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improve children's lives



National College
for Leadership of Schools
and Children's Services

Schools

Impartial careers education

Effective leadership of information, advice and guidance.

Research report June 2009

Resource

Abstract

The current focus on information, advice and guidance (IAG) in schools reflects the recognition of the significance of developing support systems alongside curriculum change to ensure that young people can make informed choices about routes and pathways to success. The need to ensure that the information and advice provided is done so in an impartial way and personalised to the needs of each individual is also increasingly emphasised. This research suggests that IAG is integral to school effectiveness and improvement and that where IAG is most effective students are supported to make the right choices and go on to succeed both in the school or college environment and in their future career.

Put simply, where IAG is outstanding, life chances are enhanced. It is therefore essential to discuss and move forward the leadership of these aspects of support at school and college level.

This paper has three aims:

Firstly, to emphasise, up to date, information about the leadership of information advice and guidance across a range of schools. The schools were visited by IAG advocates recruited by the National College. The Advocates are current or recent practitioners working at a senior level in schools, many of them in schools which display characteristics of the outstanding practice described.

Secondly the paper sets out to examine characteristics of effective practice which are:

- Strong leadership
- Personalisation of IAG
- Use of technology
- Partnership working
- IAG Workforce
- Time

A third aim is to draw out lessons for leadership which provide an opportunity for headteachers and senior colleagues to reflect on the practice in their schools.

Key lessons identified by the advocates are around the use of vocabulary, the vision for IAG, demonstrating high levels of commitment and establishing effective professional development to support IAG programmes. The research asks leaders to reflect on the coherence of their school's strategy and to consider how separate plans for information, advice and guidance are set out. School leaders are challenged to think about how they work with other agencies and how they monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of IAG systems against specific success criteria.

The report:

The purpose of this research is to identify effective leadership approaches to the delivery of Information, advice and guidance in a range of secondary schools across England. This report attempts to distil the information obtained from the case study research and to summarise aspects of good practice across the schools involved. Although examples of good and outstanding practice were in evidence no single school matched fully the 8 features of a model school identified in the dcsf strategy document. All schools involved in the research had the common theme of a strong emphasis on the importance of IAG within their improvement plans. All had identified that a clear vision for IAG is essential and that that vision must be well led and delivered by highly effective staff. The approaches to visioning and delivery varied from school to school but in this summary report an attempt will be made to highlight the good practice which existed and suggest elements of a composite model.

The research task involved a group of IAG advocates scoping IAG provision in 18 schools. Areas investigated by the researchers included:

- Identifying the vision for IAG and how this is communicated
- Highlighting the strengths of IAG practice
- Establishing how staff are involved
- Investigating evidence of partnership working
- Identifying how technology is used
- Summarising how the IAG programme is delivered and personalised
- Considering how parent and pupil voice are taken into account.

Taking on board the points above, the advocates drew up lessons for leadership which form a conclusion to this report.

The research took place from December 2008 to March 2009 and involved examining the provision, reviewing literature and systems, as well as face to face and telephone interviews and questionnaires of staff and pupils. Schools were chosen for inclusion in the study generally on the basis of excellence criteria, for instance as a result of being identified as outstanding in relevant aspects in their ofsted report or as a result of identified good practice highlighted as part of the diploma gateway process. One school was included because of a recommendation from Connexions, another because of its recent emphasis on IAG as a means of school improvement and a third because of its emphasis specifically on upping numbers of students at post 16 who are prepared for entry to top universities. The schools cover a range of contexts and geographical settings. Some are large 11-18 high schools, some smaller 11-16 providers. Examples of good practice will also be drawn from the two Post 16 colleges included in the research. Several sample schools are in an urban setting, others rural. Some draw pupils from significant areas of deprivation; others have significant numbers of pupils from higher than average income households. In short the survey encompasses a full range of educational settings, but all institutions had in common the importance placed on IAG being integral to school improvement. Quotes from headteachers sum up the emphasis placed on IAG "We are all about ensuring every individual student is given high quality IAG to enable him/ her to be the best (s) he can be." "IAG is critical to students in developing their life choices, enhancing their life chances and developing independent learners."

The leadership practice in each school was written up as a case study. These have been used in a companion publication to illustrate the new Principles for careers education and IAG. This resource will be available from November 2009.

Context

In commissioning this research, the National College wanted to take stock of the need to deliver effective and successful IAG work in schools. This research ran concurrently with work by the DCSF and Connexions/Workforce Reform Group. Advocates and a National College Reference Group met to discuss IAG in autumn 2008. Both groups discussed initial hypotheses about IAG provision in schools which contributed to the brief given to Advocates in their research work.

In producing this report a key piece of work taken into account is the draft strategy for IAG prepared by the DCSF, in particular the section of the strategy "Schools; building the foundations for successful lives." The strategy document emphasises the importance of effective IAG in 21st century education. IAG is vital in a world where work is changing and skills and qualifications are becoming increasingly significant. Old models of careers education and guidance no longer work. If we are to narrow the gap and address key issues such as NEET reduction then all young people need access to personalised information. If the principles in the strategy document are to have real impact then its place as a key IAG document must be established beyond doubt.

A second piece of information which provides context to this work is the guidance produced for the Connexions briefing by the workforce reform group. This guidance in particular takes account of the needs of young people and stresses that to be effective CEG and IAG must be responsive to need. Different types of need are identified. These include Core needs, which are the needs that all young people have in common. To meet these needs schools and other providers are expected to develop work related knowledge and management and employability skills. Young people should have access to accurate and up to date and objective information about their options and should receive impartial advice and guidance. Specific needs must also be taken into account – these are needs arising from, for example, particular gifts or talents, learning difficulties and disabilities, gender, race and socio-economic background. Individual needs can be identified as a result of assessments, review meetings and guidance processes or other learner voice. Meeting individual needs is best achieved by personalising career learning and providing targeted support and guidance. Local needs take into account the fact that the area in which young people live has an impact on their career-related learning and IAG needs. The briefing stresses that provision should take account of the local Children and Young People's Plan and factors such as local demographics, past progression patterns and career aspirations within the community, opportunities in learning and work and the transport infrastructure.

Early discussion around the development of effective IAG hypothesized that schools traditionally have systems for IAG that meet the core needs and address some specific issues. To be effective in the 21st century, plans must go much further. Individual need must be at the fore of any IAG system. In scoping the provision questions were asked about how these needs are met effectively. A hypothesis may be that what sets apart the best IAG schools is that they are the ones where specific and individual needs are best met.

The quotes from senior leaders in the case study schools demonstrate the priority placed on this;

"We have a passion for personalisation. We bend over backwards to support our pupils as individuals."
(Deputy Head i/c IAG)

"There is very clear mapping and auditing to ensure coverage which is responsive to cohort and individual need, including vulnerable groups." (Headteacher of a rural comprehensive).

"It may not be 'rocket science' but unless leadership allows for sufficient levels of flexibility in the workforce and reinforces relentless focus on pupil support then IAG systems will continue to fail this (vulnerable) group."
(Headteacher of a large urban comprehensive).

Findings

The IAG advocates involved in this project identified a number of common themes as being crucial to the effective delivery and impact of the IAG programme. These factors are worth highlighting as they may be replicable in other institutions striving to improve the quality of service provided to pupils. The schools also demonstrated unique features i.e. elements of visioning or delivery that were peculiar to their individual circumstances. Less time will be spent exploring these, but they are included later in this report as they may resonate with some school leaders who can draw parallels with the situations described.

Theme 1: Strong leadership

Headteachers and leadership teams had a vision for IAG as being central to the work of their schools and a relentless focus on IAG as a means of improving choices and outcomes for pupils. As one Headteacher stated “IAG runs through everything the school does.”

The single most important and consistent factor across the case study schools was the evidence of purposeful leadership and visioning of IAG. Headteachers and senior leaders in the case study schools place a high emphasis on IAG. They are working to embed IAG in school systems and the curriculum. Statements from senior leaders across the sample schools reflect this. “It’s really hard to disaggregate this aspect of our school from everything that happens in school, because it underpins everything we do.” “It is important to keep IAG in the spotlight, to continually review provision and create and maintain a coherent package.” Leadership of IAG was effectively distributed in the case study schools and good use was made of the expertise of relevant staff. Most of the schools had a named senior leader in charge of IAG; those that didn’t were looking to include this in their future workforce plans. Posts such as Assistant Headteacher (Deep Support), Deputy Head i/c ICAG (impartial careers advice and guidance); Head of IAG, Director of Learning for the World of Work and Enterprise Education exist. The schools may be struggling with titles for these roles but all have seen the necessity of a significant leadership post to take the IAG agenda forward.

Leaders communicated their vision ‘relentlessly’, by ensuring that IAG appears on agenda of meetings, is a theme of assemblies, appears on newsletters and bulletins to staff and parents. The best schools had an improvement plan for IAG and either produced a separate IAG SEF or included reference to IAG within the whole school document. Leaders backed up their commitment with adequate or generous resourcing and identified a separate budget for IAG activities.

Leaders also have an important role in quality assuring the provision and making staff accountable. In the most effective examples there is systematic monitoring, review and evaluation which includes information directly from students, parents and all partners and this information is used to develop future practice and respond to identified need.

Theme 2: Personalisation of IAG

As one Connexions personal adviser stated “Children of all backgrounds can achieve well in the right environment with the right support”. IAG is central to raising aspirations and informing choices for each individual.

Programmes to meet core needs for IAG existed in all case study schools and indeed should exist in all schools. Life Skills courses were a feature of some research schools, others delivered IAG through a PSHE programme. Most schools had ‘stand down’ days or weeks to enhance delivery and increase exposure. Case study research found for instance discrete IAG lessons working effectively, IAG being delivered in Year 6 as part of a transition package, IAG fortnights in the run up to choices about options and diplomas. In addition some sample schools addressed individual and specific needs by employing a support worker to ensure that vulnerable pupils have access to the core offer, a team of mentors and coaches to personalise provision for all pupils in years 9-11, vertical tutor groups which included 6th form co-tutors to share their experiences and help deliver the IAG programmes, teams of coaches to work on a one to one basis with pupils, and, in one school, a careers officer to work specifically with the pupils of that school.

To an extent it became apparent in the case study schools that the personalisation of IAG is all about how staff are deployed to work with groups of youngsters and individuals at key points in their educational career. One headteacher stated “IAG is designed to meet the needs of students... it is differentiated and personalised to ensure progression through activities that are appropriate to students’ stages of career learning, planning and development.” Leaders must take the time to appoint the right people to get involved in this aspect of IAG. The traditional careers teacher who is good at organising PSE lessons and planning work experience to meet core needs might not be the right person to deal with the child centred individual needs that arise when provision is truly personalised.

Theme 3: Use of technology

Technology in itself is not the answer, but new technologies provide a useful tool to provide information and guide pupils and to point them to sources of advice. Technology can also support the quest for impartiality.

This was perhaps the most variable factor but still frequent enough to be considered a common element of good practice. Website technology and creativity was seen as invaluable in supporting IAG systems. E-based provision such as 'Really useful e-guides', 'UCAS Course finder', 'Fish4jobs' 'Futureme', 'My choice London' and other area wide prospectuses were used significantly. The impact of technology is difficult to evaluate specifically but given the fundamental need to provide high quality and up to date information as part of an IAG programme the use of web based technology speaks for itself. Schools involved in collaborative arrangements found e tools especially valuable. As impartiality is being increasingly emphasised e technology can help, for example by providing area wide rather than school specific information for pupils and parents. The research showed that best practice dictates that pupils and parents need informing, educating and at times supporting in order to use technology to its full effect. "Getting every Key Stage 4 and 5 student registered and actively using 'My Choice London' has been my best IAG achievement to date." (IAG Leader working in a cross school collaborative).

The growth of virtual learning environments (VLE) provides opportunities for furthering e-potential. An online personal development profile has been employed in a school to support the personalised delivery process. Students can access this at home via the VLE. Another advocate found a school where detailed options information has been included on its VLE. Links from the 'Choices' page to subject sites mean that pupils and parents are supported in making a more informed choice. The fact that subject specific pages can be hyperlinked to related training and employment means that the opportunities are limitless.

Theme 4: Partnership working

No school can be an island if it is to provide the high quality IAG that the 21st century demands.

Partnership working was evident across all case study schools where a range of partners have been engaged to provide information or support the guidance process. Partnership examples include, obvious, links with Connexions, partnership working with school and college federations, 14-19 strategy groups, business partnerships and university links. One school had developed links with the Youth Service to support the specific needs of vulnerable pupils who often require a modified IAG programme. Partnerships were significant in 'making it real for the students'. Strong partnerships can lead to work placement provision, careers information and insight, aspiration raising through employer and HE links etc. One school used a 'What's my line' approach with local employers to offer insights into the world of work, Careers and qualification conventions were frequently used to provide information.

Transition points for pupils inevitably and increasingly involve considering options across a federation or educational partnership. Where these partnerships plan IAG programmes collaboratively the pupils are well informed and confident to make progression decisions that are right for them. A senior leader identified as the IAG champion in his school emphasises the value placed on partnership working in the following quote:

"We work closely with our local community and business partners to provide a relevant and modern curriculum.

Students have the opportunity to visit our business partners and work on real-life projects.

Business partners regularly come to the College to advise on modern practice and give talks on initiatives and modern day business. This allows us to prepare our students to become members of a modern workforce.

We have regular Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematic (STEM) days where students experience the world of Engineering and associated activities. Visits to further education establishments, universities and training providers are organised to enable all students to understand the opportunities available to them so that they are able to realise their potential."

Theme 5: IAG Workforce

Relevant staff who have received appropriate professional development to enable them to deliver all aspects of the IAG programme effectively are vital.

All the schools involved in the study have modified their workforce in some way to address the provision of IAG. In one school traditional form tutors now tutor vertical groups where IAG is addressed in a 25 minute daily period. Trained adult coaches are provided in more than one school to support IAG delivery in an individualised way. In another school discrete IAG teachers have been employed, in another the staff are referred to as Life skills teachers and form a discrete subject department. Mentoring in some form or other is taking place in all schools. Where vulnerable pupils are involved there is clearly a need to deploy staff on a one to one basis to address individual need. All schools made use of the specialised skills of Connexions PAs and Careers officers, one school has taken the step of appointing its own full time Careers Officer. In another example “an impressive system of key workers operate in each school across a consortium providing support for students working away from their home school, taking responsibility for attendance, transport arrangements and individual care. As a consequence, students are confident to move between sites in the partnership.”

Staff are also consistently well trained in the case study schools; resources are deployed to ensure high quality CPD. In one school all staff had been trained to understand the quality standard for IAG, in another 4 twilight training sessions during the year were dedicated to IAG development for staff. In several schools IAG had been the theme of a whole staff training day. Support staff, as well as teachers, were involved in this training. As one Head put it, it is important that “The high status of IAG is shared by all staff”. When asked what would make the IAG programme even better another senior leader stated “if all staff were more aware of the need for impartiality”. To address this training programme is required and IAG has to be kept top of the agenda.

Where schools and colleges work collaboratively a consistent approach across the workforce is vital. The Head of a one school involved in collaborative provision stated.

“A member of staff from this school works in the Consortium for two days each week to coordinate the introduction of the Diplomas and ensures that there is consistency of delivery across the partnership. There is high quality information and guidance for students considering the option of a Diploma pathway with standard information giving meetings for parents across all the providing schools”.

Theme 6: Time

Time may seem a slightly unusual choice to be identified as a common theme running through effective IAG provision, but it became clear following the scoping exercise that time allocation is crucial in several ways.

In order to deliver a structured programme which meets core needs and supports individuals, time was allocated in different ways across the schools. A Life skills curriculum had been established in two of the schools; one of these was located in an area of significant deprivation and saw the course as a means of raising aspirations. A quote from a Year 10 pupil summed up the impact of these lessons "Some people live and die here ... and never go beyond. IAG has opened up new horizons for me." In other schools there is a focus on time allocation at key transition points so that Year 9 pupils have an intensive IAG input before option choices are made. Half of Year 9 PSE time is allocated to career related work. In a school which will be involved in the delivery of all 10 diploma lines from September 2009 felt it was especially important to allocate time to IAG at this stage.

Another example identified the transitions at 16 and 18 as being key times to 'up' allocation to IAG. This comprehensive school is focussed especially on raising aspirations and increasing numbers of pupils applying for top universities. The Head of this school stated "We have to encourage young people in comprehensive schools to chase their dreams and aim for the top." IAG is therefore crucial at the Post 16 option stage and the university application stage in Year 13. Another school has established IAG lessons for all year groups with 25 minutes allocated 5 days per week. This is a significant increase on the usual 1 period of PSE designed to encompass all aspects of personal, social, economic education and citizenship. Staff time had also been set aside to work on IAG with pupils Groups of 14 pupils are allocated 2 IAG coaches in one school, in another an IAG Support Worker ensures that pupil can be accompanied to interviews and careers appointments, taken to open days and inducted into work placements etc. The schools have clearly had to rethink timetables and resource allocation (especially in terms of time) in order to deliver the high quality IAG they believe is crucial to their students.

Comment

Of all the common themes the workforce element is possibly the most significant in making the difference between mediocre and excellent provision. The need to train staff, to involve them in the vision, to understand issues of impartiality, to ensure that all pupils have access to a trained adult coach' was seen as key in bringing about improvement. Where adults are well informed and are given the time and resources to deliver, IAG works well. A relevant quote from one Head, however points to the potential fragility of workforce issues "IAG needs built in sustainability. It can be built up in an imaginative way by one or two individuals but will fall just as quickly if they leave." The answer seems to be to build a dedicated team of staff, well qualified, skilled, well resourced and well led. We would not ask an unqualified adult to deliver History or Science programmes of study or Heads of PE to dabble in the leadership of Maths. Perhaps then we should not ask busy tutors/ subject teachers to deliver IAG programmes or sit the leadership of this important element within PSHE or Citizenship or other seemingly convenient location. At least for now, in these changing times the workforce for IAG needs to be given priority and resources to build effective and sustainable systems that meet not just the general needs of the many but the personalised needs of each pupil. There is an implication for education leaders nationally too i.e. the responsibility to provide high quality training and development programmes for teachers and support staff and perhaps more significantly to include leadership of IAG in programmes of study for senior leaders and Headteachers.

Unique features

The schools included in the research demonstrated some individual features of IAG provision that allowed them to address the needs of the pupils they are working with and also to develop a local context to this work. It may not be necessary or even desirable to replicate these unique features but they are worth noting as leaders reading this report may adapt some of the strategies to their own situation.

Briefly some of the noteworthy unique features identified were:

The deployment of an IAG support worker, in one school, to work alongside a cohort of vulnerable pupils following a modified curriculum. Her role is to ensure, not learning support for these students, but supported access to careers information, progression routes, work with parents and building bridges to the world beyond school. Her work has led to a significant reduction in NEET figures amongst the groups she works with.

A school has undertaken a five year research project investigating progression routes for pupils involved in their federation. The project is supported by a University Institute of Education, Connexions, the LA and the LSC.

Two of the schools had used their specialism as a catalyst for IAG work. For instance in a school with Engineering specialist status two local engineering firms have an explicit link to IAG in the school. The employers work to contextualise learning, improve levels of knowledge of the industry but also their involvement helps to raise aspirations and improve standards.

One school is exploring the development of a multi-agency department comprising a number of full and part time staff some employed by school, others by partner organisations. The multi-agency department will be particularly important when diploma delivery is extended beyond the pilot stage.

One school has introduced a Post-18 year in industry to support students in making effective university choices. The year in industry is linked specifically to science and engineering pathways.

Another school had introduced an 'open all hours' guidance room. This base houses up to date information and offers impartial advice to pupils and their parents. The existence of this type of provision enables access to advice when it is required rather than limiting information distribution to specified times or lessons as has sometimes been the case in the past.

Vertical tutoring mentioned earlier was seen as essential by one school to creating the conditions for effective IAG delivery. Peer mentoring can be facilitated in these conditions with the older pupils acting as role models to the younger ones. Indeed the 6th formers offer a support tutor role creating capacity to increase IAG provision in tutorial time. The fact tutors only have to deal with a small number of Year 11 pupils or Year 9 pupils at any one time means that individuals get more attention at key times than in a situation where there is a class full of same age students experiencing the same transition.

Another school addressed quality assurance by employing an IAG web tool across a consortium of schools. Tools such as this enable monitoring of effectiveness of aspects of IAG provision, analysis of users and profiles and student voice feedback on a range of aspects. Such tools if used effectively can support a responsive approach to the development of IAG programmes.

Lessons (and questions) for leaders

The IAG advocates were asked to identify learning points that could be shared with other leaders aiming to develop IAG within their schools.

10 points were reiterated by the researchers;

1. Establish a clear vocabulary for IAG. Be clear about what the term means and establish its limits.

Questions: Is the term IAG commonly used in your school? Do staff and pupils understand what is involved? Are staff aware of the power of IAG? Are pupils and parents aware of their entitlement.

2. Ensure there is a clear, articulated vision understood within and beyond the school. This should be in the context of national and local legislation, guidance and partnerships.

Questions: Is there a clear vision stated in your school? Where can it be found? How is it reinforced?

3. The headteacher, other members of the senior leadership team and governors must be committed to the delivery of this vision.

Questions: Do you talk about IAG regularly. Do staff understand your commitment to it? How do you communicate the vision? How are governors involved?

4. Ensure that the relevant staff have received appropriate professional development to enable them to deliver all aspects of the IAG programme effectively.

Questions: Is IAG identified separately in your training budget? Are whole staff training days/ twilight training sessions dedicated to IAG development? Are support staff involved in this? Are staff involved in IAG well informed about the world of work?

5. There should be one planned, coherent strategy led at SLT level. This should be the substantive role of at least one member of SLT.

Questions: Where does leadership of IAG sit within your leadership team? How have you addressed sustainability of staffing?

6. Schools should recognise and plan separately for information, advice and guidance.

Questions: Is there a clear programme for delivery of separate elements of IAG? Who is responsible and accountable for each element? Where is the programme located/ when was it last updated?

7. There should be a multi-agency approach which is understood by all partners, with common protocols and a co-ordinated way of working.

Questions: Who do you currently work with? Who else do you need to work with? Has time been allocated to partnership working and do systems for partnership working exist? What are the implications of the 14-19 entitlement?

8. Ensure there is systematic monitoring, review and evaluation which includes information directly from students, parents and all partners and this information is used to develop future practice.

Questions: How do you receive pupil voice? How are parents involved? Are IAG lessons and activities monitored and evaluated? Is there an improvement plan and SEF for IAG?

9. Make sure you use new technologies to support student choice and develop web technology to monitor and evaluate provision.

Questions: How is technology used as part of the IAG process? Is this sufficiently well resourced? How is use of technology monitored and evaluated?

10. Ensure that there are clear targets for success.

Questions: What are your short, medium and long term targets for IAG? How do you measure success? What are your next steps?

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