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National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling

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The career counsellor as broker between demand and supply in adult education

THE GO-BETWEEN II PROJECT



A project funded through the SOCRATES-GRUNDTVIG programme involving partners from Ireland, Italy, Sweden, and the UK

PROJECT BRIEFING



BACKGROUND

The member states of the European Union face a similar challenge in developing the culture, and the provision, of lifelong learning. This need arises partly because modern economies need new skills while old industries and jobs die away, so every one of us must now keep learning and retraining throughout our lives. In most cases, upper secondary school qualifications are necessary for success in the labour market. As a result many unemployed people need to retrain in order to re-enter the labour market. But more fundamentally, learning is a key factor in lifelong personal development, offering social inclusion to all and helping migrant populations settle in their new surroundings. It also plays an important part in promoting health.

Every member country has developed its own system of adult education and training, in ways that reflect their historical and cultural differences. Each country also has guidance services of some kind to advise adults on their options. All the governments now understand the need for both, and try to provide them through a combination of state funding, voluntary or not-for-profit work, and private enterprise.

However, the problem all countries share is to match supply to demand in learning. On the one hand some learners are disappointed because they cannot find the course they want, and on the other providers of education and training can have difficulty 'filling' the courses they put on.

The Go-Between Project started from the idea that the guidance counsellor could act as a 'broker' between the learner and the education and training provider. The guidance counsellor meets many potential learners, so is a ready-made source of market information. The project was based on a pioneering experiment begun in Söderhamn in Sweden, and aimed to explore how feasible this broker role could be for guidance counsellors in other countries.

The project raised many questions. What are the core features of brokerage, and are there different ways of doing it? What national and local structures for guidance and learning provision are most favourable and which make it harder? Are there any patterns among the member states? And most relevantly, could the different countries learn useful lessons from each other? The first stage of the project (1998-1999) suggested they could and the second (2000-2002), with additional partners, was able to develop a common understanding and design practical tools.

THE INTERESTED PARTIES

Who influences what courses or other learning opportunities are available?

In each country the same four parties are involved in this decision:

- ☐ the learners themselves
- ☐ learning providers (colleges and other training and education institutions)
- ☐ employers (who want certain skills)
- ☐ government (through education and employment policies and funding arrangements)

In most cases it is the learning providers who decide what courses they offer, but they are influenced by the skills that local employers need, and they are guided by government policy (usually through funding arrangements). They also have many different ways of finding out what their local learners want.

The Go-Between project looked at the role of **guidance counsellors** in this decision-making process, and their potential to play a more active part

BROKERAGE

1. What is a learning broker?

A broker is someone who acts *on behalf of a client* in securing something that they want, and if necessary negotiating the best compromise. In the case of learning, this could be

I: finding existing education or training that the learner wants

II: negotiating with a provider to put on something that doesn't currently exist.

Guidance services already have a clear role in the first of these. The Go-Between project explored their potential for the second.

2. Gaps in provision take different forms

Negotiating unmet wants is not necessarily just about a putting on a course in a new subject. The subject may be taught already, but at a time, or a price, or a mode of teaching, that makes it inaccessible to the learner. A broker could negotiate with a learning provider on all these aspects of provision and more.

3. Meeting unmet wants or expanding horizons?

Some guidance services work only in response to their clients' expressed learning wishes. Many others, in response to government policies to promote life-long learning, also try to encourage more people to take up more learning.

Some guidance agencies may work in both directions, trying to influence the demand side for learning as well as the supply side. For example, they may suggest ideas to providers for courses that might attract 'new' learners, but also encourage people who are not currently learning (or not learning to their

full potential) to think about things they might like to do. This role of the *animateur* is often carried out by people who are also learning brokers - but it may be helpful to see it as a separate activity.

4. Are all learning brokers guidance counsellors?

Anyone can act on behalf of one or more learners, either to help them find the right existing course or negotiate with a provider to put on something new. The role is not restricted to guidance counsellors. However, here we are interested in the brokerage role of guidance services and individual guidance counsellors.

5. How does brokering fit in to the role of the guidance counsellor?

Guidance counsellors work in very many different contexts. In different countries they are trained and employed to do slightly different things. For example, they may work in independent specialist guidance services, or they may be employed by a college or other learning provider to find out what potential students would like to study. Or they may work for a company, to help employees with their career development, or in a community-based group encouraging members of the public in their personal development.

In spite of these different contexts, they share some common activities, such as providing *information* about what is available, and *advising* their clients about what would suit them. Some offer a fuller service, using various methods to *assess* clients' needs and aptitudes, offer more in-depth *counselling*, or help *enable* them make the next step into learning (or work). All these activities and more can contribute to what we are calling type I brokering (finding an-existing course that the learner wants).

The guidance counsellor may also go in for type II brokering: that is, negotiating with a provider to put on something that doesn't currently exist. This might be through:

- ☐ **advocacy** (speaking up for one individual), or
- ☐ **feedback** (collecting general data on what their clients want and passing it to the provider as 'market research')

6. Does the learner need a broker?

In most systems, a learner can go direct to a provider, and either find the course they want or themselves negotiate with the provider to put on something that doesn't exist. There is still a possible role for a guidance counsellor here, in supporting a learner in *self-advocacy* - not all learners need such help but many benefit from the encouragement to clarify, articulate and speak up for what they want.

However, while some learners can manage on their own, there is still a role for brokerage on the part of other individuals, and in relation to possible collective needs or trends.

7. How might brokering work?

Brokering can be done *informally* or *formally*.

An example of a **formal** arrangement to deal with feedback might be where a college or group of learning providers sets up a regular review of information received from guidance counsellors. This could happen through a regular meeting of providers and guidance services, or a regular reporting system that operates in some other way. In a formal arrangement we would expect it to be in someone's job description to seek out this information and act on it.

An **informal** system could work through a network of good contacts between guidance staff and learning provider staff in one locality. This has the advantage of greater flexibility, but is more likely to fail when individuals move on to other jobs.

Even if brokerage arrangements are of the formal kind, they can be merely advisory (a 'soft' arrangement). In other cases they can include some form of compulsion, or teeth ('hard').

One example of a 'hard' arrangement, and an extreme example of 'type II brokerage' was the one in place in the Municipality of Söderhamn, in Sweden, during the years of the Adult Education Initiative programme (Kunskapslyft), from 1997 to 2002. The learner could not start an education or training programme without first seeing a guidance counsellor in a central guidance service, and there drawing up a learning plan. Funding followed the learner, but only if mediated through the guidance service. The guidance counsellor purchased and organised training on behalf of the individual with one of the providers in the town.

Some combination of formal and informal is probably most effective.

8. Micro- and macro-brokerage systems

Guidance counsellors based in a school or college are often able to broker learning on behalf of a learner within their own college (a **micro-brokerage** system), even if there are no arrangements for independent guidance services in that area to negotiate with local providers on a larger scale (a **macro-brokerage** system).

In situations where there is strong competition between learning providers, or even between guidance services, micro-brokerage systems may be the only feasible form of brokerage. However, they may not be the most effective from the point of view of the learner (compare this with travel agents who only have links with certain commercial holiday companies, and can negotiate variations with those companies but not with others).

THE MODELS

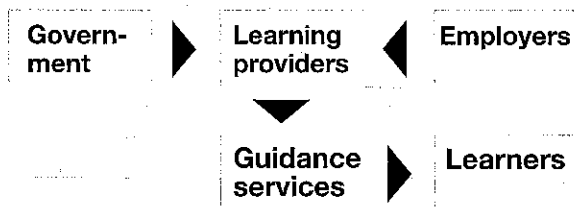
Are there any patterns in brokerage among the member states? The Go-Between Project aimed to clarify the concept by looking at its different forms in four different member states. The aim was to develop models and tools that could help colleagues in their own local situations.

To understand this, the partners suggested a continuum, that can be illustrated by three models. Model A exists in many countries in one form or another. A country, a region or a single locality may choose to work towards model B, within the constraints that exist locally. Model C, an extreme form of formal type II brokerage, both formal and 'hard' (with financial 'teeth'), was possible in Sweden so long as it was supported by public policy at both national and local level.



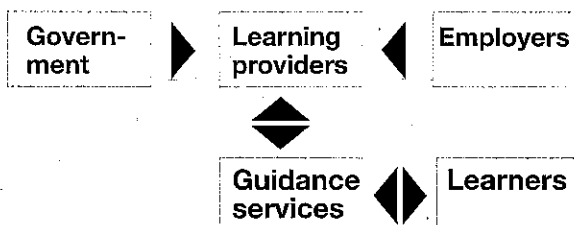
Model A: Providers are influenced mainly by government funding policies and local employers' needs, and make their own judgements about learner demand

Here the *learning provider* collects information (or instructions) from government agencies and local employers about what is needed and decides what to offer. The provider then tells learners and guidance services what is available. Guidance counsellors can inform and advise the learner, if the learner goes to them for help (and in doing so may also be using information about what skills local employers are likely to want). In this model, the guidance counsellor is offering type I brokerage only.



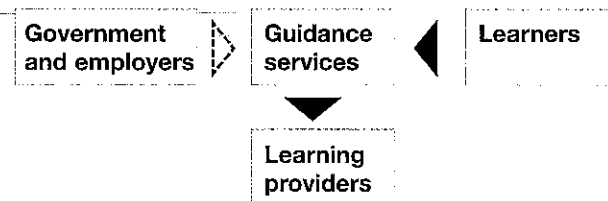
Model B: Feedback- and advocacy-influenced

In this model, the provider still decides what to offer. The provider is still influenced by government policy and employer needs, but also seeks advice from local guidance services about the unmet needs identified by guidance services. Most of the time a learner can find the course that he or she wants, but if they can't, provision is adjusted in response to the guidance counsellor acting as a simple go-between (either through individual advocacy or more generalised feedback). Brokerage of type I and type II is occurring. This is a model that most countries can work towards and continue refining.



Model C: Brokerage strengthened by financial control

This was the model followed under the Adult Education Initiative in Söderhamn in Sweden. Here the guidance counsellors act as mediators for other interested parties: the client first approaches the guidance counsellor, who then works with them to ensure that they choose the most appropriate field and subject. Most innovatively in the Swedish experiment, it was the guidance counsellor who controlled the budget and purchased training on behalf of the client, arranging new provision where necessary.



FACTORS THAT SHAPE LOCAL SYSTEMS

How can we develop brokerage, starting from where we are now? During the course of the project, partners identified questions that may determine how easy it will be to work towards Model B or even Model C, and which suggest development work to increase the brokerage role. These are questions that can be applied to a whole country, or to a region or locality within a country.

1. How widely is guidance available to adults?

Some countries have had guidance for adults in place for some years; in others it is still at an early stage. Even where it has existed for some time, it may not be widespread and consistent, and funding arrangements can change. All countries must continually check whether even Model A is applicable to them, in all localities.

2. To what extent do adults in the community seek guidance about learning opportunities?

Provision is different from use. Do adults look for help about learning opportunities from guidance providers or would they normally go straight to the provider? (They may of course then receive guidance from the learning provider, but not necessarily.)

3. Client expectations: would they ask for things that aren't there?

Would potential learners expect a guidance provider to be able to negotiate something that wasn't provided, on their behalf?

4. Guidance counsellor expectations: do they expect to negotiate provision that doesn't currently exist?

Guidance counsellors may only offer type I brokerage, and not see type II brokerage as part of their role.

5. How do guidance providers collect information about people's wants that are not currently being met?

Even where guidance is widely available, there may not be any systems for collecting information about unmet wants. ICT can be very useful in this, although it may not be available for all community-based guidance agencies. An ideal arrangement is a system that is used by all local guidance agencies; but failing that, just getting individual agencies to collect this information systematically is valuable.

6. Are there any network groups, actual or virtual, that bring together guidance providers and learning providers?

It is at such meetings that guidance agencies can explain to learning providers the benefits of the information they collect; also, the meetings are one way of sharing information and discussing solutions. Where these meetings do not exist, ICT links may provide similar opportunities.

7. How receptive are learning providers to suggestions from guidance counsellors?

Individual providers of adult learning vary in how open they are to advocacy or feedback. They may see such information as valuable market research, and even be pro-active in seeking such information. At the other extreme they may see it as a nuisance: for example, as special pleading for individuals' private interests that interferes with the college's main mission of meeting local skill shortages.

8. Are learning providers able to respond to suggestions from guidance providers?

Some learning providers may be limited in the autonomy they have to respond to local suggestions. The extreme version of this would be if their funding permits them only to run certain courses.

9. Are guidance agencies seen as impartial in relation to different local learning providers (i.e. always putting the learning needs of the client first)?

Trust in the broker, both by the learner and by the learning provider, is important. If there is any question about their impartiality, it will undermine the potential of a guidance counsellor to act as a broker. This can affect even micro-

brokerage (see above) if the guidance agency favours some departments over others within one institution.

10. Are there any local, regional and national policies for lifelong learning that interfere with the development of brokerage?

For example, if local policy encourages competition between providers by setting financial or other targets that they can only reach at the expense of their rivals, this may undermine efforts to get the best spectrum of provision for adult learners.

It is against these questions that the four countries that took part in the second phase of the Go-Between project looked at their work, and developed strategies and tools to help promote brokerage.

THE PARTNERS

In the Go-Between Project phase II, the four partners had very different systems. Furthermore, each was only one local scheme and did not necessarily reflect common practice in their own countries. They all developed the brokerage role from their own starting point.

Sweden

In 1997 the Swedish government introduced the five-year Adult Education Initiative (AEI, or Kunskapslyftet) in which funding was allocated to local government education departments, to enable them to explore ways to promote participation in lifelong learning. In Söderhamn this was used to set up a brokerage scheme. A high street adult guidance centre was opened in collaboration with the employment service. There guidance counsellors worked with their clients to produce an action plan and then organise education or training appropriate to that individual. Through funding from the AEI, counsellors could commission education or training that would take the learner to the level equivalent to upper secondary education. Education and training providers did not produce catalogues, but organised courses in response to the action plan produced by the guidance counsellor.

During the five years of the project it is estimated that 20% of the adult population in Söderhamn received some form of training through this programme. It is acknowledged as a highly successful model by other local authorities in Sweden, and many visited it to consider adopting all or some aspects of the scheme. The AEI ended in December 2002 but its activities continue within the local government adult education service with approximately a 50% reduction in governmental grant.

United Kingdom

From the start of the Go-Between project, learning providers in the UK met through Local Lifelong Learning Partnerships. From 2000, the many diverse agencies that provided information, advice and guidance (IAG) for adults in England were co-ordinated locally through newly-created IAG Partnerships. Government funding for this work is now distributed to the Partnerships through local Learning and Skills Councils, to help finance and also develop the quality of information and advice, and to co-ordinate local activities. Participating IAG agencies vary greatly, and include those that specialise in IAG as well as those that provide it alongside learning opportunities. There are 76 IAG Partnerships in England (although they are beginning to amalgamate into fewer, covering slightly larger areas).

Learning and Skills Councils also now distribute government funding for post-sixteen education (covering further and adult education). Their work is co-ordinated by the national Learning and Skills Council under the remit of the Department for Education and Skills. There are 47 local Learning and Skills Councils in England.

In Bradford, the IAG Partnership is called the Learn In Partnership. It coordinates a network of over 80 centres across the Bradford Metropolitan District that offer either information or advice free of charge to adults. This service is coordinated by the Learn In Partnership, and the information and advice sessions are funded by the Learning and Skills Council.

Ireland

In January 2000, the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative (AEGI) was introduced on a phased basis. The guidance service will be developed and supported over the period of a National Development Plan 2000-2006. Currently, there are twenty-six guidance units operating in the Republic of Ireland, three of which are being managed by County Dublin Vocational Education Committee (in the greater Dublin area): South County Dublin, Tallaght and West County Dublin.

The South County Dublin Adult Guidance Outreach project is situated within the South County Dublin Adult Education Service. The latter is managed by an Adult Education Organiser (AEO), who has overall responsibility for provision of Adult Education in the South County Dublin area.

The main groups targeted for guidance provision are those within the Adult Education system, plus a

contained number of general public clients. Therefore, a high percentage of guidance recipients are unemployed and educationally disadvantaged. Much of the project activity is involved in outreaching guidance to various community centres where these groups are based.

Each guidance unit is encouraged to adhere to a specific brief as much as possible (accepting constraints in some areas). This includes:

- ☐ the core function of guidance delivery at all levels – information; advice; guidance; counselling
- ☐ local networking either informally or formally via an education consortium
- ☐ record-keeping systems (capable of wider application)
- ☐ marketing
- ☐ maintenance of a high quality guidance service

Italy

The Emilia-Romagna region of Italy participated in the project, but the team have developed materials and methods of working that will have countrywide application. During the first phase, thirteen selected Permanent Territorial Centres (Centri Territoriali Permanenti) were contacted and interviewed. These are local educational institutions at primary or secondary level that also provide some adult education. Most of their courses for adults are aimed at enabling learners to achieve the compulsory school diploma: these courses are free of charge. But the Centres also provide other courses, some of which are free and others for which learners must pay.

In the second phase one or more Centres from each of the nine provinces of Emilia Romagna took part in pilot awareness-raising activities aimed at building appropriate links between learners, advisers and providers. Two information and awareness-raising seminars were held in which teachers, trainers, elected members responsible for guidance and adult education, and guidance counsellors met each other.

As part of the Go Between project, the Italian partners will publish a report divided into two main sections: one about the system of adult education provision in Italy, and the other exploring the role of guidance within adult education, with particular emphasis on the Permanent Territorial Centres. At the end of the project a national conference is planned, to disseminate these project outcomes both nationally and internationally. The results of the research will be presented together with three possible national brokerage models. These models reflect best practice at regional level, and a full account of the models and the best practice on which they are based will be included in the report.

In the first phase of the Go-between Project, the Educatieve Wegwijzer in Flanders, Belgium, developed a questionnaire to be used regularly to canvass local need. This information was then fed back to the local Adult Education Platform. The questionnaire is also to be used by new Labour Shops (this partner was unable to take part in phase II of Go-Between).

COMMON ISSUES EMERGING FROM THE PARTNER COUNTRIES

As well as a clearer understanding of the definition of, and factors influencing, the role of guidance counsellors in learning brokerage, a number of other issues emerged during the partners' meetings.

1. Collaboration and competition

Where post-compulsory education is predominantly market-driven, and individual colleges or training-providers benefit in financial terms or in better resourcing from numbers enrolled on their courses, it seems to be harder to introduce macro-brokerage systems. Such competition undermines the trust and respect needed to maintain it. Where localities as a whole strive to maximise overall participation as a proportion of the adult population, as in Söderhamn, there are more incentives to co-operate.

2. The role of the Employment Service

The government agency responsible at a local level for employment and related skill training has related but different goals and practices from most guidance counsellors. However, they are key partners in macro-brokerage, reaching a far larger proportion of the population and with access to national ICT-resources and different funding streams. In Söderhamn, the close partnership with the Employment Service was a key feature of the project's success, where even the different constraints of the guidance service and the employment service could be deployed productively.

3. The role of employers

This was not explored in the Go-Between project, and needs further work. Employers influence provision through different local forums, positively in clarifying skill shortages and therefore employment openings, but possibly also negatively in promoting training for immediate rather than future needs. Individual employers can also establish micro-brokerage systems internally, identifying and then supporting their staff's education and training needs through different kinds of employee development programmes.

4. Turning recommendations into action

In Söderhamn the guidance counsellors did not just make recommendations: it was they who decided what would be run

and how the budget would be spent. The Belgian partners in stage 1 of the Go-Between project concluded that a macro-brokerage system would need to be overseen by some kind of planning agency which could follow up recommendations and where appropriate ask why they had not been met. In the UK there is a role for the local Learning and Skills Councils in this respect.

5. Differences in target groups and in types of learning

The different partners in the Go-Between project targeted their services at different adult groups, Ireland and Italy in particular looking at the disadvantaged and hard-to-reach. The factors listed in "*factors that shape local systems*" apply to specialist services as well as generalist ones, but it may be helpful to review the questions there in relation to specific target groups within a larger public reached by a service. Equally, it may be easier to broker some kinds of short skill training courses than longer or more unusual educational ones. However, providers of this second kind of learning (sometimes distance, open or non-formal learning providers) can be included in advocacy and feedback arrangements.

TRANS-NATIONAL OUTCOMES FROM THE GO-BETWEEN PROJECT

The four partner countries in the second stage of the project met regularly to exchange information about their work and explore differences and similarities. The external evaluator from NICEC, at first Tony Watts and later Ruth Hawthorn, attended their meetings and helped identify features that were shared in their work. The three underlying questions of this trans-national evaluation were:

- Is there a particular brokerage role for the guidance counsellor?
- Are there similarities in this role between member
- Is it possible to extract lessons from the work of these partners to help others?

The evaluation process had led to the definitions, models, factors and other issues presented in this Briefing and NICEC concluded that the answer to all three questions was strongly positive.

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT

Is available from the project website: <http://www.careerseurope.co.uk/gobetween>

Or from the individual project partners:

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