

Operational Sub-Group

Recommendations for the Future of the London area Wide Prospectus, CHOICE, and the Common Application Process (CAP) Item No: 3

Author: Yolande Burgess **Job title:** Strategy Director - London 14-19 RPG
Date: 5 November 2010
Contact: Yolande Burgess
Telephone: 020 7934 9739 **Email:** yolande.burgess@londoncouncils.gov.uk

Summary This paper provides a summary from the LSN evaluation of the London area wide prospectus CHOICE, and the Common Application Process (CAP) pilots and makes a recommendation for the future of both applications in London.

Recommendations OSG members are asked to:

- recommend to the RPG Board the continuation of the London area wide prospectus and the holding solution for CAP.

1 Background and Introduction

- 1.1 In May 2010 the RPG commissioned LSN to evaluate London's 14-19 Prospectus and its CAP pilots. The overarching purpose of the evaluation was to provide robust evidence to the RPG on the development and implementation of both CHOICE and CAP and make recommendations for their future.
- 1.2 The evaluation was commissioned and *specified* against policy that was introduced by the previous government, specifically the Department for Children Schools and Families (DSCF)¹ 2005 *14-19 Education and Skills Implementation Plan*², which set out proposals to ensure that support is available to learners to make informed decisions with appropriate and impartial Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) and the application process for further education is simplified for 14-19 year olds.
- 1.3 Further, the evaluation took place following and during a dynamic shift, both nationally and regionally, in the political and economic climate. In particular, it is important to consider changes in policy and imminent budget cuts which could pose particular challenges for the provision of impartial IAG and the future direction of both CHOICE and CAP.

¹ The DCSF has been superseded by the new Department for Education (DfE)

² DCSF (2005) *14-19 Education and Skills Implementation Plan*, London: DCSF

2 CHOICE – Précis of Findings

- 2.1 The evaluation provides substantial evidence on support for an area wide prospectus, but disappointment in almost equal measure with important aspects of the current version of CHOICE, most particularly a weakness in the search facility.
- 2.2 Whilst a number of the features that are currently available in CHOICE are clearly enjoyed and are beneficial to both professionals and young people, in particular the Careers function, many users in the research study appear keen to see a leaner product that delivers better on its primary purpose – the ability to search and find, with ease, available post-16 options.
- 2.3 A number of the functions that are available in CHOICE help to ensure that it meets the vision of an area wide prospectus i.e. a tool that young people use frequently from Year 9 to enable them to plan for their futures. However, the evaluation shows that the majority of young people ‘dip’ in and out of the prospectus to look for post-16 options only when they need to.
- 2.4 The evaluation rightly reminds us that the primary audience for the prospectus is young people and any further improvements should be based on their needs. However, it must meet some of the needs of those who advise and guide young people in their choices - IAG professionals and parents.
- 2.5 The currency of information held on the prospectus - courses and jobs - is paramount to its credibility and usefulness. Provider users cited technical issues with uploading data, which militated against keeping information up-to-date, but also highlighted the benefits of a professional support desk.
- 2.6 The evaluation notes the significant investment that has gone into CHOICE since 2006/07 (£2,249,656), principally from the now abolished LSC and local authorities. However, it reflects the views of local authority research participants in recommending the need to consider alternative approaches to funding, particularly in the current financial climate.

3 CAP – Précis of Findings

- 3.1 The evaluation points to the limited information available on the actual delivery of a CAP due to the early stages of the pilots. Further, there is evidence that a number of pilots faced significant issues that centred in the main around the capacity and stability of IT systems, which hampered the implementation and testing of CAP solutions.
- 3.2 Notwithstanding some of the difficulties that pilot authorities faced, evidence from the evaluation strongly suggests that some form of CAP is supported by the vast majority of the CHOICE users in the research study³, and will importantly enhance the area wide prospectus for young people. The evaluation also demonstrates some enthusiasm for a pan-London CAP.
- 3.3 When considering a CAP, either local or regional, recognition of current financial constraints must be borne in mind. Based on the costs associated with the pilots (average £15k for limited scope pilots), the cost of continuing to develop a ‘Rolls Royce’ CAP that will address all the technical inter-operability issues highlighted in the evaluation, is likely to be both unpalatable and unaffordable at this time.

³ 200 individuals: 7 stakeholders; 31 local authority leads; 48 IAG professionals; 72 young people; 7 parents/carers; 10 school officers; 15 college officers; 10 work-based learning provider officers

- 3.4 The evaluation also highlights that a large majority of interviewees suggested that the current national application system for higher education in the UK, including its clearing process, could provide the model for a London CAP.

4 CHOICE - Proposals

- 4.1 Based on the above précis of findings, the following is proposed for the continuation of CHOICE into 2011/12:
- Hosting and Software Licence: **Maximum £50,000 (annual)**
 - technical issues with the search facility are addressed as a priority with a view to securing improvements at minimum cost, through the specification and procurement of a new hosting and software licence arrangement from April 2011;
 - a leaner version of CHOICE is developed through the specification and procurement of a new hosting and software licence arrangement from April 2011;
 - Management and Helpdesk: **Maximum £190,000 (annual)**
 - a more cost effective means of continuing to deliver the Careers function of CHOICE through a web link to an existing, maintained careers database is investigated and secured;
 - the management, marketing, training and help desk functions for CHOICE are reviewed, and the essential aspects are re-procured through tender from August 2011;
 - Income Generation: **Minimum £160,000 (annual for 2011/12)**
 - the specification for the management and support of CHOICE must include the need to garner substantial advertising revenue from the site to take over at least 80% of the current annual local authority revenue contribution for CHOICE;
- 4.2 Based on the above recommendations the suggested average contribution from 33 local authorities is £2,400, an 80% reduction on the current annual contribution of £15,515.
- 4.3 There is sufficient funding remaining in the current annual contribution (£150,000), and a retained LSC sum (£130,000) to pay for up-front design and development of a new site that has a purchased advertising facility so as to enable the site ultimately to become self sufficient.
- 4.4 The above is conditional on the following two significant variables:
- it is likely that the statutory requirement for an area wide prospectus will be removed: on this basis DCS and Leaders may opt not to support the continuation of CHOICE;
 - Leaders may request the reimbursement of the remainder of the current year's contribution.

5 CAP – Proposals

- 5.1 There is insufficient evidence from the pilots on which to base a single or reliably costed proposal for CAP, but there is sufficient evidence to support some form of CAP to bring about improvements to the prospectus and, more importantly, to make the process of applying for post-16 options easier for young people and their families.
- 5.2 Additionally, uncertainties regarding awaited changes in national policy with regard to the development and implementation of an all-age careers service clearly have a

bearing on an application that is not fully realised and that will no longer receive support through discrete grant funding.

- 5.3 The following is therefore proposed as a 'holding solution' to address the ambition and desire for a pan-London CAP solution for 2011/12:
- all institutions that publicise course information through CHOICE must supply a dedicated email or website address to an admissions officer/team;
 - other **cost neutral**/cost effective CAP solutions will be explored during 2010/11 and will be presented to the ICYP Group for consideration.
- 5.4 The above recommendations are entirely conditional on the decision to continue to support CHOICE.

6 Improving Choices for Young People (ICYP) Group – Response to Recommendations

- 6.1 ICYP Group members were asked to:
- recommend to the RPG Board (through OSG) proposals for the continuation of the London area wide prospectus and a holding solution for CAP.
- 6.2 There was recognition that the current budgetary pressures local authorities are faced with, combined with the anticipated removal of a number of statutory duties for the delivery of Careers Education, Advice and Guidance a likely to be the principle drivers in any decision regarding the continuation of CHOICE.
- 6.3 There was also recognition that in a more market oriented education landscape where young people and their families to engage more actively in choosing their educational options, together with a substantial reduction in face-to-face universal IAG services, that a *good* area wide prospectus may be a cost-effective means of continuing to deliver some form of universal service.
- 6.4 Group members supported the recommendation for the continuation of CHOICE into 2011/12 subject to the proposed 80% reduction in local authority contributions and the creation of an advertising income revenue stream.

7 Recommendations

- 7.1 OSG members are asked to:
- recommend to the RPG Board the continuation of the London area wide prospectus and the holding solution for CAP.