

Evaluation of the short-term impacts of Enhanced Services (IAG) delivery in Coventry & Warwickshire 2003-2004

Executive Summary

September 2004

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1. Executive Summary

1.1. Introduction

- This research focuses on the experiences of a group of adults who used the enhanced guidance service (ES) provided by Coventry and Warwickshire Guidance (CWG) advisers between August 2003 and April 2004.
- Business Link (the service contractor) and CWG wanted a fuller picture of the ‘distance travelled’ by adult clients using the ES, to provide more qualitative insights into service impacts.
- The evaluation was designed to:
 - establish more robust baseline measures and profiles of ES users;
 - measure the perceived (short-term) effects of the ES experience on clients’ learning, work and/or personal aspirations;
 - identify the variables associated with the most positive impacts and outcomes;
 - suggest where and how ES delivery might be targeted in future.
- Clients could use more than one service from the ES ‘menu’, which included a careers guidance interview for all, access to advocacy, computer aided guidance and help with job search (e.g. CV construction, job applications and interview techniques).
- Fifty-five telephone interviews with ES clients were completed, each lasting between 10 and 15 minutes. This represents 64% of the total client population, suggesting that survey findings are both robust and representative.
- The ES client group as a whole and the sample contacted for the survey share a number of key characteristics, including the fact that they were:
 - mostly Coventry-based;
 - predominantly male;
 - for the most part aged between 25 and 49 years;
 - largely of white ethnicity (although this ethnic group is smaller as a proportion of ES clients than in the wider population of adults locally);
 - educated to a relatively low level, at or below level 2;
 - unlikely to have gone back for a second ES session;
 - likely to have been advised by a relatively small group of qualified guidance workers;
 - almost all in employment of some sort.

1.2. Main findings

- Almost all ES clients were in work of one sort or another at the time of their original meeting with a CWG adviser. Circumstances had changed for a number of these people in the 2-4 months that had elapsed since their last ES session, with the percentage in work (full- or part-time) falling from 98% to just over 90%.
- We are not able to say whether these outcomes are linked to the ES intervention without following the fortunes of a control group who had not used the service.

Changes in these people's economic circumstances are more likely to be linked to underlying trends in the local labour market, where employment rates vary with macro-economic and business conditions (e.g. in manufacturing).

- Of those who were in work at the time of their ES session, 78% were still working for the same employer when interviewed for the follow-up. Many (44%) were in manufacturing, four times more than their nearest rivals in retail (10%). Overall, though, service sector employers accounted for the majority. And almost two-thirds (64%) of all ES client employers were located in Coventry.
- Less than 20% had changed the type of job they did since their ES session. Those who were in the same jobs were mostly working in lower skilled occupations, many of them in manual posts.
- Almost 60% of those who had changed jobs since their ES session had been made redundant by their previous employers, with most of the rest resigning.
- The new jobs people went into were of a broadly similar type to those in which the client group as a whole had been working. ES clients had not improved their occupational status overall by changing jobs.
- A small number of clients were studying part-time as well as working when they were interviewed for the follow-up survey. Most were following vocational courses of one sort or another.
- A minority of the ES clients' lives had changed noticeably since using the service. But over three-quarters of this group said they thought things would have changed anyway, without their ES session.
- This implies that the ES session had little impact. Whilst in the very short-term this is likely to be true, other impacts are detectable (and attributable to the ES episode) that have longer-term consequences.
- For example, clients commented on the extent to which they felt the advice and guidance they received had changed their minds about what they wanted to do next (either in their working lives or in furthering their education).
- So had the ES intervention changed their aspirations? Answers show that this sort of change is a far more likely outcome than any immediate advances in career or learning destinations. Over half those interviewed (56%) said the ES experience had made at least some difference to their thinking about the future. Another 20% claimed it had made them re-think what they wanted to do next more fundamentally.
- ES sessions tend to confirm things that clients had been thinking about for a while and give them more confidence to pursue their plans, be they work or learning related. Clients are generally aware of the personal impacts and benefits of the ES interaction and appreciate its value. In addition, over 80% say they now have a better understanding of the options available to them.
- Respondents report effects on other aspects of their lives as well, from improved self-confidence (mentioned by several people in response to a range of different questions) and knowledge about how to move on, through to changes in personal ambitions.
- So did the ES encounter help clients form a more realistic view of what they could do in the future? A large majority – 78% – thought that it had, including some who were able for the first time to work out the true costs, the financial and other barriers that stood in the way of progress, particularly those wanting to return to learning.
- One of the main barriers to further study for people who are at work *is* their work. They cannot easily fit learning in with working. This suggests that workplace-focused IAG services would profit from closer practical and planning links with other employer-facing agencies locally.

- Overall, feedback from clients when questioned about their opinion of the advice and guidance they had received was very positive, with around 80% rating the service as either 'good' or 'excellent'.

1.3. Conclusions and recommendations

1.3.1. Are we hitting the right targets?

- The profile we have sketched of ES clients in Coventry and Warwickshire raises a number of policy issues that CWG in particular and the IAG Partnership in general need to consider:
 - why has the geographical coverage of the ES been so skewed towards Coventry residents? Does it matter?
 - does the service favour men over women? Does it matter?
 - are the over-50s missing out?
 - should more people who are qualified below level 2 be targeted to receive an enhanced service?
 - are clients getting enough support and follow-up? In practice, is there more depth and substance to the typical ES relationship than just one meeting?

1.3.2. Are we making a difference?

- This study suggests that the effects of the ES experience are best measured by observing changes in *intermediate* or 'soft' variables – including changes in clients' awareness and knowledge of the options available to them, improved levels of self-confidence and higher (or just different) personal or professional goals.
- This is precisely where the ES 'encounter' has the biggest perceived impacts from the clients' point of view. People's readiness to make decisions about next steps in their lives is measurably strengthened by their use of a professional guidance service.
- We have not been able to trace any direct links between changes in people's *economic* circumstances and their use of the ES because:
 - the time elapsed between the ES session and the follow-up interview was relatively short. Evidence from the study hints that, the longer the time elapsed, the more likely clients are to report certain benefits, such as improved confidence and knowledge of available options;
 - only a controlled longitudinal study would be able to show whether, or to what extent, the destinations of our ES cohort were attributable to the interventions of guidance services. We recommend that such a study be carried out locally;
 - the main focus of the ES relationship is on equipping individuals with the knowledge, insights and confidence required to help them move on – be that in their personal or professional lives. Ultimately, clients are left to make their own decisions about what they do with what they have learned from their use of ES.

1.3.3. What else needs to be done?

- There is a need for more systematic, holistic and better-resourced follow-up of adult guidance services and service users in Coventry and Warwickshire, including:
 - **tracking destinations:** at 3 and 6 month intervals, perhaps, recording client satisfaction, what they are doing at that point, and what they are planning next. Some adjustments are also needed in 'baseline' client data and recording of information about the kinds of guidance services actually being delivered, across funding streams;

- **checking for additional support needs:** improved tracking of destinations should be combined with a check on whether clients want/need further guidance or assistance of some sort;
 - **offering additional support:** where ex-clients say they need extra help, resources need to be found to provide further IAG;
 - **measuring IAG impacts and outcomes:** controlled longitudinal studies should be built up to create a time series, offering insights into the complex interplay between the delivery of IAG, other services (such as education and training) and ongoing changes in personal, local and macro-economic circumstances.
- All of this activity requires additional resources (e.g. for new research) and a different way of funding adult IAG. The local IAG Partnership is committed to working towards an IAG *entitlement* for all adults in the sub-region. This could be taken to mean an entitlement to return to the IAG service, within reasonable limits, as and when the need arises. Funding for adult IAG should count repeat IAG sessions with the same individuals as separate episodes.