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THE PERSONAL GUIDANCE FUND – DEVELOPING NEW AND INNOVATIVE PRACTICE



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SIOBHAN NEARY AND JILL HANSON WRITE ON THE PROJECTS FUNDED BY THE CAREERS & ENTERPRISE COMPANY AND THE INITIAL EVALUATION OF THE PERSONAL GUIDANCE FUND

To support the implementation of Gatsby Benchmark 8, 'Personal Guidance', the Careers & Enterprise Company have invested £2.5 million over two phases, to showcase how groups of schools and colleges can successfully and affordably deliver personal guidance.

In summer 2018, four providers delivering five different programmes in phase one were funded to upscale and build on existing activities such as coaching, triage and group guidance.

Phase two commenced in September 2019 with thirteen providers developing new activities building on the findings in *Personal Guidance. What Works?* (2018). These included programmes which focus on young people with special educational needs and disabilities (including mental and emotional health problems), identifying those at risk of becoming NEET, providing personal guidance for younger students and the development of triage and developmental tools.

In total, eighteen projects will be funded until July 2020. This article introduces these programmes and presents some of the initial findings from the evaluation of the Personal Guidance Fund being undertaken by the International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS) at the University of Derby.

The funding for personal guidance aims to support organisations in finding innovative and cost-effective ways of expanding the provision of personal guidance for young people. This is a highly-important element of the Gatsby Benchmarks, which all schools are expected to achieve by the end of 2020. The evaluation aims to assess the feasibility and scalability of activities, consider impacts on young people, teachers, personal guidance professionals, schools, parents and carers and importantly, identify and demonstrate replicable best practice to be shared widely across the sector. Within all the projects, funding has been allocated to support training and professional development of staff, both the career professionals and school/college staff. The learning from this will be instrumental in shaping future delivery of personal guidance to young people.

The evaluation utilises a multi-method approach, which will include a multiple case study design and cost benefit analysis drawing on a Return on Investment (ROI) calculation driven by the labour market impact of personal guidance. The evaluation to date has focussed on phase one organisations whose programmes are implementing a triage system in colleges, upskilling careers advisers with coaching qualifications,

implementing a whole school system, delivering specialist guidance for SEND young people and career guidance workshops for parents running alongside personal guidance for children.

The programmes target a wide range of beneficiaries although the training and upskilling of staff is a key component, examples include; training staff in colleges to support young people through adopting a triage approach; training careers advisers in coaching skills to better support one-to-one personal guidance; targeted approaches for young people with SEND and implementing a whole school approach supported by a digital platform. All offer interesting approaches to supporting young people in making better-informed choices about their future.

Progress to date

All programmes are focussing on several cross-cutting themes, including the five elements in *Personal Guidance. What Works?*; integration, space and time, preparation and feedback, effective interviews and professionalism. These intersect with a number of beneficiaries including NEETs, young people with SEND and parents/carers.

The projects report that schools and colleges are enthusiastic about participating in the projects, as are young people and parents, although it is still early days and some projects are still embedding.

There are several key enablers so far for phase one programmes:

- Firstly, strong working relationships and networks with schools ensure that establishing the project is quicker than working with new partners and there is a sense of trust and confidence in the ability of the project to deliver a quality programme.
- Being well-established in the careers field is also beneficial with longevity and experience identified as important for facilitating the finer mechanisms of conducting interviews and group sessions.
- A third enabler is provider flexibility, at both strategic and implementation levels. Schools and colleges have a variety of approaches to timetabling and how students are made available for interventions. Providers are adopting a range of strategies to accommodate this including having multiple career development practitioners in school at the same time. For vulnerable students and those with specific needs, staff are being supported to develop a more in-depth knowledge of the students' needs, specialist relevant pathways and a greater range of tactics and techniques to enable them to better help the young people they are working with.



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Key learning from this is that this evidences the need for space and time as an inherent element of the programme for it to be effective. Investing in the careers practitioner gives them time and space to be thorough in identifying and addressing the needs of the young person.

Training and CPD

Having funding and time to support staff to engage in CPD is identified as a key benefit. Providers perceive that advisers are effective in their delivery because they are supported in developing a range of skills that accentuate their knowledge base, keep them up-to-date or support delivery of a new intervention. Examples of specialist training include presentation skills, working with young people who have memory problems and training in coaching to enable staff to develop new tools and techniques.

Training for staff to achieve the Level 6 Diploma in Career Guidance and Development is also being made available. Although this has been welcomed in supporting capacity in some instances, there are challenges for some staff in being able to find the time to complete the award. One of the projects is specifically focussing on triage training for non-careers staff. This is helping to develop a cadre of informed tutors who are trained in interview and referral skills, understand the benefits of career and personal guidance and are knowledgeable of the services and support available in their institution.

There have been several challenges which include encouraging schools to complete paperwork, students failing to turn up for appointments, recruiting staff and making time for training and Ofsted inspections popping up! It is recognised that some of the projects are 'new' and taking a little time to become fully active and recruit targeted participants. Overall, all projects have achieved their initial targets.

Next steps

The evaluation team are currently starting to work with the eleven phase two providers as well as following up on progress with phase one. A key focus for all the projects going forward is monitoring and evaluation of impact, as such the evaluation team are working with the providers to help them capture evidence to support this. The team will be identifying a number of case studies to investigate further; these will highlight good practice and crosscutting themes.

References

Everitt, J., Neary, S., Delgado, M.A. and Clark, L. (2018). *Personal Guidance. What Works?* London: The Careers & Enterprise Company www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/our-research/personal-guidance-what-works