

new start



November 1999

New Start - Paving the way for the Learning Gateway
Personal adviser pilot projects

Section 1. Introduction

- 1.1** Pathfinder projects for Personal Advisers were negotiated during March and April 1999, in order to offer a small pilot for the new Personal Adviser role being introduced within the Learning Gateway in Autumn 1999. Most of the finance comes from the 'Invest to Save' budget, with a small proportion from DfEE funds. The 'Invest to Save' implementation plan uses the terminology 'Youth Advocates' for Personal Advisers. As this terminology is not used elsewhere, and is not known to the projects themselves, we have retained the term 'Personal Adviser' throughout all documentation.
- 1.2** Pathfinder projects were located in larger conurbations which were already involved with the New Start strategy. Of seven projects in total, five are located with New Start (Round Two) projects and two with New Start (Round One) projects. Funding became available from May 1999 and ends in March 2000.
- 1.3** This report examines the operational progress made by projects over their early months, and records data on participants up to mid-October 1999. It develops earlier evaluation undertaken as part of the national evaluation of New Start (Round Two), and that evaluation report provides a significant context for this updating study. This report focuses on:
- Client characteristics
 - Targeting of specific groups of young people
 - Clients' attitudes to the projects, and particularly to project staff
 - Initial indications of client outcomes.

Research methodology

- 1.4** The visits undertaken as part of the national evaluation of New Start (Round Two) showed that in one case the pilot funding was being used to improve the support offered to trainees on an ESF-funded course operating within the New Start (Round Two) strategy. As all participants were already enrolled onto courses at NVQ Level 2, this project was not addressing the problems of working with 'out of contact' young people. It was therefore agreed with the project steering group that it should not be included in this later study of the Personal Adviser pathfinder projects. This study therefore covers six of the seven pilots.
- 1.5** The study has drawn on several elements
- a) visits to Government Offices and questionnaire responses which were part of the New Start (Round Two) national evaluation;
 - b) case-study visits to four Personal Adviser pilot areas, undertaken in July 1999 as part of the New Start evaluation;
 - c) case-study visits in September/October 1999 to the two Personal Adviser pilot areas located within New Start (Round One) projects;
 - d) a supplementary questionnaire sent to six projects for return in mid-October 1999. This questionnaire focuses on Personal Adviser caseloads and on outcomes for individual clients.

The projects covered were as follows:

New Start (Round One) Merseyside
Sheffield

New Start (Round Two) Bradford
Coventry
Hackney
Tower Hamlets

Section 2.

Background to the evaluation

2.0 The National Context

2.1 The evaluation report for New Start (Round Two) analyses the rationale, aims and objectives of the project proposals for both New Start (Round Two) and the Personal Adviser pilot projects. It sets this analysis within the context of recent government documents. We quote here only those paragraphs directly relating to Personal Advisers:

Personal Advisers are the single most important feature of the Learning Gateway. They bind the options together and provide seamless support for the individual. The advisers will be the initial point of contact for young people and those meetings will effectively mark the beginning of the Learning Gateway. The first requirement of a Personal Adviser will be to quickly build up a relationship of trust with the young person. Their role is to "provide help on a caseworker basis including initial assessment, guidance, planning and support and continuing monitoring, review and support" (DfEE 1999a). Their main purposes are to:

- a) *work with young people to diagnose their individual needs* and agree an Individual Development Plan (IDP);
- b) *arrange mentoring support*, including peer mentors, as appropriate;
- c) *act as a broker to local agencies* providing specialist support;
- d) *monitor and review all clients*, arranging continuing support necessary.

Personal Advisers will be appointed by, but not necessarily recruited from, the careers service. They could come from a number of backgrounds: the careers service, youth service, social services, schools or colleges or the probation service. They will be skillful in building relationships with young people and colleagues, in undertaking assessment and planning, and in understanding the characteristics of disaffection and the range of special educational and training needs. The Personal Adviser will need access to all plans, which have been drawn up in the interests of the young person, and develop links with those in equivalent roles. The concept of a Personal Adviser has been a strong element in a number of recent government programmes, including New Deal programmes within the Employment Service.

Contractual arrangements

2.2 Pathfinder Personal Adviser contracts are managed by Government Offices in four regions. Government Offices in these regions were asked to identify New Start projects which could be extended quickly, and particularly where appropriate staff could be identified quickly. This assumed, as has largely been the case, that Personal Advisers would be located within careers service staffing structures, either through existing direct employment or by secondment, e.g. from the youth service.

Rationale and relationship to the Learning Gateway

2.3 The rationale for the Personal Adviser role is directly linked to the Learning Gateway, which came into operation from September 1999. The role of the Personal Adviser, particularly within the 'front end' of Learning Gateway, has been increasingly defined in careers service planning documents throughout 1999, and these provide the main framework against which the current study has taken place. Key issues which were identified for trial were:

- caseloads;
- training and development needs;
- location of Personal Advisers;
- support/referral mechanisms required.

Staff raised many other issues during visits to projects, and these are reflected in our findings.

2.4 Most careers services were implementing, or at advanced stages of planning for, the Learning Gateway by the time of the evaluation visits from July to October 1999. Where there was a distinction between pilot Personal Advisers and those operating under the Learning Gateway, it normally included pilot Personal Advisers testing methods or developing materials for wider use. This particularly applied to the assessment packs produced by the two projects located with New Start (Round One) projects. In some cases pilot Personal Advisers had reduced caseloads, particularly where they had additional responsibilities for networking and establishing procedures. Of the six projects studied, only one operated separately from the local careers service.

Section 3. Young people

Characteristics of young people

- 3.1** Respondents were asked for details of the clients of the Personal Advisers. The characteristics of 176 young people were described across six projects. Table 1 gives the gender breakdown. Four projects had broadly similar male and female participants with two having very few females. Both projects with few females are located in the London area. One project had started with a male project worker in an area with a large Muslim population. The project's steering group had identified the imbalance in recruitment and ensured that the Personal Adviser pilot funding had been used to employ female Asian workers. Although numbers of young women recruited to the project are still low in total, the more recent intake shows an improved balance. The other project is one of the most recent to recruit clients and still has very small numbers (17 by mid-October).

Table 1

Personal Adviser clients of six projects by gender		
	Number	Percentage
Males	112	64%
Females	64	36%
Total number	176	100%

- 3.2** Table 2 gives the ethnic background of the young people. Although all six respondents replied, only five used the defined DfEE/CRE categories.

Table 2

Personal Adviser clients of five projects by ethnic background		
	Number	Percentage
Black-African	3	2%
Black-Caribbean	2	1%
Black-Other	2	1%
Indian	4	3%
Pakistani	17	11%
Bangladeshi	32	20%
Chinese	0	0%
Asian-Other	0	0%
White	92	58%
Other	7	4%
Total number	159	100%

- 3.3 We asked respondents for the destinations of young people who had left the project. The destinations for young people from the six projects are recorded in Table 3.

Destination	Numbers of young people
Education including part-time provision	44
Training provision	35
Job with training	15
Job without training	1
Left for health reasons including pregnancy	3
Other provision including custodial sentence	3
Left area	7
Unknown/lost contact	11
Other- No longer wanted help	2
Total	121

Out of the 121 young people who have left the six projects, 94 have entered education, training or employment (78%).

3.4 Each of the six projects was asked to indicate the characteristics of their Personal Adviser clients grouped by domestic, personal and educational characteristics. Table 4 shows the breakdown by project and in total numbers and percentages.

Table 4								
Characteristics of young people by number in each project and by total number and percentage for all six projects								
	A	B	C	D	E	F	All projects	
							N°	%
Domestic:								
In care/leaving care	1	1	0	5	8	5	20	11%
Family unemployment/ underachievement	19	48	2	13	17	8	107	61%
Poor relationships with parents/guardian	25	12	2	16	17	10	82	47%
Abuse/domestic violence	3	2	0	9	5	0	19	11%
Teenage parents	2	0	0	2	1	1	6	3%
Unsettled housing	13	1	1	25	9	11	60	34%
Personal/Social:								
Health difficulties	5	5	1	7	6	0	24	14%
Poor employment prospects	26	48	7	28	14	7	130	74%
Transport difficulties	8	2	0	1	1	2	14	8%
Ex-offenders	6	11	0	6	6	2	31	18%
Low self-esteem/confidence	33	52	1	29	14	8	137	78%
Drug abuse	6	7	0	1	4	0	18	10%
Mental health problems	2	0	0	1	0	0	3	2%
Emotional/behavioural problems	28	30	0	20	8	1	87	49%
Educational:								
Excluded/long term truancy pre-16	14	27	0	16	18	3	78	44%
Lack of qualifications	31	46	6	32	18	14	147	84%
Learning difficulties	13	15	0	11	7	0	46	26%
Little contact with careers service/careers education	13	6	0	33	15	10	77	44%
Negative view of education	28	42	0	21	11	2	104	59%
Total numbers of clients:	35	52	12	40	20	17	176	

3.5 Table 4 indicates the key characteristics of young people referred to Personal Advisers as identified by them. 61% experience family unemployment or underachievement, 47% have poor relationships with parents/carers and 34% have unsettled housing. 78% suffer from low self-esteem and confidence, 74% have poor employment prospects, with 49% having emotional and behavioural problems. 84% of the young people have a lack of qualifications but only 26% are identified as having learning difficulties. 44% have experienced exclusion or long-term truancy and 44% have had little contact with the careers service or careers education. 59% have a negative view of education.

3.6 Respondents were asked to indicate progress made through the support of a Personal Adviser for the 176 identified young people. One respondent replied that not all information was currently available (Project E). Table 5 gives their responses.

Table 5

Indicators of progress made through the support of a Personal Adviser by the number in each project and by total number and percentage for all six projects

	A	B	C	D	E	F	N°	%
Significant improvement in:								
Attendance/punctuality	16	38	0	19	8	0	81	46%
Self-esteem/confidence	25	37	12	18	18	4	114	65%
Preparedness for decisions	11	27	0	15	11	2	66	37%
Forming individual relationships	20	42	0	10	10	2	84	48%
Participating in a group	13	3	1	7	4	0	28	16%
Coping with new situations	20	41	0	13	9	5	88	50%
Participation in:								
Informal learning e.g. outdoor activities	2	7	0	2	2	1	14	8%
Formal agreement to participate	20	42	0	2	3	0	67	38%
Individual Development Plan	33	40	0	9	10	13	105	60%
Named award schemes	0	4	0	0	0	0	4	2%
Work experience	9	13	0	0	1	0	23	13%
Accredited training	5	24	0	5	1	0	35	20%
Education	6	24	4	3	3	4	44	25%
Job with Training	7	4	0	1	3	0	15	9%
Job without Training	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1%
Total numbers of clients:	35	52	12	40	20	17	176	

3.7 Table 5 shows that 65% of young people have made progress in the key area of self-esteem and confidence. 50% have made progress in coping with new situations and 48% in forming individual relationships. 60% have an Individual Development Plan and 38% a formal agreement to participate.

Section 4. Personal Advisers

- 4.1 We asked how many Personal Advisers are currently working on the project, either full or part-time. Table 6 illustrates the findings and shows that projects have between 1 and 3 advisers.

Table 6

Number of Personal Advisers used by each of the six projects

Project	Full time	Part-time			
		1 day/week	2 days/week	3 days/week	4 days/week
A	1	0	2	0	0
B	1	0	0	0	0
C	2	0	0	0	0
D	1	0	2	0	0
E	2	0	0	0	0
F	0	0	2	0	0

Targeting

- 4.2 Each project was asked to describe their methods of identifying those young people who would most benefit from support from a Personal Adviser. Five projects identified target groups, but approaches to this differed.
- 4.3 Three projects used management information systems to analyse the geographical locations (postcode or ward) with the highest percentages of 'unknown' or unemployed young people. Various activities were then used to provide an easy access point within the area and to network with agencies within the locality.
- In one instance, this involved new links with a local authority neighbourhood initiative which introduced the careers service to ethnic minority support groups of whom they had been previously unaware.
 - In another, analysis showed that unemployment and disaffection was increasingly polarised over time in these areas. Percentages of young people unemployed and out of contact increased over the months after statutory school-leaving age, when in other areas of the city they were falling.
- 4.4 Three projects used existing knowledge to identify target groups. A fourth project established eleven categories, which cover such a broad range of characteristics that few young people would not be covered. They summarise their eleven target groups collectively in words from the Careers Service Planning Guidance for the Learning Gateway as young people 'disaffected by attitude ...(or) disadvantaged by circumstances or characteristics'. Within this range, they give priority to two groups, which are listed below along with the more specific target groups of the three projects using a targeting approach

- young offenders (two projects)
- looked-after children (two projects)
- travellers
- young Asian women
- young black people
- long-term unemployed
- early leavers from their first post-school destination
- leavers with a history of non-attendance, or leaving Pupil Referral Units.

Two projects used both geographical targeting and targeting by characteristics. One project recruited solely by networking with a wide range of other agencies, and accepting referrals.

Working methods and relationships with young people

4.5 All projects identified the need to establish appropriate relationships with individual young people very quickly. They endorse the statement in the Learning Gateway Specification 'The first requirement of the Personal Adviser will be to get alongside the young person and quickly build a relationship of trust.'

4.6 A number of issues arise in seeking to achieve this:

i) Location

Careers centres were frequently seen as barriers. The only positive mention is of young female clients being comparatively comfortable to use a careers centre within a shopping centre. All projects used outreach on other agencies' premises and through home visits. No reference was made to work 'on the streets', but in general the early stages of targeting meant that projects were purposefully seeking out specific individuals or groups of young people.

Youth workers and careers advisers have different approaches to off-site work, especially home visiting. Typically youth workers will undertake home visits alone unless there is background information that suggests particular risk. Careers services are much more likely to have procedures for working in pairs on home visits, and in at least one case undertaking a home-visit alone would be a breach of company procedures.

In many cases initial contact is made by telephone, and the young person is encouraged to choose a venue. Extensive use is made of fast-food outlets in some projects.

ii) Careers service 'image'

Projects report that the careers service has an 'authority image' amongst young people, particularly related to its role in the benefits system. Careers advisers working as Personal Advisers in outreach locations tended to play down their careers service background, except in one instance where this style of working is longer established. New Start has provided a comfortable, neutral descriptor for many Personal Advisers. Even so, they expect some testing out by young people before a relationship of trust starts to develop.

iii) Initial relationships

Several factors are of importance here.

- Listening is essential; the message is re-iterated from all clients that they want to be listened to first, and then helped. They greatly value this when it happens.
- Several projects mention the need to create a feeling of impetus from the start. This requires a 'can-do' attitude by the Personal Adviser, and appears to work best when they identify anything that is an issue, however small, for the young person and help to make a change. Personal Advisers report that optimism and persistence are important qualities in their work. Conversely, looking backwards and examining the issues that have led young people to their current situation was generally unhelpful in the early stages, although it becomes important as the relationship develops.
- A holistic approach is essential. Young people frequently have multiple problems, and many of these will only emerge as a relationship of trust develops.

iv) General characteristics of young people

Underpinning the specific characteristics reported in the previous section are certain general characteristics that affect the relationship between young people and the Personal Advisers. Focus group evaluation, client feedback and our own interviews with young people all confirm clients' own perceptions of confusion. They use descriptions such as 'It does my head in', 'I learned just how confused I was', 'It cleared my head about the things I don't want to do', 'I was a bit confused.' This state of confusion is often reflected in chaotic lifestyles and the ability only to cope with very short timescales.

With time, young people are aware that they have been helped to manage their confusion: 'I feel totally secure in myself', 'More open-minded', 'Feel I can do more', 'Knew what I wanted to do'.

v) Developing an understanding of relationships

Several projects report that they now need to develop models of direct working with young people, and to focus on what it is that makes the relationship between the young person and their Personal Adviser work. Youth work and careers work bring different perspectives and approaches to young people, and there appears to be good scope for mutual learning.

vi) Continuity of relationship

In general, young people value the continuity of contact with one person. They especially value 'friendship' with their Personal Adviser, often built on discussion of topics of general interest, such as sport or music. Personal touches (in one case a birthday card) were highly valued by some young people. This makes them an individual, not a 'client'.

From the Personal Advisers' viewpoint, this relationship is consciously built through small steps. One Personal Adviser reports that, with the most difficult young people, a first step is establishing eye contact. A willingness to meet again may be a significant step. However when a relationship is established, it brings its own further issues of avoiding dependency and allowing an 'exit strategy' for the Personal Adviser when the time is right. Some projects are recognising that they need a strategy of gradually introducing young people to a range of helping agencies within their network, and supporting the formation of further relationships, to reduce the risk of inappropriate dependency on one person.

Caseloads

4.7 Respondents were asked for the caseloads of each Personal Adviser. Table 7 indicates their responses and shows that the majority of full time/ part-time equivalent Personal Advisers have a caseload of between 10 and 23 young people. Respondents were also asked how many young people had been allocated to Personal Advisers by the 15th October 1999. This is illustrated in the table below alongside the relevant caseload figures.

Project	Caseloads for full time Personal Advisers for the six projects	Total number of young people allocated to Personal Advisers to October 1999
F	10	17
E	12	25
C	12	12
A	15-20	35
B	23	52
D	*Up to 50 on a roll-on roll-off basis	40
	Total	181

*No indication given as to the maximum young people at any one time

4.8 Projects are still feeling their way on what is a manageable caseload for a Personal Adviser. Several projects consider contact on a weekly basis to be essential. There is variation in the extent of other responsibilities allocated to Personal Advisers, for example networking with local agencies. Projects identified that over time the caseload would include 'high-maintenance' early stage clients and 'low-maintenance' clients who are making progress into other options. Individual Personal Advisers made comments on the large amount of time taken by some very effective work. In one instance a Personal Adviser spent a complete half-day accompanying a client to an interview, but felt that the quality of discussion before and after the interview justified the time spent. Projects are not yet able to quantify what such intensive support will mean in caseload numbers.

4.9 There is a clear consensus that this is extremely time-consuming work, and that cutting corners jeopardises success. To quote one project manager 'While apparently expensive, if it produces the results it is not expensive in the long term. You can't do it more cheaply.'

4.10 Short-term targets are seen by Personal Advisers to be very unhelpful. Specific targets on numbers entering certain types or stages of provision are unmanageable with this client group, and distort work with them. Broader targets, including reducing the numbers of 'unknown' and 'out-of contact' young people and aiming for eventual positive progression of all young people, are widely supported. However, as Table 3 demonstrates, 78% of young people, who have left the six projects, have made a positive progression.

Assessment

- 4.11** Assessment is a key function allocated to Personal Advisers within the Learning Gateway Specification. Personal Advisers and project managers see this as encompassing a very wide range of activities.
- 4.12** Most acknowledge that assessment starts from first meeting, and is a normal part of Personal Adviser - client interaction. It is a two-way process. Some projects are consciously adopting 'hidden' assessment techniques, such as asking young people to enter their name and address on a basic form, and observing their ease of writing. Two projects have developed extensive assessment packs; one based largely on the young person's self-perception of attitudes and employability characteristics, the other more focused towards workplace skills and abilities. In both cases these are clearly built into a structured approach towards creating an Individual Development Plan.
- 4.13** Some projects identify activities such as job sampling as useful forms of assessment. Other projects are anxious to define assessment holistically, in line with their overall approach to clients. This would include assessing the family situation, for example with young Asian women who might be supported or restricted by family views.

Recruiting and training Personal Advisers

- 4.14** We asked about the professional backgrounds of Personal Advisers. Table 8 gives the professional backgrounds of the advisers, from the four projects who replied.

Professional background of Personal Adviser	Number of Respondents
Careers Adviser	4
Youth Service - Development Officer	1
Outreach Youth Worker	3
Guidance & Counselling worker from FE college	1

- 4.15** Five of the six projects are located within careers services. All five are using careers advisers in the Personal Adviser role, and in most cases staff have been chosen because of previous experience of similar styles of working. One project uses careers assistants as well as careers advisers. Two projects had also recruited youth workers for individual work with young people, and a third employed a youth worker for running group sessions.
- 4.16** The sixth project is directly managed by a local education authority (LEA). The project worker, from a youth service background and with previous knowledge of the area, reports directly to the LEA's 14-19 Adviser. Additional part-time Personal Advisers are also from a youth work background, and take over longer-term support of young people after initial contact by the project worker.
- 4.17** Given the mix of professional backgrounds of staff within projects, and the early stages of development of the projects, it has not proved possible to establish any differences in effectiveness arising from different working methods or the Personal Adviser's professional background.

4.18 Only two projects have addressed issues of developing staff into and within the Personal Adviser role. Their actions include:

- offering interested staff the chance to sample the role before deciding whether to apply for this sort of work;
- placements in partner agencies to develop understanding and enhance co-operative approaches;
- team-based support;
- specific training workshops.

4.19 In general, little specific training is being offered, with several projects acknowledging this as an important area for development. Effective work will depend on personal preference (this is not work which all careers service staff will choose to do) supplemented by appropriate training.

Developing the Personal Adviser role

4.20 We asked respondents to describe their plans for the quality assurance of the Personal Adviser role. Table 9 illustrates the wide range of methods used.

Plans for quality assurance	Number of Responses
Activities and processes will be built into Quality System	2
Activities are built into existing Quality System	1
Performance Reviews	3
Monthly statistical returns	1
Log sheets completed on meetings with clients	1
Log sheets completed on liaison with organisations	1
Monitoring of Individual Development Plans	1
Peer group support sessions	1
Issue discussions	1
Clear recording and reporting system	1
Audited by Government Office	1
Qualified careers or youth workers	1

4.21 All projects show an awareness of the need to ensure the quality of Personal Advisers' work. In all cases this includes management support and monitoring. Some projects refer to the monitoring of work products, such as Individual Development Plans. All Careers Services also make reference to incorporating the role into company quality systems. One project is exploring the role of team support on a case-conferencing basis for Personal Advisers, and another emphasises the need for time for reflection and analysis for individual Personal Advisers.

4.22 Two projects made specific reference to the need to develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between Personal Adviser and client.

Section 5. Key findings

- 5.1 Analysis of Management Information System data has led to a fuller understanding of patterns of disadvantage.
- 5.2 There is a need for careful monitoring to ensure that the intake to Learning Gateway reflects the gender and ethnic background of the potential client group.
- 5.3 This study fully confirms the picture of young people suffering multiple barriers to learning.
- 5.4 Personal Advisers perceive significant improvements in their clients in 'soft outcomes', notably in self-esteem and confidence.
- 5.5 78% of young people, who have left the six projects, have made a positive progression into education, training or work.
- 5.6 Individual Development Plans are used extensively within the existing pilot projects.
- 5.7 Personal Adviser caseloads need to be small to allow intensive support. A 'typical' caseload cannot yet be quantified.
- 5.8 Formal settings and coercion are not effective with this client group.
- 5.9 More work is needed to establish appropriate guidelines for work off-site, including home visiting.
- 5.10 Careers services are interested in a further detailed study of the factors and conditions that lead to effective relationships between Personal Advisers and their clients.
- 5.11 Training for Personal Advisers is a priority which many pilot projects have not yet fully addressed.

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