Information advice and guidance

Examples of best practice
Contents

- Introduction 4
- Context 6

Case Studies

- Your Future East Midlands 8
- Individual IAG perspective 1 10
- Union Learners 12
- Individual IAG perspective 2 14
- Community 16
- Individual IAG perspective 3, 4 and 5 18
- Working with existing networks to provide IAG 20
Introduction

Leap Ahead Lifelong Learning Network in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire and Skills for Sustainable Communities Lifelong Learning Network in Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire and Rutland

The two networks represent 43 Further Education (FE) Colleges and Higher Education (HE) Universities.

Funded by HEFCE, Lifelong Learning Networks aim to increase progression into vocational Higher Education through supporting a wide range of initiatives and development. These include bringing together employers and curriculum teams to ensure that courses meet real skills needs, working to open HE opportunities to a wider community, developing information advice and guidance (IAG) on HE opportunities to all of those who could benefit, helping understand and resolve barriers to raising skills levels and making the case to employers for investing in the skills of their workforce.

Together the Lifelong Learning Networks have had a real impact on access to opportunities for information advice and guidance, and this document will highlight some of the impacts that we have had.

To date, across the East Midlands more than 7000 individuals have received individual advice and guidance sessions about opportunities in Higher Education, around 10,000 information leaflets have been distributed and more than 1600 IAG professionals have attended staff development events to ensure that they are aware of latest developments. More than 34000 individual visits have been made to the Your Futures East Midlands website which has been supported by the Lifelong Learning Networks, and now holds information on more than 18000 courses across the East Midlands. If you would like to know more about the work of the Lifelong Learning Networks please visit:

www.leapahead.ac.uk www.le.ac.uk/ssclln
Mike Braund Rose Robinson
Director of Leap Ahead Director of Skills for Sustainable Communities
The East Midlands is the third largest region in England. It has a very mixed geographical terrain including coastal areas, rural countryside and urban conurbations and is the third most rural region. This brings challenges to enhance opportunities to involve possible learners wherever they live.

When the two Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) were set up in 2006, the East Midlands was characterised by a combination of high employment and a predominance of jobs demanding low skills and paying low wages. So the region recognised the importance of raising skills to enhance economic performance.

Moreover the key factor to compete in a global market is a higher skills base to support a knowledge-based economy. The East Midlands population of men (19-64) and women (19-59) qualified to level 4 and above is a lower proportion than in the nation as a whole.

The challenge for the two Lifelong Learning Networks, Leap Ahead and Skills for Sustainable Communities (SSCLLN) was to create opportunities for vocational learners to progress from level 3 qualifications to level 4 Higher Education qualifications. Though the region has a large number of universities and also colleges that provide Higher Education, they are not necessarily in easy reach of all potential learners. Neither do they all offer the types of courses that vocational learners and their employers require. Therefore a critical objective of the LLNs has been to extend the places of learning to more Further Education colleges and to support universities and colleges to create new courses in the priority economic sectors.

This document showcases some of the information advice and guidance work that has taken place at Leap Ahead and SSCLLN.

1 http://www.emda.org.uk/res/default.asp
2 http://www.emda.org.uk/employmentskills/default.asp?nav=07
SSCLLN, Leap Ahead, East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA) and Aimhigher have jointly funded and developed an innovative online IAG resource for learners, practitioners and employers. Your Future East Midlands is, an online course database which contains details of and links to all courses and post compulsory providers (FE and HE) in the region. The website was launched in October 2008 and since then has had over 130,000 page views. There have been over 22,000 visitors to the site with an average of six pages per visit.

With a searchable database of over 17,000 courses in the East Midlands, the website is a unique tool as it links courses together to create personalised progression routes for learners. The courses span all levels from entry level (basic skills and life skills) to level eight (post graduate courses/doctorates). This will include data from all 43 colleges and universities, private training providers, the 14-19 area prospectuses and hot courses.

The site creates progression maps based on a number of criteria including:
- Sector/subject area
- Where you want to study and
- What level you are currently at

The maps created show three different types of learning routes, which can be interchanged, these include:
- Work based learning e.g. apprenticeships
- Vocational e.g. BTECs
- General academic e.g. GCSE/A level routes

Learners are able to view actual courses that they can study at each level, for each learning type. Moreover, at each level a learner can view possible careers they could go into with a qualification at that level and within their chosen subject area.

The SSCLLN has also supported further development of the website’s provision for potential adult learners. This includes work with regional experts in adult education to develop new functions and facilities, creation of specific case studies, targeted signposting information and promoting the site to potential adult learners.
Leap Ahead individual IAG perspective 1

‘Kay’ was a single parent working part time in an Admin role in a local public utilities company. She visited the Connexions Centre in Nottingham for some advice as she was quite bored with her job and wanted to discuss gaining higher level qualifications that would lead to a more interesting and challenging career. She wanted to work with children and had thought that she might like to be a midwife, but did not know much about the job or how to get into it. She needed to be able to combine her current job with part time study.

The adviser suggested that Kay use careers information to research becoming a midwife and also to research other jobs working with children such as teaching, nursing, play worker/therapist or a family support worker to see how these compared with midwifery. The adviser provided details of general websites to use to research higher level qualifications; as well as specific information on local midwifery training courses at Nottingham, Staffordshire and Sheffield Hallam universities. The adviser also recommended getting some relevant work experience, perhaps by volunteering in a local hospital. As Kay did not have A levels, the Adviser discussed Access courses as a way of starting her on the path towards midwifery or related careers. Kay had not heard of Access courses before, so the adviser gave her some information about course content and local providers. Kay was also advised to either check that local universities accepted Access students for entry to their courses; or to ask the providers of Access courses about the success rate of their students in getting on local university courses, so that she could be sure that the Access course would allow her to study the university course of her choice.

After looking at the information and websites provided by the adviser, Kay decided that it was midwifery that she wanted to pursue. She applied for, and got a place on a part time Access to Higher Education Diploma (Nursing and Midwifery) which allowed her to carry on working part time in her current job.
Supporting union learners into higher learning in the East Midlands

unionlearn was established by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) to help unions to become learning organisations. This includes brokering learning opportunities for their members, running phone and online advice services, securing the best courses to meet learners’ needs and kite marking union academy provision to a quality standard. unionlearn also works to research union priorities on learning and skills, identify and share good practice, promote learning agreements, support union members on learning and skills bodies, and help shape sector skills agreements.

An essential part of unionlearn activity is undertaken by Union Learning Representatives (ULRs). This includes signposting a range of courses to members, arranging for college tutors to come to the workplace to deliver learning at a time to suit members’ needs, supporting members with literacy and numeracy needs or running a workplace learning centre.

In 2008, the SSCLLN recognised the importance of establishing ULRs level of awareness of higher level learning and commissioned unionlearn to research this and identify any barriers preventing future progression to Higher Education for vocational learners.

The research drew the following conclusions:

- There is significant demand for higher level learning at work but a lack of clear information, advice and guidance about learning options
- Most potential learners see time and financial issues as barriers to prevent progression to higher level learning
- ULRs are keen to promote higher learning and gain information and skills needed to do that.

As a result of the research, the following activity has taken place to increase union learners and ULRs awareness of higher level learning provision:

- A series of seminars were convened across the East Midlands to disseminate findings and develop partnerships to help overcome issues raised
- A unionlearn programme of training has been developed to improve skills and knowledge of ULRs; this includes workshops and guidance materials
- Union learners who have achieved level 3 qualifications have been targeted with further progression opportunities information
- Your Future East Midlands, an online IAG tool, has developed a dedicated area for ULRs to help them advise potential learners. This includes a free advice line.
“Jay” visited the Nottingham Trent University (NTU) Careers Service for some advice. She had worked in NHS Administration for some years but for a long while had nurtured the wish to move her career into Social Work. Although she had achieved Diplomas in Mental Health & Psychology and Psychology whilst working, she did not have the confidence to take her aspirations further, nor did she know how to build on these qualifications. However with a strong desire to change her life, she by chance found out about Leap Ahead at NTU and encouraged by a friend, made an appointment to discuss the way forward.

Her discussion with the Careers Adviser reassured her that to study for a degree was well within her reach with no time like the present. Information about the NTU BA Hons Social Work course was provided, followed by a telephone conversation with the admissions tutor for the course and advice on the UCAS admissions procedure.

Jay applied immediately and after an interview received the offer of an unconditional place on the degree course to start in October 2010. There were 7000 applicants and only a limited number of places.
To help reach potential vocational learners in the community the SSCLLN has worked with a local charity to pilot sector focused interactive IAG events in Leicester. The LeicestHERday Trust is an umbrella organisation formed to give an equal voice to all women and enhance the community at large by enhancing women’s life experiences. The LeicestHERday Trust and Network partner De Montfort University have worked together since 2004 on a range of widening participation projects in the community. They have extensive experience working in deprived areas of Leicester. As a result, they have developed relationships with a range of community groups and built up a considerable network of contacts.

SSCLLN believed that barriers to learning faced by potential vocational learners would prevent them from approaching an institution to find out about education opportunities. These events would allow Network partners to pilot new methods of engaging with potential learners by taking information on education opportunities to them.

The first event held in 2009 targeted a wide audience of 16+ visitors and hoped to attract people who had the ambition to achieve a career in one of the diverse Creative Industry sectors but not necessarily have the qualifications or experience to progress in this field. The event aimed to not only engage with the audience on a creative level but to act as a platform to support and promote the many courses and entry levels into the sector.

LeicestHERday worked with SSCLLN partner colleges and universities to plan and feature at the event and as a result, the event included a whole range of interactive stalls from graphic design and photography, to hair and beauty and art and crafts. Guest speakers and live practical demonstrations took place throughout the day to inspire people and allow them to get hands on with different activities. On the day 15 organisations exhibited and 62 potential learners attended. The feedback from both delegates and exhibitors both during and after the event has proved to be excellent. As a result of the event, 24 learners have now signed up to education courses.

Following the success of this event the Network is working again with the Trust and partners to hold a similar event focusing on opportunities in Health and Social Care in 2010.
Leap Ahead individual IAG perspective 3

TM – ‘I’d been at home with the children for six years. I used to be a professional singer but being on tour, you can’t really keep that up with children. I did a numeracy course at the children’s school, part of a ‘Skills for Life’ programme, and have recently started helping out at the school. I really surprised myself how much I enjoyed it and thought I’d see if there was any way I could train. I did A levels, but they were geared to my music career, except biology and I used to love that.

So I talked to a careers adviser about becoming a science teacher but I wanted to be with my children too. Now I am starting an NVQ Level 2 Assistant Teacher in the Classroom course and continuing to get experience at my children’s school. The careers adviser gave me such a boost. I would have done it anyway eventually but I just needed someone to tell me I wasn’t aiming out of my league. I’m determined to show my children that you can do anything, you don’t have to just go along with what everybody else has done.’

perspective 4

KP – ‘I stumbled upon the careers fair in the canteen at work. I’d recently moved to Nottingham and wasn’t enjoying my job as much, although it was a very similar position in Mental Healthcare.

I had been thinking about doing a degree before and got talking to the careers adviser at their stand. I am really passionate about Mental Health and the adviser listened. Now I am leaving my job to do an Occupational Therapy BSc course, so everything got sorted out. I am dyslexic and the adviser arranged for testing. She emailed information to me and let me know further information that I needed. It is so good when somebody just offers you the information you need and you don’t have to fight for it.’

perspective 5

J – ‘I’d gone into banking after doing my A levels and gone back part-time after having children. I wondered about getting into teaching and rang the local university to get some advice. To be honest they weren’t very helpful, they said it was a very popular course and I’d need extra UCAS points, but didn’t explain how to get them. It was very off-putting really.

The careers adviser was brilliant. He phoned up someone he knew at a local university and we sorted out different ways to do it, to fit in with the children. I was all set to start an Access Course in September but then I got a letter from the university saying it was full. I knew I could go back to the adviser but I couldn’t get an appointment for two weeks.

We explored another way of doing things with the local college. So I popped round there and that’s what I’m starting in two weeks. I’ll do three days at the bank and two in college.’
Working with existing networks to provide IAG

The SSCLLN has where possible worked with existing networks and groups to achieve its vision. The Colleges University of Leicester Network (CULN) is an example of this partnership approach. CULN, established in 2001, is made up of 18 Further Education (FE) Colleges and three Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across the East and West Midlands and exists to optimise collaboration between Further and Higher Education institutions for the benefit of staff and learners. The network provides flexible mechanisms to enable institutions in the region to collaborate on a variety of matters of common interest, such as foundation degrees, student activities, progression and research. The network develops by responding to changing needs and priorities so that working groups are formed and dissolved as required.

SSCLLN has always aligned its activities where possible with CULN to avoid duplication and to share best practice. Because of this close partnership, the SSCLLN and CULN have worked together recently on two IAG events for potential vocational learners.

Focus on Fashion
137 students from four FE colleges in Leicestershire took part in this one-day event designed to provide an insight into careers and education within the fashion industry. The event was also supported by John Lewis, which ensured industry representation, combined with advice from Higher Education providers in the region. Evaluation showed that 70% of students felt they knew more about Higher Education and progression routes following the event.

Health and Social Care
This event aimed to raise awareness of, and provide an insight into careers and education opportunities in Health and Social Care for students in Leicestershire. 300 students attended and were involved in a range of interactive workshops provided by Network partners. These included Podiatry, Play Assistants, Dentistry, Clinical Psychologists, Childcare, Biomechanics, Social Work and Complementary Therapy.
This publication aims to share with you examples of good practice, embedding information advice and guidance for vocational learners in the East Midlands.

Other publications include
- Progression
- Employer Responsive Curriculum