

# Adapt and Prosper

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*A partnership between*



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The Centre for Guidance Studies was created in 1998 by the University of Derby and five careers service companies (the Careers Consortium (East Midlands) Ltd.). The centre aims to bridge the gap between guidance theory and practice. It supports and connects guidance practitioners, policy-makers and researchers through research activities and learning opportunities; and by providing access to resources related to guidance and lifelong learning.

CeGS aims to:

- conduct and encourage research into guidance policies and practice;
- develop innovative strategies for guidance in support of lifelong learning;
- provide resources to support guidance practice across all education, community and employment sectors.

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Adapt and Prosper reviews an 'agent for change' programme developed as a joint partnership arrangement between Derbyshire Career Services Ltd, North Derbyshire Training and Enterprise Council, SMEs in North Derbyshire, Forschungszentrum Informatik Karlsruhe University and the Comité de Bassin d'Emploi d'Epernay et sa Région.

Employee development and work-related learning are key elements within the government's lifelong learning and workforce development agendas. Guidance has an increasingly important role to play in helping to support both employees and employers, particularly within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), to adapt and respond to changes in the workplace. This paper provides a review of an 'agents for change' approach designed to explicitly respond to the learning and development needs of SMEs. It is suggested that there is much scope to harness the reservoir of guidance skills and knowledge that currently resides nationally within careers service companies. Information, Advice & Guidance for Adults (IAGA) partnerships will also have a crucial role play in developing new guidance strategies to support learners in the workplace.

## Meeting the skills challenge: agents for change in a workplace context

This paper examines an innovative client-centred approach to effect change and develop a learning culture using guidance within the workplace. This is an example of a careers services' crusade to enlighten and inspire employers so they can be supported to maximise the potential of their business and employees.

An 'agents for change' model implemented in North Derbyshire, supported by Guidance Consultants from Derbyshire Career Services Ltd, has formally introduced guidance into a process of facilitating and enabling a learning culture change within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). An overview of the key findings from a survey of SMEs within North Derbyshire shows that guidance has a major role to play in assisting companies to clarify their business goals and in supporting them to become more competitive. The aim is to support and enable individuals to face and manage change in their workplace by investing in workforce development through education and training.

The added-value benefits and potential drawbacks of the model are examined and a review and analysis of the process and role of guidance is discussed. The findings provide an overview of a strategy to meet the business and training development needs of organisations. It is apparent that there is a need for guidance in the workplace in order to make learning readily accessible to employers and their employees and to develop their confidence and experience in understanding their true potential. The role of guidance and the centrality of providing flexible approaches to respond to business needs are considered. It is argued that the use of guidance enhances the effectiveness of existing resources and partnership relationships. The concept of developing sustainable models of working with employers is viewed as crucial to the success of this government's lifelong learning and workforce development agenda.

## Policy context

The concept of widening participation in adult learning is a recurring theme within the government's lifelong learning agenda. The Learning to Succeed White Paper (DfEE, 1999a) indicated that "the fortunes of businesses and individuals in the modern economy are now inextricably linked. Individuals without the relevant skills and qualifications will find increasing difficulty in gaining and retaining good quality jobs. Businesses without a well motivated and skilled workforce will have increasing difficulty surviving." As a result, government reforms must lead to a significant increase in the proportion of employed people who undertake training and retraining, especially in the workplace, throughout their working lives. However, the British Chambers of Commerce (1999) indicates that "many employers are investing in training and education but there is still potential to raise levels of investment. More effort is needed to help employers to recognise the clear benefits of investing in the employees' learning, particularly in small firms."

Across the UK, Lifelong Learning Partnerships (DfEE, 1999b) and newly established Information, Advice & Guidance for Adults (IAGA) Partnerships, are designed to support the development of more coherent learning provision for adults and the skill requirements of employers. Other government-funded initiatives, such as the University for Industry (Ufi) Ltd. offer telephone helpline services, and ICT on-line information and advice for adults. In autumn 2000, the introduction of a national framework of Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) (DfEE, 1999c), designed to offer discounts off the cost of eligible adult learning courses could potentially have a significant effect on how adults access learning both within and outside the workplace. Sargent's work (1996) concludes, "many people's motivation to study is directly related to its relevance to their current or future work". There is a growing body of evidence from Higher Education Quality & Employability projects (DfEE, 1999d) which suggest that "the needs of the business, the management development needs, and the needs of the individual must be related to each other if lifelong learning is to be successfully developed in SMEs". On the face of it, work-related learning and workplace training and development is nothing new; however, a main challenge for adult guidance workers, particularly those working within careers service companies, is to find new ways of marketing their services in

order to persuade employers and employees that what is on offer could have all round benefits and potentially lead to a better motivated, skilled and highly trained workforce.

### The 'agents for change' model

In 1999, North Derbyshire Training and Enterprise Council in partnership with Derbyshire Career Services Ltd., funded through the ADAPT 2 programme, developed a guidance strategy to support small business and enterprise. Local businesses were targeted and asked to define the developments they require to help meet their business goals. The 'agent for change' approach, designed by the careers service, identifies an individual within an organisation as the lead person for managing the specific change within their company. So far, 707 people managing change within their respective organisations have been supported through the programme. They are tackling issues such as:

- introducing IT to production, services and administration;
- developing awareness and knowledge of their sector before making development choices;
- growing the business;
- expanding the market and building the customer base;
- developing new and existing customer services and products;
- boosting staff training and qualification to improve the skills base;
- engaging in training related to sales and marketing to help promote business into new areas;
- learning presentation and coaching skills to assist in the dissemination of information to other staff.

Strong partnerships operate between Derbyshire Career Services, local business support agencies such as Business Link, the TEC, the Chamber of Commerce and the participating companies in order to provide a coherent business support network at a local level. The Guidance Consultant works with the person responsible for managing change to develop an 'Individual Development Plan' that will meet their training and development needs, and carry out the change in the company.

The guidance objective is focused on supporting the person to make the changes, successfully complete, and use the training. A process of joint reflection is undertaken using the company

business plan to ensure that the desired changes will realistically meet company expectations. Where additional company needs or difficulties are identified Guidance Consultants, through the partnership arrangements, draw on the expertise of Business Link Advisers, Training & Enterprise Council (TEC) representatives, or other specialist consultants.

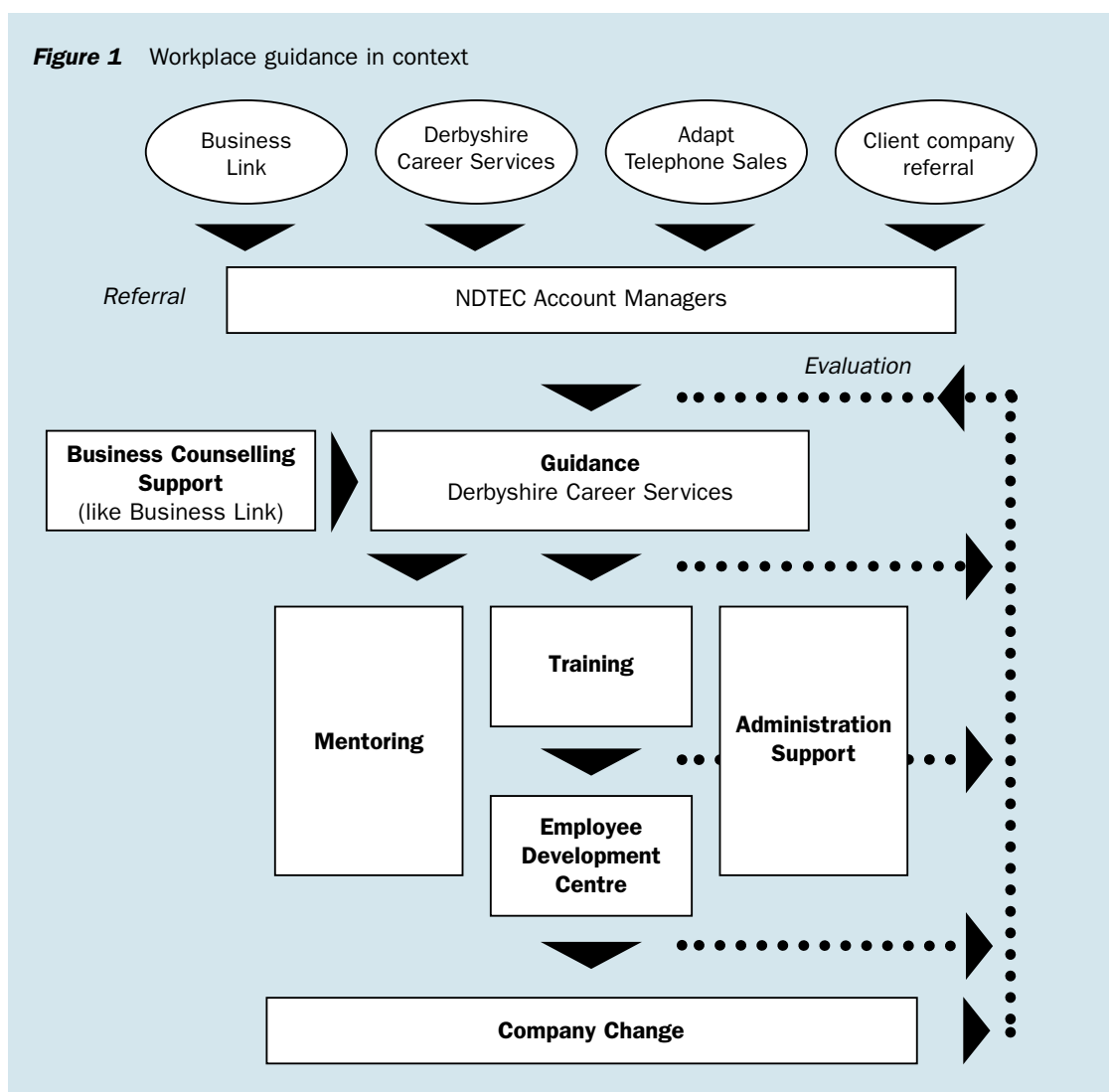
Figure 1 outlines the main partners and process. The majority of guidance delivery is undertaken in the company whereas, training and personal development for the 'agents for change' takes place at the most appropriate time and place and by a method which best suits their learning style. Sargant (1996) highlights the two main situational barriers to access 'time and place' may tend to be under-estimated in comparison with 'dispositional' and 'attitudinal' barriers.

### Defining guidance in a workplace setting

The term guidance can be used both as a generic term, and a term to describe a specific activity. In its generic usage, a broad definition of guidance is that it covers a "wide range of processes designed to help individuals to make informed choices and transitions related to their learning and work" (Watts, 2000). In this context, guidance is characterised in terms of the processes that the Guidance Consultants have engaged in. At an early stage, feedback suggested that very positive outcomes were emerging from their work.

A preliminary investigation of the causes and effects of the positive outcomes (and how these related to narratives derived from client experiences) was undertaken by Derbyshire Career Services Ltd. The main question posed was whether or not these guidance activities were similar to those delivered to employed adults in other settings such as clients self-presenting to careers centres. On closer inspection, the findings showed that the quality of work was similar, a closer examination of the content and key guidance activities was then undertaken.

The research methodology consisted of a questionnaire survey sent to 204 employers in March 2000. This was followed by the selection of a representative sample of twenty companies and twenty-five agents for change (identified by size, geography and sector); analysing the amount of time and key activities undertaken by Guidance



Consultants with the clients managing the change. Using the seven activities related to guidance e.g. informing, enabling, advising, counselling, assessing, advocating and feeding back (as developed by the Unit for the Development of Adult Continuing Education UDACE, 1986) these were compared and contrasted to other adult guidance activities. A sample measure of the guidance content was taken. From the initial pilot, the term ‘active listening’ was also included as a further component within this guidance process. The sample findings yielded a range of information; however, the main focus identified that the guidance activity was substantially similar to that delivered elsewhere.

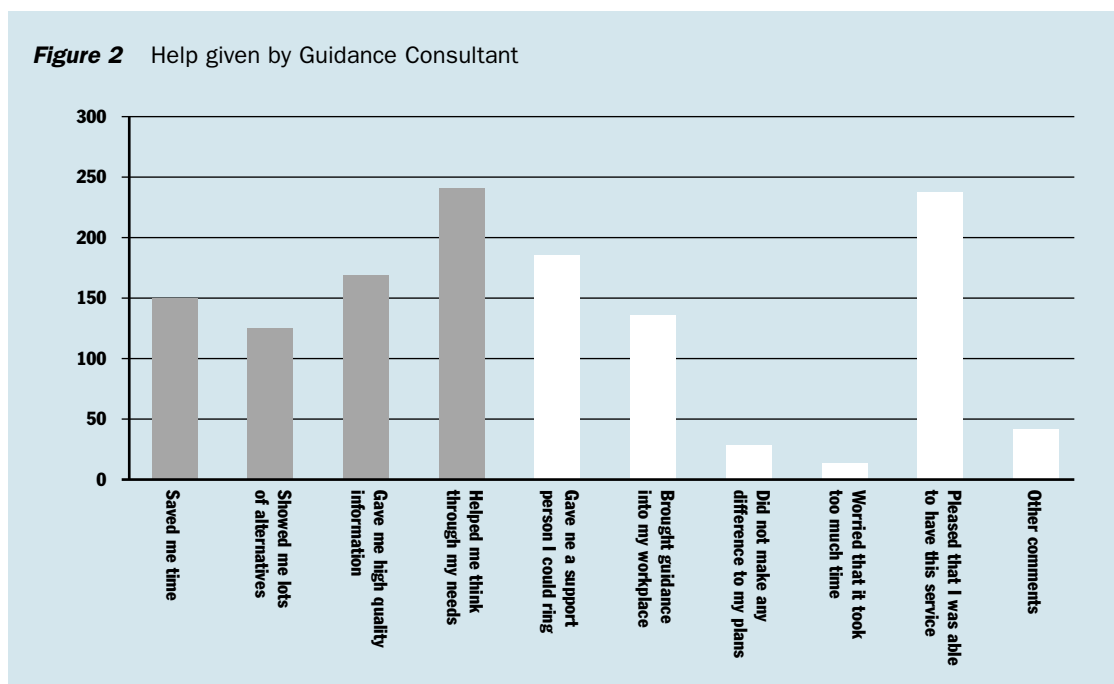
**Therefore, what makes this programme distinctive in terms of supporting workforce development?**

## Interim findings

By the end of March 2000, 624 companies had participated in the programme, and 45% of the agents for change had responded to the questionnaire survey. They described the support activity in terms of ‘a friendly approach’ and being ‘good to know that there is support available’. Many respondents stated that they were not aware that help was available and easily accessible.

Most indicated that it was good to be able to seek advice from someone outside the business area. The findings support Tremlett & Park’s work on individual commitment to learning (1995) and the National Adult Learning Survey in 1997 (Beinart & Smith 1998) in which 95% of respondents agreed that employers should give guidance

**Figure 2** Help given by Guidance Consultant



internal career development, with far fewer (65%) believing that employers should guide them on external career options. Clearly, employers are well placed to provide information about the skills and learning required for specific internal jobs and advancement, and to recognise the learning needs of their staff.

Tremlett & Park (1995) found that employers had a positive view of the provision of internal career information and advice which they saw as motivating employees and raising their responsibility for career development. However, they were concerned about raising employees expectations and did not feel that they have sufficient information on learning opportunities. In addition, only half (54%) of employers reported providing information about learning, and this was job or company specific, and may lack independence and impartially about options and routes. More critically, employer-led learning is unlikely to be conducive to encouraging individual motivation and commitment to lifelong learning. Employees often undertake learning because their employer wishes them to do so, rather than being committed to the learning itself (Tremlett, Park & Dundon-Smith, 1995)

Individual meetings with the Guidance Consultant were described by the majority as ‘a very well

prepared and organised meeting which targeted the relevant issues promptly and efficiently.” Others stated that it offered an excellent opportunity to learn more up-to-date information regarding business development.

Within the survey, employers were also asked “Do you feel that the Individual Development Plan agreed with the Guidance Consultant covered all important areas?” The responses to the findings indicate that 76% said it gave them a support person to contact, 72% suggested that it brought guidance into the workplace. 71% suggested that it helped them think through their needs and 46% indicated that the guidance activity saved them time; 41% said that it showed them lots of alternatives and 59% said that it gave them high quality information.

This was followed by “In what ways did your meeting with the Guidance Consultant contribute to your plans?” The responses can be categorised as follows:

There were those who described the meeting(s) as:

- *broadening perspectives* by making explicit the options available and providing key contacts;
- *providing advice and information on relevant training opportunities* at a local and regional level;

- *helping to achieve set targets* often linked to personal and company goals;
- *clarifying objectives and areas of interest* linked to an agreed action plan;
- *presenting creative ideas* and lateral thinking to support business goals;
- *helping to generate more sales and leads* through networking and training opportunities;
- *encouraging and supporting a culture of change* and critical reflection on individual and company needs.

Clearly, the personal element, the guidance and the immediate accessibility of assistance that a “support person” brings are seen as being crucial for developing the business plans and the workforce.

The programme offers motivators such as:

- i funding for training;
- ii delivery of services at both client and company convenience;
- iii identified time-bound needs and agreed learning plans.

The contribution of these motivators and the commitment to engage in guidance, learning and personal development were considered. The questionnaire findings indicated that funding and service delivery at client and company convenience were not identified as primary motivating factors in influencing workforce development and supporting change. The fact that organisations had committed to an agreed plan provided the context and timing for appropriate guidance and training. Key factors such as working with organisations on their premises and providing on-going support was clearly valued; the ‘agents for change’ indicated this stimulated their interest in finding out more about learning opportunities:

*“It gave me a deeper insight into planning and what is available in help and training”*  
(Engineering Consultant)

*“It enabled me to develop IT ideas and add on further training to complement that already in progress”*  
(Office Manager)

*“It offered guidance on how to structure training and identified areas where training may be needed”*  
(Designer)

## What makes this approach work?

In looking at the difference between this and other adult guidance work, the following conclusions are drawn:

Firstly, agencies often predict when guidance interventions will be required or ask clients to contact them when in difficulty. In most cases, the timing of the guidance intervention is often imprecise (Wilson & Jackson 1998). Within the ‘agents for change’ approach Guidance Consultants control the timing and pace and through their involvement in managing the change and understanding the situation are able to plan more precise interventions.

Secondly, guidance suffers an image problem due to the generic use of the term. Wilson & Jackson (1998) suggests that individuals’ perceptions of provision are generally characterised by a lack of clarity about what guidance is or how it can benefit the individual”. Guidance was not overtly promoted within this programme; however, guidance skills were used to meet concrete requirements that were linked to the company aim of making successful changes.

Thirdly, the traditional approach of delivering guidance outside of the workplace is challenged. The key element within the ‘agents for change’ approach is to integrate the support provided from the Guidance Consultant with the individual and company needs. Guidance has a role related to bringing about change within the company, and is there to enable the individual to confidently manage the process.

Fourthly, clients need to feel that their own circumstances are understood. Active listening, informing and advising are the main components that provide reassurance and support. This poses a key question about the level of knowledge, skills and personal qualities demanded of the Guidance Consultant. In this context, Guidance Consultants are professionally trained Careers Advisers who are able to utilise their interviewing, active listening and mentoring skills to effect change.

Finally, a formal partnership arrangement between a careers company, a TEC and an Employee Development Centre has resulted in maximising limited resources for direct intervention in the workplace. It had reduced duplication of effort and developed co-ordinated responses. By

comparison, other forms of intervention in the workplace such as business counselling often have their focus drawn towards “business activity” rather than the individual. Personal development approaches focus on the individual but with less of a direct link to the specific demands in the workplace. The ‘agent for change’ model adopts a person-centred approach that concentrates on equipping the worker to meet the challenge and drive forward an agreed programme for change within the company.

## Conclusion

Workplace guidance appears to work well when plans for change in the workplace drive the need for personal development. The ‘agents for change’ approach ensures that the needs of the company and the needs of the individual are explicitly addressed. This leads to consideration of other situations where workers require support. It poses questions on how integrating guidance in the workplace and work-related learning would be especially effective. Models for managing change (Kanter, 1992) suggest, that building a commitment to change requires positive re-enforcement for competence; letting people know they can do it; avoiding creating obvious losers from the change (but if there are some, be honest with them early on) and minimising surprise; and giving people advance warning about new requirements. All of these functions can be served well through the use of effective guidance.

The findings from this ADAPT programme suggests that with precise targeting, the use of guidance is more cost effective than simple delivery of information and advice. A reservoir of guidance skills currently resides nationally within careers service companies; however, with the introduction of the government’s Connexions strategy greater consideration must be given to the role of guidance workers in their work with employers and adults in the workplace.

The Information, Advice & Guidance for Adults (IAGA) partnerships offer some scope for employer and trade union participation in lifelong learning; however, the ‘agent for change’ model offers scope to effect change in the workplace through the application of guidance skills and knowledge. The model offers synergy and

cohesion towards the diverse range of approaches to SME development which are currently taking place. It uses guidance to effect change and to begin the process of lifelong learning in a practical and structured way.

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