. A list of social capital charities can be found below.

- [Future First¹⁴](#) helps schools and colleges harness the experiences and skills of their former students through alumni communities.
- [Young Enterprise¹⁵](#) is a business and enterprise education charity, helping young people to learn about business and the world of work in the classroom, under the guidance of a network of volunteers from a range of companies.
- [Brightside¹⁶](#) is a charity that helps young people access the education and career pathways they might not have believed were available to them.
- [Horsemouth¹⁷](#) is a social network for informal mentoring.
- [STEMNET¹⁸](#) works with schools, colleges and STEM employers to enable young people of all backgrounds and abilities to meet inspiring role models, understand real-world applications of STEM subjects and experience hands-on STEM activities that motivate, inspire and bring learning and career opportunities to life.

Careers Information Advice and Guidance

[Research by CFE¹⁹](#) identifies that very few learners rely on one source of IAG, rather they access a range of formal and informal sources. Informal sources (such as parents/carers, friends, tutors and assessors, the media) tend to exert more influence.

Given the choice most learners, and in particular young learners, would prefer face-to-face support. This is vital for learners with complex needs, such as those from disadvantaged backgrounds, but not all learners actually need it. Instead they should be supported and empowered through integrated and meaningful programmes of career learning (see [Careers and the world of work²⁰](#)) to make effective and well-informed choices about life, learning and work.

[Ofsted²¹](#) found a significant feature of outstanding teaching in FE was the involvement of employers in the planning and implementation of learning programmes. This ensures learners are given the skills, knowledge and attitudes to secure employment and stay employed in the future. In its strategy for IAG, [the Department for Children, Schools and Families²²](#) suggest providing online work-tasters that give learners insight into their career choices.

Online content allows learners to access the information at a time that suits them.

[Careers and the world of work: a framework for 11 to 19-year-olds in Wales \(Welsh Assembly Government, 2008\)²³](#) recognises that many learners will become employers and self-employed and that it is, therefore, important when designing any careers programme to bear this in mind and encourage learners to be entrepreneurial.

[RSA²⁴](#) identifies art and design, IT, business, law, health and social care and performing arts as often being 'fallback' subjects chosen by learners who have no firm path for their future; as a result, learners on these course may benefit from more support than their peers.

Training

To be effective, tutors and assessors need to be able to give informed and impartial advice, feel comfortable interpreting and using Labour Market Intelligence (LMI), and know when to refer learners to alternative provision. [RSA²⁵](#) have highlighted the need for staff to be alert to developments in local and national economies to ensure provision is matched to employer needs, and to ensure course content prepares students for what they will encounter in the workplace. Staff industry away days can be a good way of keeping skills and knowledge 'fresh'. The [National Occupational Standards²⁶](#) for career development can be a useful place to start when identifying training needs.

Action plan

- Review implementation of [Careers and the world of work: a framework for 11 to 19-year-olds²⁷](#), drawing on best practice and resources elsewhere, e.g. [Informed decisions \(Estyn, 2012\)²⁸](#) and [Career learning for all²⁹](#).
- Conduct a skills gap analysis of teacher, tutor and assessor IAG skills.
- Use the [National Occupational Standards³⁰](#) for career development to identify and plan personnel requirements, develop job descriptions, and design, deliver and evaluate training.
- Self-assess against the [Careers Wales Mark³¹](#), [Investors in Careers kite mark³²](#) and/or [Matrix Standard³³](#).
- Appoint a lead governor for IAG and employer engagement.
- Get your learners to quality assure your IAG resources.
- Use the Education and Employers charity's [Inspiring the Future³⁴](#) to connect with employers and people from the world of work and to inspire learners.

Resources

- ***Complex needs, complex choices*³⁵** (LSIS, 2012)
The role of career learning, information advice and guidance in the further education and skills sector.
- ***When IAG grow up...*³⁶** (National Union of Students, 2014)
A collection of opinions on the state of careers information, advice and guidance in the UK.
- ***Learner support services in further education colleges for learners aged 16-19*³⁷** (Estyn, 2015)
The report looks at the quality, consistency and impartiality of learner support services that further education colleges provide to learners.
- ***Informed decisions*³⁸** (Estyn, 2012)
The implementation of the careers and the world of work framework.

Learner Voice Wales

Learner Voice Wales is the Welsh Government's annual survey of learners in further education, work-based learning, adult community learning and Welsh for Adults. Launched in 2013, it seeks learners' views on a range of topics relating to:

- information, advice and guidance
- support
- teaching and learning
- well-being and responsiveness
- Welsh-medium learning
- overall satisfaction.

Learners are also asked to comment on what they like best about their learning provider, and what they think could be improved.

A summary of the survey is available at <http://gov.wales/learnervoice>

For more information, please e-mail post16quality@wales.gsi.gov.uk

- 1 *Complex needs, complex choices: The role of Career Learning, Information Advice and Guidance in the Further Education and Skills sector* (LSIS, 2012)
www.nus.org.uk/PageFiles/12238/2012_NUS_L SIS_Complex_needs_complex_choices.pdf
- 2 *Making the best match: Improving the quality of pre-course information, advice and guidance* (Learning and Skills Development Agency, 2002)
<https://core.ac.uk/download/files/161/4159524.pdf>
- 3 *Barriers to participation in education and training* (Department for Education, 2010)
www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/182518/DFE-RR009.pdf
- 4 *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2014–2015* (Estyn, 2015)
www.estyn.gov.wales/sites/default/files/documents/ESTYN_Annual%20Report%202016%20FINAL_ENGLISH_Accessible_WEB.pdf
- 5 *When IAG grow up... A collection of opinions on the state of careers information, advice and guidance in the UK* (National Union of Students, 2014)
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- 7 *Not enough capital? Exploring education and employment progression in further education* (RSA, 2011)
www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/reports/not-enough-capital-exploring-education-and-employment-progression-in-further-education/
- 8 *All things being equal? Equality and diversity in careers education, information, advice and guidance* (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2011)
www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/documents/research/71_careers_information.pdf
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- 11 *Learner support services in further education colleges for learners aged 16–19* (Estyn, 2015)
www.estyn.gov.wales/sites/default/files/documents/Learner%20support%20services%20in%20further%20education%20colleges%20for%20learners%20aged%2016-19%20-%20ENG_0.pdf
- 12 *Learning to Learn in Further Education: A literature review of effective practice in England and abroad* (CfBT Education Trust, 2010)
www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/cfl/assets/documents/Research/LearningToLearn_v5FINAL.pdf
- 13 *Not enough capital? Exploring education and employment progression in further education* (RSA, 2011)
www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/reports/not-enough-capital-exploring-education-and-employment-progression-in-further-education/
- 14 Future First <http://futurefirst.org.uk/>

- 15 Young Enterprise www.young-enterprise.org.uk/
- 16 Brightside www.thebrightsidetrust.org/
- 17 Horseshmouth www.horseshmouth.co.uk/
- 18 Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Network (STEMNET) www.stemnet.org.uk/ambassadors/
- 19 *Complex needs, complex choices: The role of Career Learning, Information Advice and Guidance in the Further Education and Skills sector* (LSIS, 2012)
www.nus.org.uk/PageFiles/12238/2012_NUS_L SIS_Complex_needs_complex_choices.pdf
- 20 *Careers and the world of work: a framework for 11 to 19-year-olds in Wales* (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008)
<http://learning.gov.wales/resources/browse-all/careers-world-of-work/?lang=en>
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- 22 *Quality, Choice and Aspiration: A strategy for young people’s information, advice and guidance* (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009)
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www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/reports/not-enough-capital-exploring-education-and-employment-progression-in-further-education/
- 26 National Occupational Standards, 'What are National Occupational Standards?'
<http://nos.ukces.org.uk/Pages/index.aspx>
- 27 *Careers and the world of work: a framework for 11 to 19-year-olds in Wales* (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008)
<http://learning.gov.wales/resources/browse-all/careers-world-of-work/?lang=en>
- 28 *Informed decisions: The implementation of the Careers and the World of Work framework* (Estyn, 2012)
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- 29 Foundation Online Learning <https://www.foundationonline.org.uk/login/index.php>
- 30 National Occupational Standards, 'What are National Occupational Standards?' (2016)
<http://nos.ukces.org.uk/Pages/index.aspx>
- 31 Careers Wales
www.careerswales.com/prof/server.php?show=nav.5906
- 32 Investor Careers, 'The Quality Award' www.investorincareers.org.uk/
- 33 Matrix <http://matrixstandard.com/>
- 34 Inspiring the Future, 'Inspiring the Future: securely connecting thousands of teachers with volunteers from the world of work; committing an hour a year to speak about their job' www.inspiringthefuture.org/
- 35 *Complex needs, complex choices: The role of Career Learning, Information Advice and Guidance in the Further Education and Skills sector* (LSIS, 2012)
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- 36 *When IAG grow up... A collection of opinions on the state of careers information, advice and guidance in the UK* (National Union of Students, 2014)
nusl.ukmsl.net/resourcehandler/7b9ebcec-dc86-41c5-8bf5-682736164572/
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- 38 *Informed decisions. The implementation of the Careers and the World of Work framework* (Estyn, 2012)
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