

# Local access to careers information, advice and guidance for employability:

## Provision through public libraries in the North East of England

October 2008

This study demonstrates demand amongst employability target groups for local access to Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) services in public libraries.

The study assesses how the library sector and policy makers can work together to develop services within the context of the emerging Adult Advancement and Careers Service.

### Key findings

- The library sector in North East England supports a wide range of IAG activity, principally engaging with employability target groups and then signposting to other services, but also funding or providing space for qualified careers advisers to work from libraries.
- Libraries in North East England are involved in promoting and delivering learning opportunities including basic skills courses, English for Speakers of Other Languages and informal adult learning.
- Libraries in deprived locations are local and frequently accessed resources for employability target groups (i.e. those not in employment, education or training, those in receipt of Employment Support Allowance, lone parents, BME groups, over 50s, the disabled, care leavers, those with addictions, ex-offenders and the homeless). Access to local services matters most for those with low skills and those distanced from the labour market.
- Demand for IAG services in public libraries amongst employability target groups is clearly demonstrated: the majority have recently experienced or seek change in relation to employment, education or training and are interested in accessing support services in a library.
- A significant proportion of library users are already using the library to find out about and assist choices about education, training and work. Most of these require a personal response, i.e. seeking help from library staff or a trained adviser.
- The capacity and capability of the library sector to engage employability target groups and deliver services is variable across the region. Significant challenges include securing sustainable funding, marketing and promoting services, and the professional development of staff to build an appropriately skilled workforce.
- Historically, the library sector has lacked strategic voice in regional and national planning forums for IAG, which has limited access to funding and development opportunities. In moving forward, 'minimum' and 'expanded' IAG offers from public libraries are now being developed in consultation with policy makers and planners contributing to the design of the Adult Advancement and Careers Service (AACS).

## Background

The Government has set long term objectives for IAG services in England, specifically the announcement of the Adult Advancement and Careers Service (AACCS). An integrated employment and skills service, drawing together existing Jobcentre Plus services and the planned AACCS, will offer universal access to careers advice and links to training to help people get into work, stay in work and progress in work.

IAG services and the partnerships that deliver them will have a pivotal role to play in delivering the Government's skills and employment strategies, particularly in upskilling the workforce and reducing the number of people who experience the 'revolving door' between benefits and low paid and low skilled employment.

## The study

The project required an evidence based approach to strengthening the strategic role of the library sector in developing IAG provision. The project was sponsored by One North East, the regional development agency for North East England, and Museums Libraries and Archives North East. The research questions guiding the project included:

- How effective are libraries at engaging 'hard to reach' groups, particularly in locations where groups eligible for intensive IAG support can be found in relatively high concentrations? Therefore, could libraries play a role in meeting regional skills and economic inclusion targets?
- Do employability target groups using libraries require support with making choices about education, training and work? How interested are they in accessing support in a library?
- How can more consistent access and usage of library based IAG services across the region be achieved?
- How can the library sector contribute to strategy, policy making and planning of IAG services?

This study delivered a survey of 3,226 library users, a census of IAG activity across 200 North East libraries and 40 interviews and a strategic workshop with policy makers, service planners, chief librarians, library staff and careers advisers to assess the above questions. Further consideration was given to establishing the role of libraries in supporting and delivering services within the emerging AACCS.

## IAG activity in North East libraries

The current structure of IAG services in libraries across England is diverse and dependent upon factors such as funding, human resources, staff capability and capacity, local awareness of the IAG offer and the library sector's involvement in local and regional IAG forums.

The library sector in the North East is comprised of twelve local authority areas that have responsibility for 207 libraries. Four models of library based IAG provision were identified across 200 libraries.

In the North East most libraries (68%) offer information about education, training and work and signpost library users to specialist services or training providers for 'advice' and 'guidance' when library based advisers cannot respond or there is no dedicated provision at the library. Across the North East nextstep advisers deliver IAG sessions in 6% of libraries. Trained advisers employed by library services and local authorities also operate from 31% of libraries. In addition to these formally delivered services, 18% of libraries report that they sometimes offer 'advice' or 'guidance' about learning and work in addition to their traditional 'information' giving role.

Although an IAG offer exists in 200 out of 207 libraries, there are very limited cash resources or specific time allocated for IAG activity. In some instances, the IAG offer is not formalised and may not be perceived as such by customers. In the main, IAG activities are embedded within other library activities e.g. generating reference materials about education, training and work, providing information and offering assistance with job search or CVs.

## Learning opportunities in North East libraries

Libraries are involved in promoting and delivering learning opportunities. Amongst the 12 local authority library services in the North East, 11 offer Information Technology courses, 8 offer basic skills courses, 8 offer informal adult learning and 6 offer English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). In 9 authorities, local training providers use libraries to hold recruitment and awareness raising events.

## Do employability target groups visit public libraries?

The profile of library users living in deprived communities in the North East largely mirrors the employability target groups for nextstep services and the North East Regional Employability Framework:

**Pre Level 2 qualified** - 48% yet to achieve a Level 2 qualification (around half of this group have no formal qualifications);

**Benefit claimants** - 45% claiming one or more of these benefits: Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment Support Allowance, Working Tax Credit, Industrial Injury Disablement Benefit;

**Unemployed or distanced from the labour market** - 39% not in education, employment or training, 35% in socio-economic group E (household entirely dependent on state benefits), 13% claiming Jobseeker's Allowance;

**In low skilled, low paid employment** - 21% in socio-economic group D and mean annual personal income is £8,600;

**Disability** - 15% have a long standing physical illness, disability or infirmity and 11% claim Employment Support Allowance;

**Housing** – 34% live in social housing and 13% live in a one parent household.

Libraries are a frequently used, local and accessible resource for employability target groups. Fifty-five percent visited weekly or more often and 87% visited at least once a month. Seventy-eight percent lived one mile or closer from the nearest public library and 95% lived within four miles.

### What is the potential demand for library based IAG?

Figure 1 outlines the potential demand for IAG services by noting circumstances that people have recently thought about or experienced in relation to learning and work. Overall, 57% had thought about or experienced one or more of the situations outlined in Figure 1 and the proportion rose to 66% for those who were not in education, training or work and 66% for those in receipt of benefits.

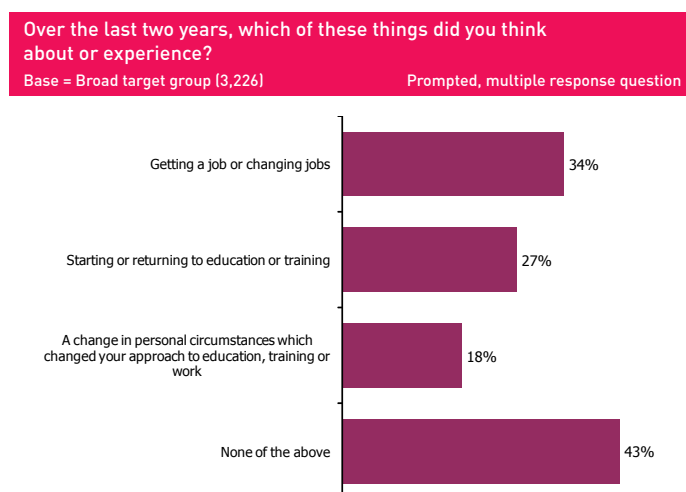


Figure 1: Potential demand for IAG services

Library users in deprived areas are also interested in receiving help to support choices about education, training and work in the library setting.

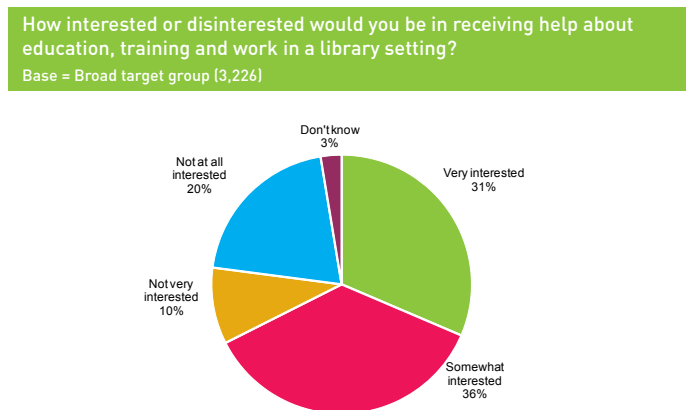


Figure 2: Interest in library based IAG services

### How are people using libraries to find out about learning and work?

Overall, one in five (19%) have used a library to find out about or make choices relating to learning and work in the last two years. The reasons for choosing the library as a source of IAG are linked to accessibility, i.e. that the library is close to home or work, is 'part of the community' and is perceived as a friendly, welcoming and non-threatening environment.

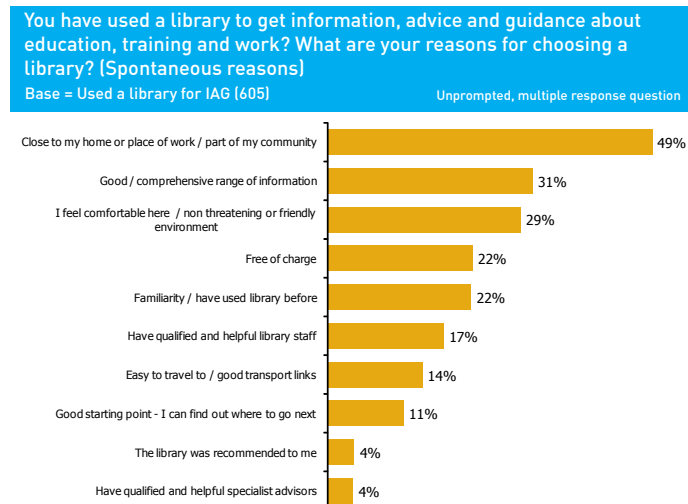


Figure 3: Reasons for selecting a library to find out about education, training or work

The majority (65%) of those who have used a library to find out about learning and work asked a member of library staff or trained adviser for help and 36% helped themselves to information without interacting with library staff. There are graduated resource implications here as most people require a personal intervention. If services are to be developed then front line staff may require more training in assessing clients' needs, providing the most effective and up-to-date information and referring or signposting to other services.

### Realising the potential of the library sector

The survey research findings indicate that the library sector does engage 'hard to reach' and other target groups who qualify for personalised IAG support. Furthermore these groups are thinking about returning to education or training or entering or changing employment. These groups already do or are interested in accessing support services in the library. The research evidence has established a case for furthering developing IAG provision in libraries.

Interviews with the library sector and learning and skills stakeholders have articulated the unique contribution that libraries make in delivering IAG services in the North East:

**A local community resource** – a network of libraries close to where people live and work. The workless are more likely than other groups to have short 'travel to learn and work distances' and will benefit from accessing IAG services on their doorstep.

**An accessible service** – libraries are open evenings and weekends in addition to day time hours.

**Safe and welcoming** – libraries are regarded as open to everyone and a source of impartial information.

**Provide a range of learning opportunities** – libraries can provide informal adult learning and basic skills courses, which help people to prepare for structured learning or become work ready.

**Engage ‘hard to reach’ groups** – those who make up the target groups for welfare to work agencies visit libraries frequently and are interested in using the library to support choices.

Library sector professionals identified several challenges that must be addressed in developing the capacity and capability of libraries to engage target groups and deliver IAG services. These include:

**Obtaining adequate resources** – particularly sustainable sources of funding to enable library staff to train as advisers and to coordinate IAG activity in libraries (i.e. provision of suitable space, promoting services, outreach activity, delivering sessions and monitoring clients).

**Achieving industry standards** – meeting the costs of training to build an appropriately skilled workforce and working towards Matrix accreditation for the library network.

**Strategic development and visibility** – developing the library sector’s strategic voice in regional and national planning policy and planning forums and in local advice networks.

**Facilitating partnership working** - building relationships between heads of library services and prime nextstep contractors to enable libraries to participate in the trialling and testing phase of the Adult Advancement and Careers Service.

**Cultural change** – communicating the changing role of libraries and enabling those working in the library sector to embrace change, i.e. to move beyond a purely ‘information giving’ role to providing advice with additional professional training or building relationships with local IAG partnerships to enable referral of clients.

## Defining an IAG offer from libraries

In a strategic workshop (with the library sector, policy makers and IAG practitioners), design principles for developing library based IAG were discussed: a ‘minimum offer’ (i.e. a more efficient mobilisation of existing resources

## MINIMUM OFFER

## EXPANDED OFFER

### Policy

Society of Chief Librarians represented on North East regional IAG board

Promote message to policy makers that libraries can engage ‘hard to reach’ groups and contribute to employability targets

Strategic links furthered between MLA and DIUS, LSC, LLUK and CLG

Libraries to trial and test approaches for the AACs

### Strategy and planning

Access Train to Gain and Apprenticeship funding for library staff’s access to IAG qualifications (influence LLUK on qualifications eligible for funding)

Build relationships with CfBT (the North East nextstep prime contractor) to enable more advisers to work from libraries

Increase strategic alliances with other regional IAG providers, e.g. nextstep prime contractors and subcontractors

Prepare funding bids to local authorities and One North East to support staff training and development of systems necessary to achieve Matrix

### Implementation

Offer an ‘engagement and signposting’ model across all 207 regional libraries

Develop front desk staff’s ability to handle IAG enquiries

Offer more sessions with qualified advisers across more locations

Increase outreach activity with employability groups

Figure 4: Minimum and expanded IAG offers from libraries

to achieve consistency of provision across the North East region) and ‘an expanded offer’ (i.e. increasing the strategic and delivery role of libraries with additional funding and human resources).

## From regional to national focus

CFE is currently working with MLA to map IAG activity in libraries across England and with wider stakeholders to further develop the IAG offer from libraries.

The full report, **Local access to information, advice and guidance for employability: Provision through public libraries in the North East of England**, by Mark Ravenhall, Louise Peck, Peter Howe and Elizabeth Davies, is published by CFE.

For more details contact Louise Peck (lead researcher) – [louise.peck@cfe.org.uk](mailto:louise.peck@cfe.org.uk) or 0116 229 3300

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CFE, Phoenix Yard, Upper Brown Street, Leicester, LE1 5TE. 0116 229 3300