



**Learning Opportunities in the
South East – the Learning at
Work Information Service
(LAWIS) project**

Final Report 2008 - 2010

CONTENTS	
Section 1 - ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	Page 3
Section 2 - INTRODUCTION	Page 4
Section 3 - PHASE ONE 2006 – 2008, LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES IN SUSSEX	Page 4
The development of the Sussex Learning Network	Page 4
The context for the development of information, advice and guidance	Page 5
The launch of Learning Opportunities in Sussex	Page 5
Sustaining and extending the Learning Opportunities in Sussex work	Page 7
Section 4 - PHASE TWO 2008 – 2010 LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES IN THE SOUTH EAST	Page 8
Governance	Page 8
Development of the Learning Opportunities in the South East service	Page 9
Responding to change	Page 11
Evaluating Learning Opportunities in the South East	Page 13
Evaluation strategy	Page 13
Dissemination	Page 13
Learning Opportunities booklets	Page 15
Learning Opportunities website	Page 15
One-to-one advice	Page 16
Impact on HE and IAG providers	Page 17
External recognition – award winning	Page 18
Section 5 - FINANCIAL REPORT	Page 19
Section 6 -CONCLUSIONS	Page 20
Section 7 - PHASE THREE – FROM JANUARY 2011, FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS	Page 22
Section 8 -APPENDICES	Page 24

Learning Opportunities in the South East – the Learning at Work Information Service (LAWIS) project

Final Report – 2008 to 2010

1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- Kent and Medway Lifelong Learning Network
- Progress South Central (the Lifelong Learning Network for Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Surrey)
- Skills Funding Agency (formerly the Learning and Skills Council)
- South East England Development Agency
- Sussex Learning Network

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- Caroline Wood, South East England Development Agency

The LAWIS team was as follows:

- Maureen Haywood, Project Director (full-time)
- Joy Lankester, Project Development Manager (part-time)
- Moira Monk, Project Coordinator (part-time)
- Andrea Purvis, Project Development Manager (full-time until April 2010)
- Lynne Varney, Project Development Manager (part-time)

The team was supported by Paul Mitchell (Paul Mitchell Consultancy) who researched and managed Foundation Degrees in the South East and Maggie Allgrove and Maureen Stenning (The Open University in the South East) who provided consultancy support (which was funded by the OU) at various points of the project. In the second year of operation additional, short-term support was provided by University of Sussex students Paul Codd and Dan Syms.

2. INTRODUCTION

Whilst this report is essentially a report on the Learning at Work Information Service (LAWIS) project which ran from 2008 to 2010, the LAWIS project built on and extended to the South East the successful information, advice and guidance (IAG) work undertaken in Sussex between 2006 and 2008 as part of the Sussex Learning Network. Learning Opportunities in the South East, the product of the LAWIS project, can thus be seen as a four year undertaking and one that will continue to develop in line with the plans outlined in section 7 below. It is therefore described in terms of three separate phases, the third of which will begin in January 2011.

- Phase 1 Learning Opportunities in Sussex
- Phase 2 Learning Opportunities in the South East
- Phase 3 from January 2011, further developments

Learning Opportunities in the South East is an example of the information, advice and guidance (IAG) strand of Lifelong Learning Network activity in the South East being sustained well beyond its initial phase of funding and being further developed to take account of the external climate and the needs of its audience.

www.learning-opportunities.org.uk

3. PHASE ONE 2006 – 2008, LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES IN SUSSEX

3.1 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SUSSEX LEARNING NETWORK

In 2005 the Sussex Learning Network (SLN) was formed.¹ It was one of the first of 30 Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). These LLNs were designed to be partnerships between universities, colleges and training providers with an overall objective of widening participation by encouraging the progression of vocational learners into and through higher education (HE). The introduction of LLNs was a staged process that took place between 2005 and 2007 with varying funding periods and they were expected to provide local solutions to local issues with three priorities: curriculum development to facilitate progression

¹ From the outset the SLN worked in partnership with Sussex's HE providers: the University of Brighton; University of Chichester; University of Sussex; The Open University in the South East; Northbrook College, Sussex

to HE; network-wide progression agreements for local learners; and better information, advice and guidance for all. This focus on progression was intended to complement Aimhigher's work to raise aspirations and widen participation in HE for young people.

www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/In/

The SLN's vision was to "transform the nature of access to and participation in higher education in Sussex, through working with employers, schools and colleges, higher education institutions and guidance agencies in major disciplinary and employment sectors locally" and the provision of better information, advice and guidance (IAG) was one of the seven key objectives (SLN Two Year Plan, 2006). This IAG would support:

- The SLN's new curriculum development to fill gaps in local vocational provision at higher education level across 9 curriculum areas
- The progression agreements that the SLN brokered between local institutions to aid the movement of vocational learners into and through higher education.

In addition, staff development would be provided for practitioners, advisers and brokers.

3.2 THE CONTEXT FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

In 2006 the IAG team was formed, led by the SLN's Staff Development Officer. The team drew heavily on the expertise of the Open University, an SLN partner with extensive experience of supporting adult learners and learners without traditional HE entry qualifications such as 'A' levels. Seven part-time IAG officers were recruited, each working one or two days per week – 2.4 full-time equivalents (FTE).

The team undertook mapping in Sussex that revealed a lack of good information, advice and guidance for vocational learners and potential learners who might be interested in developing higher level skills. Potential learners included individuals in the workplace or about to enter the workforce who knew little or nothing about higher education. It was clear that the SLN would need a vehicle to raise awareness of its curriculum and progression developments amongst learners, potential learners and those who supported, advised and employed them. At that time Aimhigher Sussex's focus was predominantly on young people and not necessarily on either local or vocational learning. The Connexions service had been developed for young people in schools and the Nextstep national service for adults only provided free advice for adults with level 2 qualifications or below. (This was increased during the project.) In addition, targets for Train to Gain Brokers working with employers predominantly focused on level 2 qualifications and below.

3.3 THE LAUNCH OF LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES IN SUSSEX

In 2007 Learning Opportunities in Sussex was launched, an open access website supported by a range of leaflets, marketing materials and the offer of staff development for practitioners, advisers and brokers. The emphasis was on jargon-free pre-entry advice. Although an Advisers' Pack was included, it was assumed that the same resources would be used by individuals and those who

advised, supported and taught them. The web was chosen as the main vehicle for IAG because it could be accessed from all corners of the County whether from home or via a public access point and it could easily be kept up to date. Arguably, the website also included an element of guidance (traditionally seen as only being delivered face-to-face) via a personalised, downloadable Personal Planning Pack. A key objective was that individuals without access to free advice elsewhere would be able to independently access high quality, up to date content that enabled them to feel confident about choosing and applying for a course. This was particularly important because mystery shopping in Sussex had revealed that University frontline staff were more used to dealing with enquiries from young people with 'A' levels seeking full-time university study than enquiries from individuals, particularly adults, with vocational qualifications or work experience. The website included these key resources:

- Sussex Routes which brought together all the progression agreements (and the new curriculum development) into a simple to use tool which could be accessed by learners and their advisers. Learners could access subject specific progression routes, save and download progression agreement certificates and use a unique UCAS code on their university application.
- Links to Foundation Degrees in Sussex, a user-friendly searchable web tool that was part-funded by the SLN and provided access to a database of all the Foundation degrees, HNDs and HNCs in Sussex with links to individual course descriptions.
- An 'ask a question' free text facility supported by an extensive database.
- Careers advice across 14 broad subject areas including over 70 information sheets on discrete job areas.
- A Personal Planning Pack that gathered together the Learning Opportunities web pages and progression agreements accessed by the individual into a personalised pdf that included advice about taking the next step and selecting and applying for a course.
- An Advisers' Pack that could be used on or off-line or in hard copy.

The team also used their knowledge and experience of adult learners to produce a range of accessible content that dealt with barriers to learning such as finance, confidence, time and a lack of understanding of qualification, levels and entry requirements. The model used was to link to good web-based information and advice where it existed and to write new content only where necessary. As one of the first Lifelong Learning Networks, the Sussex Learning Network thus became a trail-blazer for LLNs in terms of initiating curriculum development, developing progression agreements and communicating these across Sussex via IAG supported by staff development for organisations and agencies with an interest in higher education.

The outcomes of this IAG initiative are well documented in the SLN's Delivery Plan (2006), Three Year Report (2008) and eBook *Bringing Higher Education Within Reach* (2008). Fifty IAG events for advisers, education practitioners and brokers were planned and delivered and feedback showed that

the service was being used regularly in Sussex by a range of intermediaries, such as Union Learning Representative, advisers at Nextstep, Student Services staff in colleges and Train to Gain brokers.

www.sussexlearningnetwork.org.uk/about-us/sln-plans-and-papers

www.sussexlearningnetwork.org.uk/research-zone/

The experience raised a number of questions about the nature and future of information, advice and guidance in the context of work where the objective needs of the employer might be seen as in conflict with the traditional sociological and psychological approach of impartial guidance starting from the aspirations of the individual.

“At a time when employers are increasingly under pressure to develop the workforce as well as to employ the workforce, there is evidence that IAG has an increasing role. Although some of the traditional client-centred guidance theory may not apply, the areas of IAG activity are if anything even more pertinent. Courses must be work-ready, relevant and accessible. Employee-learners must be helped to progress. Advice must be informed, relevant and transparent so that everyone stands to gain.” (Lankester, J (2008), SLN eBook, *Bringing Higher Education Within Reach*)

www.sussexlearningnetwork.org.uk/resources/e-book_FINAL_three.pdf

As will be seen in later sections of this report, as the project developed, there was an increasing emphasis on linking the three areas of work, learning and careers.

3.4 SUSTAINING AND EXTENDING THE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES IN SUSSEX WORK

From 2006 to 2008 the SLN had met regularly with the other three LLNs in the South East to exchange ideas and expertise. For example, training workshops for Train to Gain Brokers were devised and developed collaboratively and delivered across the South East as part of a Higher Education South East (HESE) initiative to raise awareness of HE in the workplace. This was supported by a Train to Gain Brokers’ pack, again developed collaboratively. Agreement was thus reached to take Learning Opportunities forward as a joint Lifelong Learning Network venture in partnership with Hampshire and Isle of Wight LLN, Kent and Medway LLN and Progress South Central. Additional funding was sought from the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in the South East (now the Skills Funding Agency). The resources produced in Sussex would be rolled out to also cover Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Kent, Medway, Oxfordshire and Surrey. The new project was called the Learning at Work Information Service (LAWIS).

Hampshire and Isle of Wight LLN, Kent and Medway LLN and Progress South Central, whose funding periods extended beyond that of the Sussex Learning Network at that time, would benefit from the expertise developed in Sussex and be able to build on public investment already made, rather than duplicate it. In addition the new project would benefit from access to the wider LLN networks. This joint LLN initiative would therefore provide an exemplar of LLNs working together to extend a service geographically and make best use of public investment. It would provide a cost effective solution for the three LLNs who had yet to develop IAG materials, particularly to support

progression. The four LLNs would be able to offer a coordinated and common service across the nine counties, thus breaking down artificial geographical boundaries. Individuals and organisations living close to county borders would have access to all the information and advice most appropriate to them.

4. PHASE TWO 2008 – 2010 LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES IN THE SOUTH EAST

Learning Opportunities in Sussex was developed into Learning Opportunities in the South East under the LAWIS project which was hosted by the University of Brighton and, from 1 August 2009, operated from the newly formed department of Economic and Social Engagement (EASE). As well as the funding received from the 4 LLNs, SEEDA and the LSC (now Skills Funding Agency), it also benefited from consultancy time paid for by The Open University in the South East in both years of funding. The core team comprised five members (3.5 FTE) that reduced to four in April 2010 (2.5 FTE)., Continuity was maintained by employing members of the original SLN IAG team, managed by the former SLN Staff Development Officer as Project Director.

The objectives in the original business case were as follows:

Learners and potential learners will be able to:

- obtain personalised information, advice and guidance relating to work-based and work related vocational higher education.
- identify opportunities for local work-based and work related higher education.
- search and use agreements that will support their progression into and through higher education.
- feel confident about making a decision independently and approaching an institution to apply for a course.

Practitioners and employers will be able to access:

- cross-institutional, cross-organisational and supporting information from one place.
- local information about opportunities that exist in work-based and work related HE.
- a wide range of generic and locally specific information to support them.

The Learning Opportunities in the South East service that was developed to fulfil the above objectives also developed additional resources and services in order to respond to external events.

4.1 GOVERNANCE

Two groups were set up: a Management Group with oversight of the project and an Advisory Group comprising the six funders and other relevant organisations operating across the South East. In this way, joint accountability could be exercised through members of the Management and Advisory Groups reporting back to their own organisations.

Management Group: with a membership of the 4 LLN Directors (who chaired meetings on a rotating basis) and the Project Director who were to:

- provide operational management for the LAWIS project
- have oversight of the delivery of the objectives to budget and plan
- formally receive reports and accounts
- provide reports to the accountable body (University of Brighton) through the SLN Board
- use the expertise of the Advisory Group to plan further strategic development for sustainability and ensure that the project complements other national and regional developments.

Advisory Group: the 4 LLN Directors and representatives from organisations operating across the South East: Aimhigher, fdf (formerly Foundation Degree Forward), Higher Education South East, the Skills Funding Agency, Skills South East, the South East England Development Agency and VT Enterprise (now Babcock Enterprise). This group was chaired by the Regional Director of The Open University in the South East and the terms of reference were to:

- report to the SLN Board on the continued strategic fit of the project with other developments (both national and in the South East)
- promote the usage of the Learning Opportunities in the South East service and the wider outcomes of the LAWIS project
- ensure coherence and fit of the LAWIS project with the objectives of members' own organisations
- add value to both the LAWIS project and members' own organisations' aims
- advise on long term sustainability of the project
- act as a sounding board and in an advisory capacity to the LAWIS team and Management Group.

4.2 DEVELOPMENT OF THE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES IN THE SOUTH EAST SERVICE

A range of online and paper resources was developed to meet the business case deliverables (**appendix 1, schedule of deliverables and outcomes**).

- An open access, innovative, interactive website called Learning Opportunities in the South East which built on and extended the Learning Opportunities in Sussex content.
- 4 x booklets to complement the website, one for each of the LLNs, covering the nine counties in the South East – these included contact details for all the HE providers in each area.
- Leaflets and marketing materials such as bookmarks, posters and postcards as well as a DVD guide to Learning Opportunities for practitioners.
- A standard Advisers' Pack and new, bespoke packs for Train to Gain/Business Link and Job Centre Plus.
- 1:1 support for individuals and advisers by phone and email.

The website:

- career, study choice and financial advice
- information about progression from apprenticeships
- an 'ask a question' free text box underpinned by an extensive database
- over 30 information sheets covering the enquirer/student journey
- contact details of all the HE providers in the South East
- Foundation Degrees in the South East – an innovative, interactive tool searchable by postcode, place, subject or keyword with access to all the providers' course description pages and email links to each institution
- South East Routes – an interactive tool containing all the progression agreements developed and brokered by the four Lifelong Learning Networks in the South East. These progression agreements were designed to support the progression of vocational learners into and through higher education.
- a personalised Personal Planning Pack with careers and education advice
- disability information
- sections for advisers and employers, including an online free shop that enabled them to order resources
- an 'email us' facility for personalised 1:1 guidance

www.learning-opportunities.org.uk

The website was launched with basic content in January 2009 with South East Routes (the progression tool) and Foundation Degrees in the South East being added over the next eight months. Whilst it was originally thought that there might be a separate entry point for people living in each of the four LLN areas, research showed that much of the advice was generic or regional rather than county specific. For example, applications for financial support no longer went to local authorities and disability support had been regionalised. In addition, it was important to ensure that individuals living near county borders could easily access cross-border information about education providers and courses. Localised information primarily related to progression agreements and Foundation degrees (for which individual, searchable tools were developed) and county specific education provider details and job searching advice. As discussed later in this report, there were additions to the website throughout the project in order to ensure that the content was timely, useful and accurate.

The website was designed with a single database to support both the South East Routes and Foundation Degrees in the South East interactive tools which were seen as unique and innovatory additions that simplified complexity for the users. This meant that course or institution details only had to be updated once. The content management system enabled the project team to update all content quickly and easily. The amount of time and expertise that have gone into researching and developing the website may not be immediately apparent given the user-friendly interface of the web tools and the straightforward navigation system.

The booklets, one tailored for each Lifelong Learning Network area, were designed to complement the website by providing local information and addressing possible barriers to

learning such as finance, confidence, child-care and so on. They would encourage users to look on the website for more information, provide a resource for those without readily available internet access and provide a valuable marketing tool.

Having developed the resources, the team went on to begin the process of dissemination across the South East. It was assumed that this dissemination process would be able to take advantage of the extensive networks of all four of the Lifelong Learning Networks as well as those of Advisory Group members.

4.3 RESPONDING TO CHANGE

The external climate changed radically between 2008 and 2010 and the definition of what the service was also had to change to respond to new needs and opportunities. The recession dramatically changed the environment in which Learning Opportunities was operating and impacted on both its funding and the nature of information, advice and guidance needed.

Firstly, in 2009 and 2010 universities were over-subscribed with applicants to full-time courses and progression to HE for vocational learners was difficult to guarantee. The team responded to this by producing additional resources for individuals who didn't get a university place. They included advice about jobs with the potential for degree level training, part-time higher education, employer supported study, self employment and volunteering.

Secondly, there was a dramatic increase in the number of individuals who were either redundant or in fear of redundancy. A new section was added to the website which included advice about internships, enhancing employability skills and county by county job searching advice, again using the model of linking to high quality material that already existed and writing new material where necessary. The team also sought ways of involving themselves in different areas of face-to-face work. For example, they worked with SEEDA led task forces in Sussex to support local large-scale redundancies and provided support for Job Clubs. However, the original LLN objective of facilitating learners' progression into and through higher education had little relevance for many individuals for whom guidance had to take account of the impact on their benefits of not being available for work. Whilst higher education might well eventually provide a way back into employment for individuals who had been made redundant, short courses and continuing professional development would be the only option for many. What was more pressing was advice about transferable skills, tailored CVs and interview skills, especially for those who had held more senior posts, already had higher level skills (with or without qualifications), had never experienced unemployment and had not applied for a job for a long time.

Thirdly, the second year of funding for Learning Opportunities in the South East was volatile and unpredictable: the Learning and Skills Council (now Skills Funding Agency) was unable to extend the contract to year two. Budgets were re-profiled in order to avoid immediate redundancies and the Project Director started separate negotiations with the LSC for different deliverables in order to recoup at least part of the original funding. Some of the lost funding

was thus recovered but it still meant that the original LSC contribution was greatly reduced and there were additional deliverables relating to web resources:

- to raise awareness of World Skills 2011 competitions in London
- to provide a separate portal on the website to promote London 2012 related volunteering opportunities and progression routes through education for those inspired by 2012.

www.learning-opportunities.org.uk/2012

The LSC also recommended that Learning Opportunities bid to become subcontractors for Nextstep as part of the new Adult Advancement Careers Service, funded by them. The bid was successful and the new service began operation on 1 August 2010, again with considerable additional deliverables. This added a face-to-face service to the one-to-one support by email and phone. Whilst this provided the opportunity to bring in income and to demonstrate the demand for higher level advice and guidance, this imposed extra work on the team who were required to undertake training and development in order to get to grips with the new national customer relations management system and supporting bureaucracy.

During 2010 other opportunities for contract services, and thus extra income, started to emerge, undoubtedly linked to the reputation of the Learning Opportunities team. They included:

- The delivery of Matrix training for Student Services staff and employability workshops for interns at the University of Brighton.
- A scoping exercise based in Crawley and the Gatwick Diamond on behalf of Economic and Social Engagement, within the University of Brighton, to test the market for research, consultancy and employer responsive modular training and develop a plan for the development of information, advice and guidance specifically for the area.
- The development of the Brighton and Hove Graduate Jobs web portal, funded by Brighton and Hove Council in partnership with the University of Brighton and the University of Sussex and aimed at unemployed and underemployed graduates in the city. This is part of the City Council's Employment and Skills Strategy and reflects their commitment to supporting graduates who live in the city and need to know about opportunities that use their graduate level skills and knowledge. It brings together the Careers Services of the two universities whose free job advertising services are available to employers looking for graduates, and to graduates looking for jobs. In addition it provides an opportunity to increase awareness of other business facing services provided by the Universities.

www.brighton-hove-graduate-jobs.org.uk

These new opportunities, together with downsizing to one office and the early return of a seconded member of staff to her substantive post, enabled the team to recoup more of the lost £100K and reduce the fixed costs of the project. With the £40K contingency carried forward from year one, this opened up the possibility of extending the project in order to plan for sustainability. As will be seen from the Financial Report in section 5, through a

combination of careful management and a willingness to explore other opportunities, within a year the project has gone from having a £100K cut from the budget to generating a £30K surplus.

All of this dramatically impacted on the team's workload as work plans and budgets were frequently adjusted during this second year of operation. It also created a tension between continuing to disseminate the service across the South East service and concentrating on new, local opportunities. However it was this additional work and income that supported the teams' successful request to extend the project by four months to 31 December 2010, and, indeed, has informed and enabled the sustainability plans which are outlined as Phase Three later in this report.

4.4 EVALUATING LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES IN THE SOUTH EAST

4.4.1 EVALUATION STRATEGY

The stated objectives of the project's evaluation strategy were to gather quantitative and qualitative data from learners, potential learners, advisers, practitioners, brokers, partner colleges and universities and from the website to show the impact on the quality of:

- vocational information, advice and guidance provision for learners and potential learners moving into and through higher education across the South East
- resources for all those who provide brokerage, support and advice relating to higher education across the South East.

The summary of data gathered is attached as **Appendix 2**. It is important to acknowledge that what was actually delivered by the project went above and beyond the deliverables in the project plan because it was important to respond to the dramatic changes in the external climate outlined earlier in this report in order to ensure that Learning Opportunities in the South East continued to be useful and relevant.

The data gathered covers the period from 1 February 2009 to 20 October 2010 in order to take account of both the launch of the website in January 2009 and at least part of the extension of the project that included new developments.

4.4.2 DISSEMINATION

During the project the team attended over 70 events to raise awareness about the service amongst education practitioners, careers professionals, brokers, college staff, individuals and others with an interest in vocational education and career development. These ranged from small group staff development on behalf of the LLN partners to large scale job fairs and careers events where 1:1 advice was offered.

The following are samples of unsolicited comments from a range of learners, potential learners and advisers.

“Brilliant, I didn’t know this information existed.” (Potential learner looking for Psychotherapy courses and careers information)

“Thanks for your help. I now know where to look, that’s super.” (Unemployed graduate)

“Thank you for your help with this client. That’s brilliant!” (Nextstep adviser, Portsmouth)

“We had an excellent response and positive feedback from the Berkshire Team this afternoon. ... Like me they were impressed as to how easy it is to navigate around the website and all the sources of information and factsheets. ...I’m so thrilled and delighted with the Adviser Pack you have kindly put together for us and I look forward to giving you further feedback next week after the Hampshire and Isle of Wight and corporate team briefings next Tuesday and then my Surrey Team Meeting next Friday.” (Train to Gain Area Manager)

“Very useful for adult learners who were anxious about the prospect of trying HE. Helps explain how to go about getting into HE and confidence building for presenting themselves.” (Local college)

“Booklets very accessible for adult learners. Useful for students thinking about going on to HE. Used by colleagues, particularly curriculum leaders who talk to students about HE.” (Local college)

“Website very helpful and up to date. Really good booklets with useful information, especially the benefits of HE.” (Union Learning Representative)

“I wish I’d known about this website when my son was trying to decide what he was going to do.” (Parent)

4.4.3 LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES BOOKLETS

Three thousand copies of each of the four 50 page Learning Opportunities booklets were initially printed in 2009 with Progress South Central requiring a two thousand re-print in 2010. The majority of the booklets were distributed by the partner LLNs in their own areas, many going to colleges for distribution to level 3 vocational learners, but advisers and practitioners could also order them from the free online shop on the website. 84 orders were processed via the online shop, demonstrating the usefulness of this simple addition to the website. As well as colleges and sixth forms, they went to Libraries, Union Learning Representatives, Train to Gain and Business Link skills advisers, JobCentre Plus, Local Authorities, Nextstep providers, Connexions, Aimhigher and a range of community organisations offering IAG. They were also distributed at events across the region. The most common comments on the booklets related to them being comprehensive and jargon free. The real benefit was seen as being that they were free to the end user and brought together unbiased information and advice that wasn’t available elsewhere. Whilst they directed users to the website for more comprehensive information and advice, they provided a stand-alone resource for both individuals and advisers without immediate access to the internet.

4.4.4 LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES WEBSITE

Detailed web statistics are attached at **Appendix 3**. It is always important to acknowledge that web statistics do need to be approached with caution as simply measuring vast numbers of page hits adds nothing to knowledge about the quality or usefulness of the materials. However, it is possible to draw some conclusions about the users. To summarise they show that between 1 February 2009 and 20 October 2010 there were 15,702 visits to the website of which just under 60 per cent were new visits, and just over 40 per cent returning visitors. There were 55,735 page views which means that, on average, each visitor looked at just over 3.5 pages and spent 3.5 minutes on the site. If you eliminate from the figures those visitors who only looked at one page (see bounce rate below) the average number of pages viewed rises to 5 to 7 pages per visit.

The bounce rate (visits in which users leave the site from their entrance page) is understandably high at around half of visits because Learning Opportunities gathers together all the available information and advice into a single website so that users can find what they need from one place. In addition, much of the publicity links users directly to discrete portals or individuals sections (for example, visitors to both Brighton and Hove Graduate Jobs may well go straight to either Sussex or Brighton University websites and visitors to Foundation Degrees in the South East are likely to go straight to a provider's website). In addition this creation of direct links to portals or individual sections saves time as users don't have to navigate from the home page to the section they need.

Usage increased steadily between March and October 2009 as the website became more widely known and it has risen to over 2,000 visitors for the month of October 2010 which coincides with the launch of Brighton and Hove Graduate Jobs which has been publicised by partner universities.

The most popular pages (apart from the home page) for both 2009 and 2010 have been South East Routes, the progression tool, and Foundation Degrees in the South East with almost 5,500 unique page views, thus justifying the financial and time investment in these interactive South East wide tools for partner LLNs for whom progression has been a key objective.

The most frequently asked questions throughout the project have consistently related to Foundation degrees, the cost of studying and work based learning, with apprenticeships being added to this list more recently. This confirms that the website is attracting those interested in vocational learning. The top twenty most frequently asked questions also includes those relating to child-care costs, age, redundancy and part-time studying, indicating that the website is being used by adults and by those in work or hoping to return to work.

Just over a third of traffic comes via Google and just over a third from typing the web address into a browser. Just under a third comes from other sources, half of which come from the Sussex Learning Network where a link and logo are prominently displayed on the home page. The number of hits via the Sussex Learning Network and the rapid rise of hits on

Brighton and Hove Graduate Jobs show the value of partnership working and the difference it makes when other organisations embed and publicise the Learning Opportunities resources. Whilst the number of different sources from which traffic to the website originates has risen steadily, it is still relatively small. Those who support and teach vocational learners are not the same people that manage web content, and convincing marketing departments of the value of impartial information, advice and guidance via Learning Opportunities has not been easy. Whilst good advice is important for the retention of students, as discussed earlier, institutions have been over-subscribed and there is little incentive to provide pre-entry advice for people from a vocational background.

Apart from the sample comments above, the most common feedback on the website at national events was from practitioners working outside the South East who wished they had a similar resource that brought everything into one place and linked careers, work and education advice together. They appreciated the amount of work that had gone into researching and structuring the content to produce up to date, accessible IAG that was unhampered by advertising or log-in boxes. Without the public funding that this project has had, it is difficult to see how it would be possible to produce such an extensive, high quality resource that is free to the end user.

4.4.5 ONE TO ONE ADVICE

Comments from individuals who have been given 1:1 advice by phone, email and face-to-face include:

“Thank you so much for this information – it’s a fantastic amount that will really help with decisions in going forward. Also thank you for getting back to me so quickly – it’s really appreciated!! I have to admit – I’m feeling like I am in a bit of a tricky position at the moment (i.e. trying to find paid work so I can come off benefits asap) so I’m really hoping I can manage to accomplish this whilst moving in the RIGHT direction careerwise! Thanks again for your time and help.” (First Class Honours Graduate in Applied Social Science interested in working in an IAG setting, passed to Learning Opportunities by a University Careers Department.)

“I managed to get an apprenticeship at a Letting Agents in Chichester. I had my interview on Tuesday and it went really well. Thank you for all your help and finding lots of useful information for me.” (19 year old who fell outside the funding range for much of FE, originally interested in The Institute of Legal Executives’ courses.)

“I had been unemployed for almost 6 months, during which time I had filled in numerous job applications and had several job interviews. ...Lynne boosted my confidence and self-esteem by taking a very positive approach, making me think about all the sorts of jobs I was likely to enjoy, rather than looking back and dwelling on my previous failures. ... I can only say that my session with Lynne was a very positive experience without which I might still be filling in job applications.” (30 year old unemployed graduate who had a successful interview outcome two weeks after his advice session. He has since been in touch to tell us that he has met all his work targets and has received an award as “employee of the year”.

110 individuals have been provided with 1:1 advice, using various combinations of phone, email and face-to-face interaction.

With over 30 separate information sheets, a free text 'ask a question' facility, a personal planning pack and numerous other interactive resources, a great deal of IAG is readily available to the user. The website was originally designed to be open access with no log-in or other barriers to entry so that it could be used independently by individuals from anywhere. However, this presented a difficulty for the project in terms of gathering data on users. The 'email us' facility was initially added to only a few of the web pages as a pilot and there were few responses. In July 2010 it was elevated to a side link on the home page with its own section and the numbers of individuals using it have steadily increased.

As mentioned above, Learning Opportunities has been subcontracted as a Nextstep provider since August 2010. However, under the new national service, payment is only made for local face-to-face advice with the expectation that all email and phone queries should be referred on to the national email and telephone lines. Enquiries about higher education tend to be complex and time-consuming to deal with as different providers have different provision. If the Learning Opportunities local, personalised and flexible service currently provided is to continue after 31 December 2010, alternative ways of funding it will need to be sought unless there are changes to the national provision. With few exceptions, users of the 1:1 service have been adults and feedback indicates that they appreciate the flexibility of the opportunity to talk to an adviser, receive advice in hard copy as an email and follow up with a phone call if they have further questions.

4.4.6 IMPACT ON HE AND IAG PROVIDERS

The development and maintenance of the Foundation Degrees in the South East tool provides a positive example of successful partnership working to improve the quality of IAG. An objective was that the Foundation Degrees in the South East web tool should always be accurate and up to date. However, initial research revealed that in some cases the information on provider websites was neither accurate nor up to date. Some courses weren't actually running, some had no web presence at all, and in some cases there were differences between course descriptions for the same course on university and partner college websites. A great deal of work was done to establish an appropriate named contact in each institution so that the course details could be checked during the academic year. Records show that in some cases this took ten contact attempts. However, this perseverance had the effect of teasing out and correcting discrepancies in information, and ensuring that institutions provided online course descriptions where they were missing, thus improving the quality of information on their websites as well. There is concern that the shortage of university places may impact on the value of this unique website in terms of the ability of those with vocational qualifications to gain a place when in competition with 'A' level students who see a Foundation degree as a viable alternative to a Bachelors degree.

There is still work to be done with HE and IAG providers. Learning Opportunities was designed to provide pre-entry advice so that the user would feel confident about contacting an institution. But, with the knowledge of the mystery shopping exercises carried out by the

Sussex Learning Network in Sussex between 2006 and 2008, there have always been concerns about the quality of front-line service information and advice provided to:

- individuals with vocational qualifications
- adults with skills and experience rather than qualifications
- enquirers wanting to know about Foundation degrees rather than Bachelors degrees
- those looking for part-time provision.

Research has shown that admissions teams generally have the twin focus of processing applications as well as dealing with external enquiries, the former requiring administrative skills, the latter requiring high level communication and customer service skills. There is an expectation on the part of admissions teams that IAG will be carried out by teaching staff who will almost certainly not be trained/qualified advisers, and whose teaching commitments prevent them from being readily available.

Experience has shown that it is really important that adults interested in vocational learning are armed with the right questions and information when approaching institutions that appear to be predominantly geared up to deal with young people with 'A' level qualifications seeking full-time courses. The Learning Opportunities website therefore includes the following, necessary, advice for those contacting an HE provider – *“Assemble a few details about yourself and the questions you want to ask before you phone, and bear in mind that the person you talk to may not be familiar with all aspects of every course offered. Be persistent and email us if you get stuck.”*

The LAWIS project's records include the case of an enquirer interested in medicine who was passed from Sussex Coast College to University College Hastings then to the University of Brighton and finally to Learning Opportunities in the South East!

A lack of knowledge amongst advisers and admissions staff in terms of the offer, entry requirements and funding can, and still does, result in bad advice. The name of the college has been omitted from the quote below which was received early in 2010 from a learner who originally contacted the team in 2008 seeking advice about getting on to a Foundation Degree.

“As promised I am keeping in touch as without the help you gave me I wouldn't have been able to take the course. I have good news, I am passing with a distinction in my Foundation degree and have accepted a conditional offer to go to the University of ... in September to continue onto the top-up. So it's all good news to report to you after two years. The only downside is that the Adult Learning Grant cannot be back paid and thanks to ... College I've missed out on that for the past year, so the application has gone in early for next year. I have also passed on your details to a friend who is struggling to find someone to talk to about help she might get when doing a different course. I hope you don't mind, but you were so helpful to me, I have nothing but praise for what you have done and do.”

4.4.7 EXTERNAL RECOGNITION – AWARD WINNING

In November 2009 the quality of the Learning Opportunities in the South East service was endorsed by the Institute of Career Guidance (ICG) who, unusually, gave it two national awards in a single year in two separate categories out of the total of eleven. The awards were received at the ICG annual conference in Blackpool and published nationwide in the ICG magazine.

The Learning Opportunities service was the outright winner of the category “Working with Adults 2009”.

“It is a real team effort and recognition for four years of innovative and dedicated work. It has been the high standard of professionalism that has been the hallmark of your work (both individually and collectively) and that has gained you respect from everyone you have come into contact with. It is alright to have ideas, but without talented people to implement them, they remain just that, ideas. I promise to go on thinking if you promise to go on creating such imaginative and successful products and services.” Chris Baker, Head of Economic and Social Engagement, University of Brighton.

Maureen Haywood, the Project Director, was one of three highly commended practitioners who were runners up in the category “Career Guidance Practitioner of the Year 2009”.

“Maureen Haywood has led this highly innovative initiative from the outset and through several stages of development. She has had the vision to conceptualise the use of web technologies to deliver information, advice and guidance in the area of vocational learning and progression. The audience is diverse and not easily reached through existing organisations and networks. Her background is with the Open University and her excellent team members also have OU backgrounds which have informed their understanding of the way in which online interactive communication can work for a widening participation audience. Maureen has been particularly successful in promoting the work of the project and engaging a very wide range of partners and agencies in its delivery. This project is a particularly good example of the innovation that has made really good use of the funding and approach that came with the Lifelong Learning Networks.” Liz Gray, Regional Director, The Open University in the South East.

5. FINANCIAL REPORT

A summary is attached at **Appendix 4**. The funding model was complex from the outset in that there were six separate streams of income. There were separate contracts with the Learning and Skills Council (now the Skills Funding Agency) and the South East England Development Agency, both with staged payments at different times of the financial year. Hampshire and Isle of Wight LLN, Kent and Medway LLN and Progress South Central committed to equal amounts of funding in both years of the project. whilst the main Sussex Learning Network contribution was seen to be the initial financial investment in Learning Opportunities and the expertise and resources that had been developed over two years.

As discussed in section 4.3 above, the budgets have been re-profiled several times in order to respond to changes in funding and changes in the external climate. The LSC (SFA) were unable to fund the project for the full amount in year two and further contracted work that generated income was undertaken throughout 2010.

Following the agreement by the funders and the University of Brighton that any surplus left at the end of the project would be used to maintain the website, concerted efforts were made to generate this extra income and also to save money where possible. In its final year the project moved from a situation of facing a loss of £100k to creating a surplus of £30K. This has been achieved by:

- delivering employability training and Matrix related workshops
- producing a London 2012 portal on the website
- producing web content to promote World Skills 2011
- developing the Brighton and Hove Graduate Jobs web portal
- undertaking scoping work for the University of Brighton's Gatwick Diamond initiative
- becoming subcontractors to deliver Nextstep as part of the new Adult Advancement Careers service that started on 1 August 2010
- downsizing to one office that includes a hot desk shared by two members of staff.

6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Lifelong Learning Networks were charged with three areas of engagement: curriculum development, information advice and guidance and progression. Learning Opportunities brought together all three areas via: the Foundation Degrees in the South East tool; the vocational IAG provided in paper, online and 1:1; and the South East Routes progression tool.

6.2 The Leitch (2006) report which influenced the development of LLNs opens with a summary of adult qualifications and makes the point that "continuing to improve our schools will not be enough to solve this problem". Whilst the Learning Opportunities resources are useful for all those with an interest in higher education, the LAWIS project has particularly addressed the issue of IAG for the *current* workforce by providing pre-entry advice aimed at those in work and returning to work as well as those about to join the workforce.

6.3 It is acknowledged by practitioners that it is difficult to gather feedback on the longer term effectiveness of IAG in relation to adult enquirers, particularly where they are returning to learning. There is a gap between advice, action and result, and a number of different institutions are involved in the process as an adult enquirer, facing a number of barriers to learning, typically moves from initial advice and guidance to choosing a course, possibly refreshing IT, communication or maths skills, making an application, organising finance, organising time, and so on. The true extent of the project is therefore difficult to measure. The decision to leave the website as an open access resource rather than gather personal details via a log-in was based on not wishing to add a further barrier to learning. Evidence shows that the website is well used and the project has demonstrated that it has made a profound difference to a number of individuals and has impacted on the quality of information and advice on providers' websites. (For existing learners, the LLN partners have, separately, found ways to track learner progression in their areas, for example, via Skills Funding Agency data.)

6.4 The LAWIS project brought together a network of highly influential brokers. However, this did not of itself address the important issue of how those brokers, in turn, could persuade their

own partner universities and colleges to embrace the project. This is a particularly challenging issue when dealing with websites and seeking ways to ensure that an independent and impartial source of information, advice and guidance like Learning Opportunities can find a place alongside the services provided by the institution itself.

6.5 Another difficulty occurs when parallel initiatives from different government departments overlap or contradict each other. For example: the various special initiatives around STEM or organisations like the NHS; the launch of the 14-19 Diplomas that impacted on the respective roles of Aimhigher and LLNs in terms of vocational learning and progression; the movement of fdf (Foundation Degree Forward) into IAG that resulted in the eventual production of generic resources, albeit much later than those produced for Learning Opportunities. Each organisation, in turn, can legitimately claim IAG as part of its role. This ultimately leads to making the whole area seem overly complex for individuals, employers and IAG practitioners.

6.6 The recently published Action on Access report (October 2010) *Supporting Vocational and Work-based Learner Progression into HE* recommends that LLNs and Aimhigher work together to take ownership of IAG materials and resources that have been developed during their various operations. However, it is difficult to see how this can become reality when both organisations have come, or are coming, to the end of their funding periods. By being very focused on the future and the changing external climate, the LAWIS project has put plans in place to ensure that the IAG resources will continue to be maintained, developed and available at least until April 2012.

6.7 The formal, HEFCE sponsored, research and evaluation of the work of the LLNs, does little justice to individual projects such as LAWIS that provide an example of collaborative LLN work on a major LLN strand. For example, whilst the draft (not yet published at the time of writing) summative evaluation of the LLNs for HEFCE has commented on much excellent work taking place, there is also reference to the fragmentation of IAG. Whilst this was inevitable with individual LLNs providing local solutions to local issues, for the South East this joint project has enabled learners and potential learners across nine counties to have access to the same high quality IAG.

6.8 One of the most challenging aspects of providing high quality IAG in relation to vocational higher education has been matching expectations and reality. The research undertaken in order to produce jargon free, accurate advice has revealed the lack of truly flexible and appropriate provision for those in work or hoping to return to the workforce for whom full-time study is not an option. Whilst the Open University is very clear about its open access for undergraduate courses and upfront about course length, cost, study time needed, assessment and level of support, for many other providers, short course and part-time provision is often difficult to find on websites and difficult to understand. In addition, Foundation degrees come in all shapes and sizes, require varying amounts of college or university attendance and do not necessarily include work-based learning. As mentioned earlier in this report, simply phoning an institution to ask for advice is not always the most effective option. In an endeavour to be seen as helpful and flexible, higher education providers can effectively erect a further barrier to learners by not

being explicit and not recognising that learners need to know exactly what is expected of them and what their commitment is before making a decision to study.

6.9 The climate has changed dramatically since the start of the LLNs in 2005 and, indeed, since the start of the LAWIS project in 2008. At the time of writing there are four key areas of change. Firstly, most of the major publicly funded agencies that were involved with the LAWIS project are disappearing, changing or are coming to the end of their funding. Secondly, there have been major reductions in the Connexions service for young people as part of Local Authority spending cuts, and the Coalition Spending Review has clarified that an all age IAG service will be provided. This announcement has come just a few months after the launch of the national Adult Advancement Service so the future of national IAG provision is uncertain. Thirdly, changes to HE funding and the graduate contribution system add further complexity to IAG as costs could vary from institution to institution. Finally, all this is happening against the background of higher unemployment and the prediction that nearly half a million public sector jobs will go. High quality education, career and employment information, advice and guidance for adults will become even more important. Learning Opportunities in the South East has already demonstrated an innovative and non-bureaucratic way of providing a personalised and local service for those with or aspiring to higher level skills and employment that is a mix of online independent access to interactive materials and 1:1 support by telephone and email.

7. PHASE THREE – FROM JANUARY 2011

As outlined above, the project has generated a surplus of £30,000. It has been agreed by the Management Group and Advisory Group that this surplus will be used to continue to support the service and the original aspirations of the Lifelong Learning Networks who were charged with providing better information, advice and guidance.

The next stage of development, which will be managed by the University of Brighton, will need to take into account the dramatic changes in public sector activity and this includes changes in both higher education and the national provision of IAG which will begin moving to an all age service in 2011. It is recommended that:

- A basic service (web resources and the offer of email or telephone advice) should continue to 30 April 2012. This will ensure that the project which was conceived as an LLN joint activity continues until the end of the current funding period of the Sussex Learning Network.
- The website content be reviewed in the light of other available resources as well as the changing external climate that includes HE funding, new Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and an increased emphasis on employability skills. Local Enterprise Partnerships introduce a new geography into the equation with, for example, two LEPs cutting across Sussex². The content should also take account of changes to the Business Link service, part of which is about access to training and development.

² Coast to Capital (Brighton and Hove, Croydon, the Gatwick Diamond and West Sussex) LEP and Kent, Greater Essex and East Sussex LEP

- The website continues to be adapted and maintained to its current high standard of providing up to date, timely and accurate IAG.

Maureen Haywood

Project Director

November 2010

www.learning-opportunities.org.uk

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SECTION 8 APPENDICES -Appendix 1 – Schedule of deliverables and outcomes

Date	Milestones in LAWIS project plan	Status	Notes
September 2008	Appoint Project Director and Project Development Managers. Contract and meet with Web Developers. Contract and meet with consultant to research and produce data for Foundation Degrees in the South East database. Form Advisory Group and set up first meeting. Fix dates for Management and Advisory Group meetings.	All achieved	Project Director and 3 x Project Development Managers appointed. Paul Mitchell, external consultant, contracted to begin work on Foundation Degrees in the South East Management and Advisory Groups set up and dates for first meetings agreed. First Management Group meeting held.
Oct – Dec 2008	Design and build technical infrastructure. Research and map HE provision and IAG across South East. Prepare initial content for website. Begin to build, develop and maintain specialist networks and operational links with colleges, universities, employers and brokers.	All achieved	The structure of South East Routes (the progression tool) planned to take account of the merging of different geographical areas. Initial contact made between new Project Development Managers and partner LLNs in order to develop understanding of South East area.
Jan – March 2009	Launch phase 1 of Learning Opportunities in the South East website with basic content. Begin publicity/dissemination process. Research and produce location specific content for Learning Opportunities booklets, website and support materials. Design evaluation process. Plan sustainability strategy. Continue to build, develop and maintain specialist networks and operational links with colleges, universities, employers and brokers. Deliver staff development in each LLN area.	All achieved	Phase one of Learning Opportunities in the South East launched and newsletter sent to all LLN contacts. Communication strategy discussed at first Advisory Group Meeting and approved at second Management Group Meeting. Initial planning done on range of staff development, publicity and marketing materials to support dissemination. Project Coordinator appointed.

April – June 2009	Usability testing of website. Launch Learning Opportunities in the South East phase 2 with area specific content, postcode search and progression tool. Launch Learning Opportunities booklets. Produce marketing and promotional materials. Do further marketing and publicity (ongoing throughout rest of project) Begin training, support and development for brokers, advisers and others who support learners Begin evaluation process (ongoing throughout project). Progress sustainability strategy (ongoing throughout project). Continue to build, develop and maintain specialist networks and operational links with colleges, universities, employers and brokers. Deliver staff development in each LLN area.	All achieved	Work started on gathering feedback from users and regular analysis of web statistics in line with the formal evaluation plan. Work started on sustainability and a consideration of the new Adult Advancement Careers Service and how Learning Opportunities might align with that.
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July – September 2009	Continue evaluation process. Begin mystery shopping process. Continue to build, develop and maintain specialist networks and operational links with colleges, universities, employers and brokers Continue marketing and publicity. Progress sustainability strategy..	All achieved except mystery shopping	Planning was put in place for mystery shopping and follow up staff development at the beginning of the new academic year. However, the Skills Funding Agency were unable to fund the second year of the project and mystery shopping across the South East was therefore cut as part of the cost saving strategy. Quick reference guide for Train to Gain/Business Link advisers produced. First Year Report produced.
October – December 2009	Continue to build, develop and maintain specialist networks and operational links with colleges, universities, employers and brokers. Continue training, support and development for brokers, advisers and others who support learners. Continue marketing and publicity. Deliver staff development in each LLN area. Progress sustainability strategy.	All achieved	Two awards received from the Institute of Career Guidance. Work started to support individuals being made redundant or in fear of redundancy. Opportunities for contracted work start to emerge.

January – June 2010	Continue to build, develop and maintain specialist networks and operational links with colleges, universities, employers and brokers. Continue training, support and development for brokers, advisers and others who support learners. Continue marketing and publicity. Deliver staff development in each LLN area. Progress sustainability strategy.	All achieved	Agreement reached with funders and the University of Brighton to extend project to December 2010 and to use any surplus generated to sustain project thereafter. Additional contract work undertaken.
July – August 2010	Produce evaluation and final report.	Delayed due to extension of project	Agreement reached to produce final report in November. Additional contract work undertaken.
September – December 2010	Learning Opportunities service extended and work started on future plans.		Additional contract work undertaken. Final report produced. Meetings scheduled to discuss future plans for the extension of the service to April 2012.

Appendix 2 - Summary of quantitative and qualitative data gathered

QUANTITATIVE DATA FROM LEARNERS AND POTENTIAL LEARNERS		
Personal Planning Packs created	1,393 visits to the Personal Planning Pack page 394 Personal Planning Packs viewed	<p>The Personal Planning Pack was originally designed to gather all the pages viewed in a single visit into a personalised pdf that automatically included education planning advice. The design of the Personal Planning Pack was changed to respond to (a) feedback and (b) the external climate. Users felt that as the website expanded, the pdf was becoming too large to print and too large to easily navigate. The external climate had changed and the pack needed to include more than education advice. The modified Personal Planning Pack offers users the opportunity to select from 30 information sheets and it includes career planning and education planning advice. The pack continued to include any progression agreements that had been selected.</p> <p>During the project the original statistics tool was replaced by the more efficient Google Analytics that enabled far more in-depth analysis. Google Analytics</p>

		recorded the number of Personal Planning Packs viewed rather than downloaded.
Website hits and sessions analysed by page and section.	15,702 visits and 55,735 page views between 1 February 2009 and 14 October 2010	See attached Appendix 2B for more detailed statistics.
Number of questions asked via the "ask a question" text box	1,203	<p>The free text question box is supported by an extensive database. Users are invited to send an email if they don't get a satisfactory answer to their question. In addition ten frequently asked questions, with answers, are displayed next to the question box in the "ask a question" section.</p> <p>The most popular questions relate to the cost of the course, whether there are age limits, how to find a vocational course and how apprenticeships work.</p>
Number of queries from "email us" facility	110 individuals given 1:1 advice via a mixture of email, phone and face-to-face	In August 2010 the "email us" facility was elevated to the top of the left hand menu on the home page. In addition a phone number was added. From 2010 some face-to face advice was provided. This includes being involved in the SEEDA led redundancy task forces as part of the Continuing Employment Support Service (CESS) scheme and providing delivery for Nextstep as part of the new Adult Advancement Careers Service.
QUANTITATIVE DATA FROM ADVISERS, PRACTITIONERS AND BROKERS		
Adviser Packs	1,266 visits to the Advisers' section (220 printed copies distributed by the team)	<p>The pack was designed so that maximum benefit was gained by using it online with working links. It could also be used offline or printed out. Feedback indicated that advisers appreciated being provided with their own hard copy because they often had no web or printer access when interviewing clients.</p> <p>During the project the original statistics tool was replaced by the more efficient Google Analytics that enabled far more in-depth analysis. Google Analytics records the number of visits to the Advisers' section rather than the number of packs downloaded.</p>
Number of people who have attended staff development/dissemination	72 events attended 1:1 contact with 816 people Direct contact with 7,974 individuals via presentations, staff development events, careers	Apart from the direct face-to-face contact, materials were distributed to other delegates via conference packs or from conference stands.

sessions	fairs, business events etc.	
QUANTITATIVE DATA FROM PARTNER COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES		
Number of applications made via progression agreements		The system set up by the Sussex Learning Network between 2006 and 2008 was intended to make it simple to gather data from partner universities and colleges with applicants putting "SLN" on their UCAS form. However, the reality was that data was difficult to gather as the LLN codes weren't necessarily included..
QUALITATIVE DATA FROM LEARNERS AND POTENTIAL LEARNERS		
One to one contact with learners/potential learners	110 individuals	1:1 contact was introduced in year 2. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive in terms of the effectiveness of help and the quality of IAG.
Feedback button on Learning Opportunities website	No feedback button added. Feedback was invited on various website pages where users were given the opportunity to email for advice. Positive comments have been received from individuals who have been counted in the 110 above and from other organisations asking the team to provide links to their websites.	
QUALITATIVE FEEDBACK FROM ADVISERS, PRACTITIONERS AND BROKERS		
Feedback on web and paper resources gathered from events and individuals	The team has always sought feedback on resources in order to improve and development them. As a result of both informal feedback and usability testing, website content has been amended, items on the left hand menu have been renamed, new sections have been added and pages shortened. For example, a CD guide to the website was produced for time poor practitioners in order to ensure that they were aware of the rich andwide range of content and a 'quick guide' was added to the website. Some comments are included in the main body of the report.	
Sampling of institutions and organisations to gather case studies and data on the impact of Learning Opportunities Follow up phone calls to individuals who have used the online shop to order resources	36 practitioners followed up	Of the 68 shop orders processed between April and December 2009, 36 individuals were selected from a range of organisations across the South East including Colleges, Trades Unions, Skills Brokers, Nextstep and Connexions advisers. Of these, we received positive feedback from 21. Of the 15 that we didn't talk to, 6 were no longer in post, 1 person was in hospital, 1 couldn't recall ordering the resources and 7 were unavailable. Feedback indicated that people appreciated having a jargon-free comprehensive booklet with local information that they could hand out to individuals. The main report's conclusions make reference to the difficulties of embedding the LO website within the websites of other providers of HE and IAG and thus gathering case studies.

Appendix 3 – SUMMARY OF WEB STATISTICS 1 FEBRUARY 2009 TO 1 OCTOBER 2010

1. VISITOR INFORMATION

(a) Overview from 1st Feb 2009 to 14th Oct 2010

- Total Visits = 15,702 of which 9,135 (58%) were new visits and 6,567 (42%) from returning visitors (*Total Visits* represent the number of individual sessions initiated by all the visitors to the site)
- Total number of pages viewed = 55,735
- Average number of pages viewed per visit = 3.55
- Average time spent on site = 3.5 minutes
- 51% bounce rate (The percentage of single-page visits (i.e. visits in which the person left the site from their entrance page))

(b) Monthly breakdown

Figure 1: **Visitors to www.learning-opportunities.org.uk between 1st Feb 2009 and 30th September 2010**

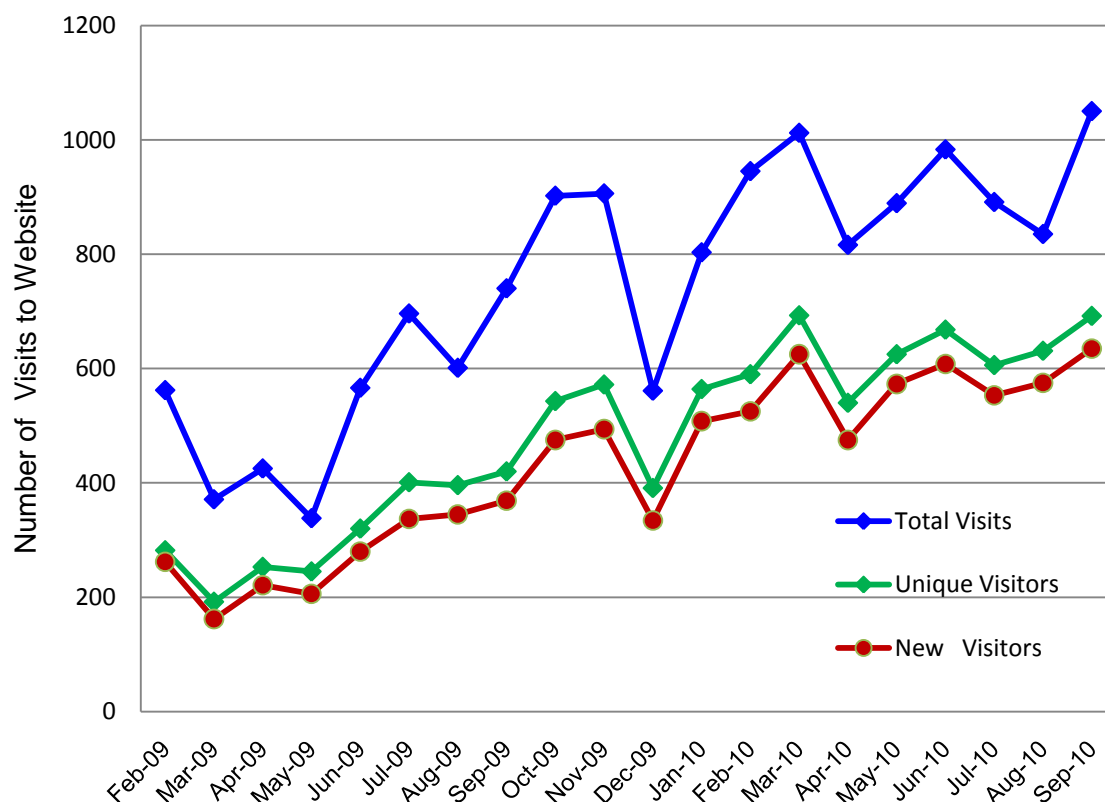


Figure 1 shows a general trend in the number of visitors (new and returning) increasing between March and October 2009 as the website became more widely known. Between October 2009 and September 2010 the number of visits per month remained at between 800 – 1000 with around 600 of these being unique visitors. The dip in the number of visitors during December is presumed to be due to the holiday

period. In October the number of visits rose to 1,500 and this can be accounted for by the launch of the Brighton and Hove Graduate Jobs portal.

(c) Returning visitor information – customer loyalty

Figure 2

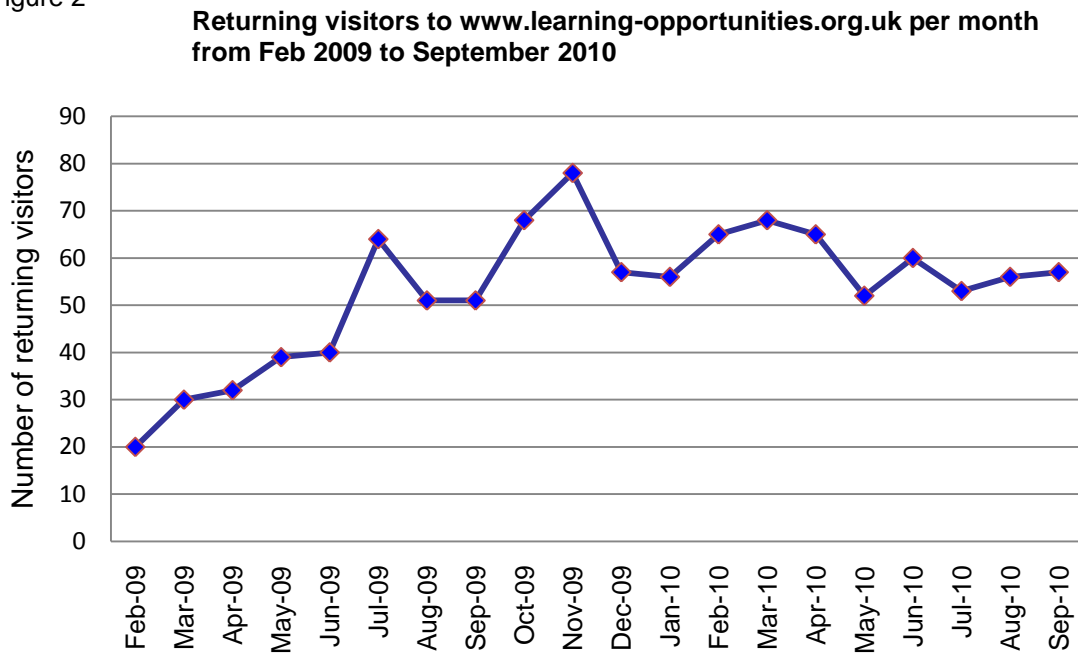


Figure 3

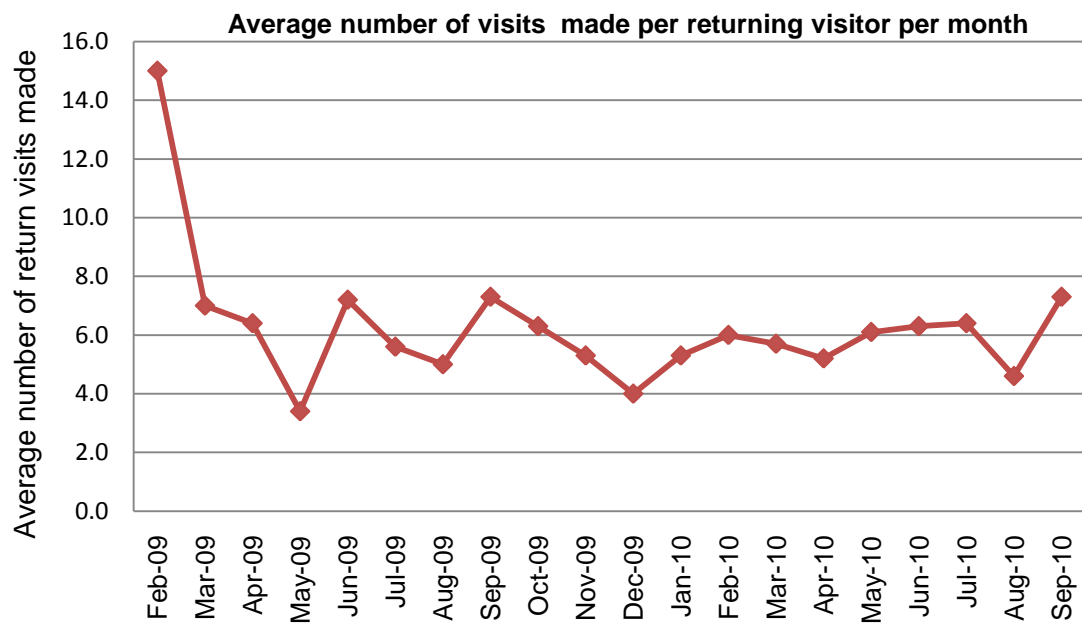
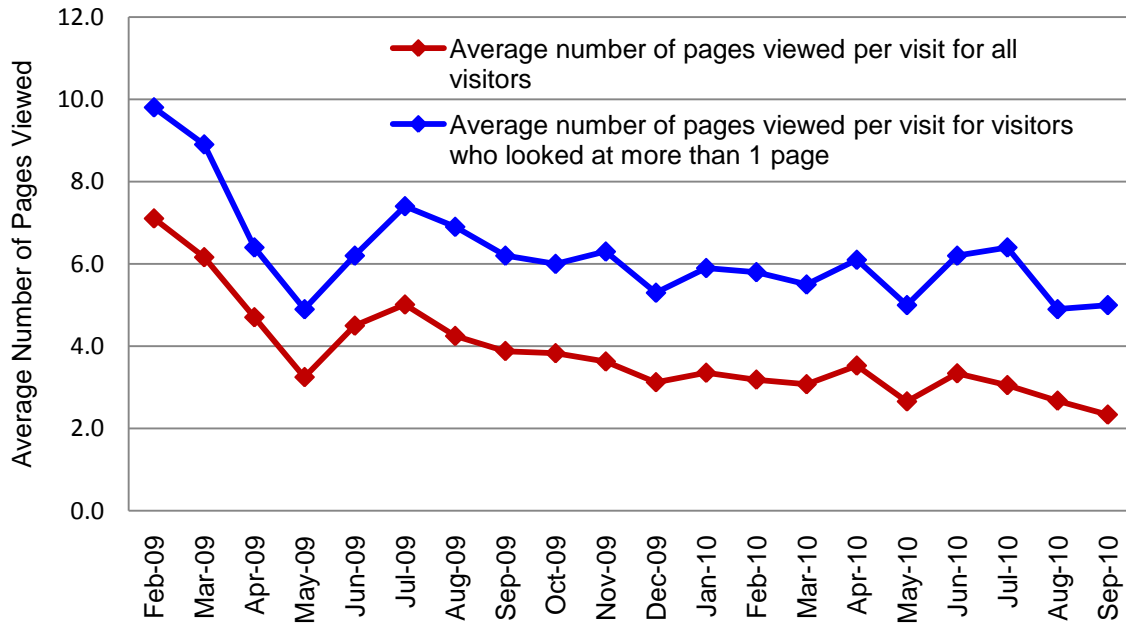


Figure 4 **Average number of pages viewed per visit for each month - from Feb 2009 to Sept 2010**



The red line in Figure 4 shows that the average number of pages each visitor looked at has undergone a slow but steady downward trend from around 5 to 2 pages per visitor since July 2009. This decrease could be accounted for in several ways, for example:

- returning visitors finding their way around the website to the information they require more quickly
- more visitors going directly to the portal or page they need as a result of specific publicity (for example to promote the 2012 portal or the Brighton and Hove Graduate Jobs portal) and direct, deep links being provided in that publicity.

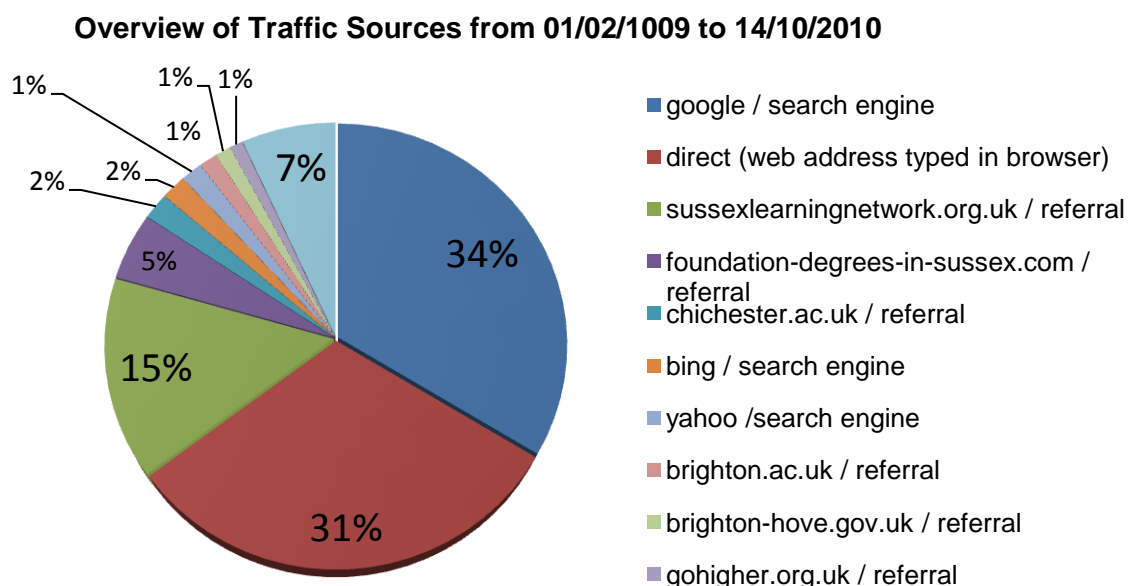
The blue line in Figure 4 only shows the data for visitors who looked at more than one page. Eliminating the visitors who only looked at only one page shows the other visitors looking at between 5 to 7 pages per visit on average. This would equate with the high bounce rate which is likely to be accounted for by the number of external links deliberately provided as part of the LAWIS objective to pull together a wide range of material and websites into one place.

Customer Loyalty over the whole 20 month period

Number of visits to website (n)	Visits that were the visitor's nth visit	Percentage of all visits
1	904.00	63.62%
2	87.00	6.12%
3	28.00	1.97%
4	12.00	0.84%
5	13.00	0.91%
6	11.00	0.77%
7	6.00	0.42%
8	11.00	0.77%
9-14	47.00	3.31%
15-25	48.00	3.38%
26-50	95.00	6.69%
51-100	32.00	2.25%
101-200	4.00	0.28%
201+	123.00	8.66%

2. TRAFFIC SOURCES

Figure 5:



Over the period shown in Figure 5 above, 65% of the traffic to the website has come from just 2 sources. These have remained the most frequent sources of traffic throughout the 20 month period. The link from the 4th most frequent source (foundation-degrees-in-sussex.com) was not established until October 2009. In some months since January 2010 referrals from www.foundation-degrees-in-sussex.com have accounted for more traffic into the website than those from www.sussexlearningnetwork.org.uk as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Sources of traffic to www.learning-opportunities.org.uk (measured by number of visits from source) on a monthly basis from Feb 2009 to October 2010.

Date	Google	Direct (from browser)	sussexlearningnetwork.org.uk / referral	foundation-degrees-in-sussex.com / referral	Total from other sources
Feb-09	12	406	120		24
Mar-09	22	165	150		34
Apr-09	31	194	151		420
May-09	53	131	110		131
Jun-09	79	250	168		69
Jul-09	149	257	206		84
Aug-09	141	206	182		72

Sep-09	176	253	210		101
Oct-09	304	266	121	48	211
Nov-09	303	237	177	35	189
Dec-09	231	144	46	39	140
Jan-10	346	169	42	77	246
Feb-10	429	221	48	75	247
Mar-10	401	218	46	84	347
Apr-10	309	198	77	45	232
May-10	379	224	96	67	190
Jun-10	468	238	92	76	185
Jul-10	416	188	80	53	207
Aug-10	376	240	28	80	191
Sep-10	433	319	106	72	192

Figure 6: Changes in the 4 main sources of visits to www.learning-opportunities.org.uk on a monthly basis from Feb 2009 to Sep 2010 shown as a bar chart

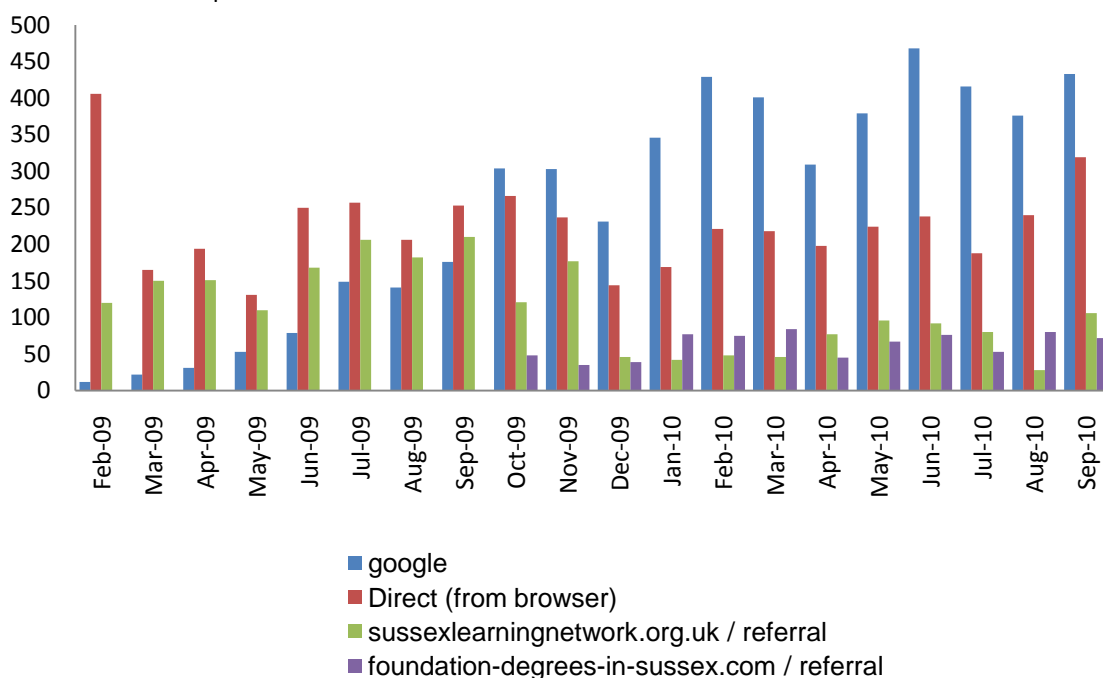


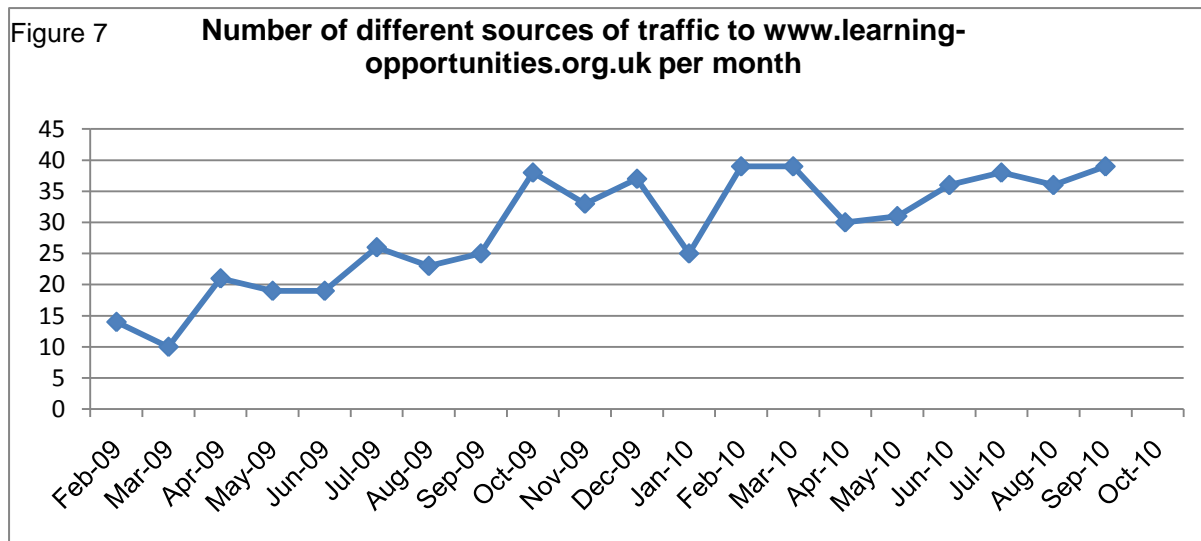
Table 2: Sources of visits

Number of visits	Month	Total visits	Sources
		Feb-09	562
	Mar-09	371	10
	Apr-09	796	21
	May-09	425	19
	Jun-09	566	19
	Jul-09	696	26
	Aug-09	601	23
	Sep-09	740	25
	Oct-09	902	38
	Nov-09	906	33
	Dec-09	561	37
	Jan-10	803	25
	Feb-10	945	39
	Mar-10	1012	39
	Apr-10	816	30
	May-10	889	31
	Jun-10	983	36
	Jul-10	891	38
	Aug-10	835	36
	Sep-10	1050	39

Table 2 shows that the number of sources per month from which traffic to the website originated increased steadily from Feb 2009 – Oct 2009.

From Oct 2009 until the present time it has remained at between 30 to 39 different sources per month (with the exception of January 2010).

Figures 7 shows this same information as a graph.



3. MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

(a) Looking at the data over the whole 20 month period

Table 3: The 20 most frequently asked questions over the 20 month period from Feb 2009 – Sept 2010

Note: A *unique page view* = the total number of unique visitors to a given page. (This aggregates page views that are generated by the same user during the same session.)

	FAQ	Pageviews	Unique Page views
1	FAQ - How do apprenticeships work?	78	65
2	FAQ - What does the course cost in real terms?	74	54
3	FAQ - Am I too old to study for a foundation degree?	71	60
4	FAQ - How much is my foundation degree going to cost me	58	49
5	FAQ - What vocational courses are available in the South	43	38
6	FAQ - Where can I study?	33	20
7	FAQ - What can I do to prepare for my course?	32	26
8	FAQ - How are foundation degrees different from other degrees?	22	21
9	FAQ - What do the initials NVQ stand for?	20	16
10	FAQ - What help can I get with child care costs?	16	13

11	FAQ - What is a modern apprenticeship?	16	13
12	FAQ - What does it mean that the course is vocational?	15	15
13	FAQ - Where can I find help finding employment?	14	11
14	FAQ - Will the course help me get a job?	14	13
15	FAQ - Do I have to pay anything to become an apprentice?	13	10
16	FAQ - What are the entry requirements for a foundation degree?	13	11
17	FAQ - Are there age barriers for careers?	12	12
18	FAQ - What financial help is there for part-time students?	12	10
19	FAQ - What qualifications do I need to get accepted on a course?	12	12
20	FAQ - Where can I find help about being made redundant?	11	10

It is also useful to gather together the FAQs on the same topic as this gives a greater indication of the main areas of interest to visitors to the website – see table 4 below.

Table 4: Most 'Frequently Asked Questions' grouped in topic areas, from 1st Feb 2009 - 30th Sep 2010

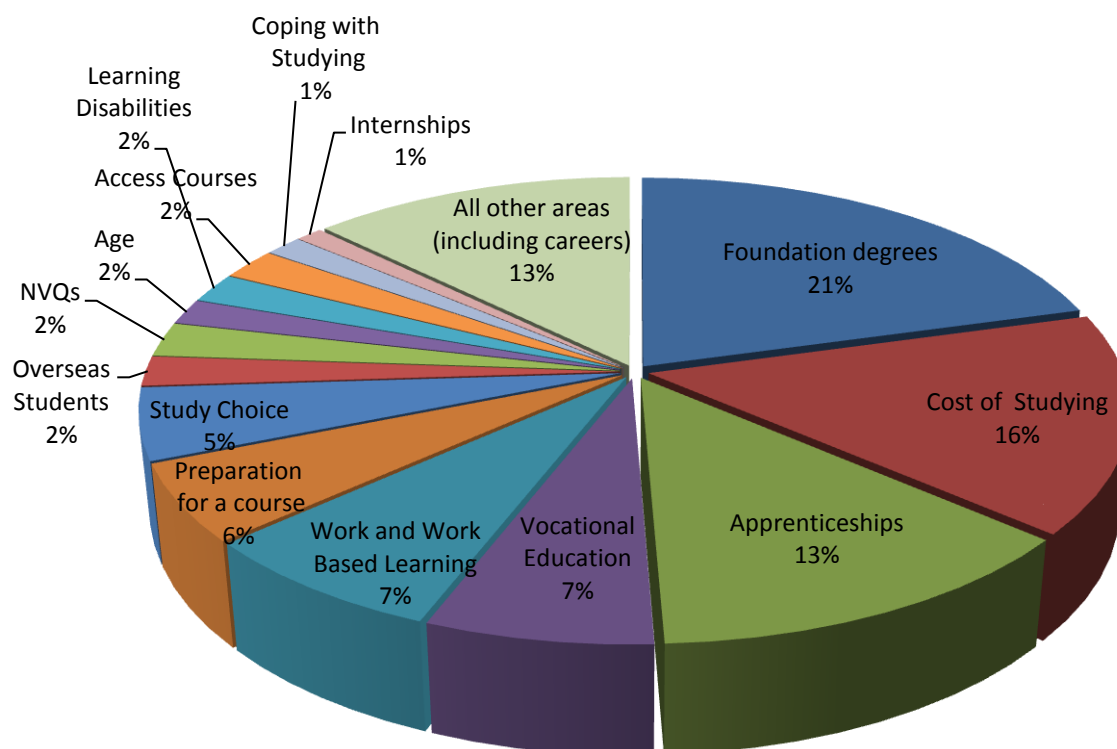
Subject Area	Page views	Unique Page views
faqs about foundation degrees	195	165
faqs about cost of studying	147	109
faqs about apprenticeships	123	97
faqs about vocational education	62	55
faqs about work and work based learning	70	55
faqs about preparation for a course	52	44
faqs about study choice	48	32
faqs about overseas students	20	19
faqs about nvqs	23	17

faqs about access courses	21	15
faqs about support for learning disabilities while studying	20	15
faqs about age	17	15
faqs about coping with studying	14	14
faqs about internships	10	5
all the other faqs (including those on different careers)	120	111

These results reflect the emphasis of the website on providing information about work based learning and Higher Education and concerns among potential applicants about the costs of studying.

Figure 8 below shows this more graphically with half of all queries relating to foundation degrees, apprenticeships and the costs of studying.

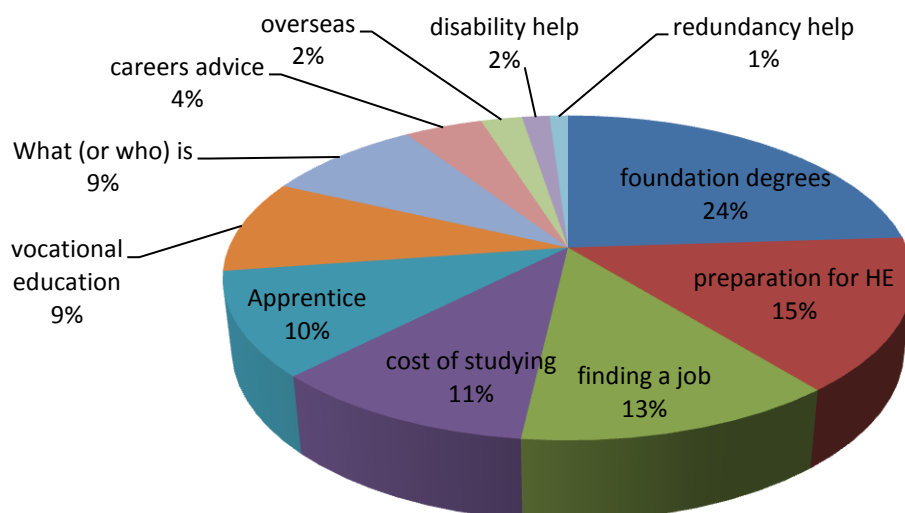
Figure 8: Most 'Frequently Asked Question' grouped in topic areas, from 1st Feb 2009 - 30th September 2010



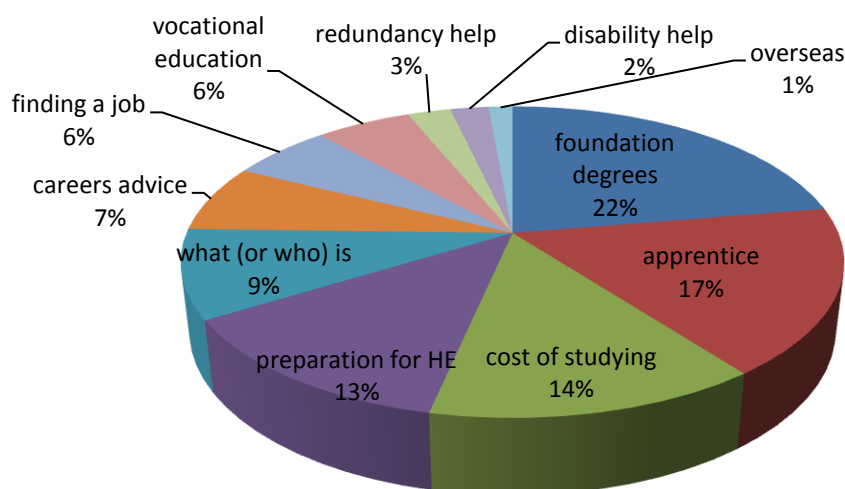
Grouping the faqs into topic areas to show the main areas of interest over the whole period:

Topic area	Total unique pageviews
Foundation degrees	173
Preparation for HE and where to study	105
Apprenticeships	102
Cost of studying and financial help	90
Help with finding a job	70
What (or who) is?	67
Vocational education	56
Careers advice (on a specific career area)	42
Disability help	14
Overseas students	14
Redundancy help	13

Percentage breakdown of Frequently Asked Questions (faqs), grouped into main topic areas, over 10 months from 1st Feb 2009 – 30th November 2009



Percentage breakdown of Frequently Asked Questions (faqs), grouped into main topic areas, over 10 months from 1st Dec 2009 – 16th October 2010



Comparing the two charts shows that questions about foundation degrees have remained the most frequently asked question with a small fall in popularity from 24% to 22% in the second half of the 20 month period.

The area second in priority has changed from with how best to prepare for higher education falling from second place to fourth place (with only a small change from 15% to 13% in popularity) while questions about apprenticeships rose from fifth place to second place showing the greatest overall increase (from 10% to 17%) in popularity.

Rather surprisingly questions about finding a job fell in popularity (from 13% to 6%) over the same period.

4 MOST POPULAR PAGES

The most popular pages (with more than 100 unique page views in the 10 month period) from 1st Feb 2009 to 30th November 2009 compared to 1st December 2009 to 16th October 2010 (alphabetically sorted - for ease of comparison)

Page title	Unique page views 01/02/09 - 30/11/09	Page title	Unique page views 01/12/09 - 14/10/10
Ask a question	562	Ask a question	313

		Brighton & Hove graduate jobs	425
Career matters	620	Career matters	412
Financial help	422		
		Careers in Sports and Exercise Science	606
Find a course	492	Find a course	872
Finding employment	336	Finding employment	390
For advisers	323		
For advisers and FREE shop	258	For advisers and FREE shop	349
Foundation degrees in the South East	922	Foundation degrees in the South East	1143
Home : Learning Opportunities in the South East	4157	Home : Learning Opportunities in the South East	4876
Info sheets - the higher education journey	741	Info sheets - the higher education journey	377
Learning Opportunities : SouthEast routes	1972	Learning Opportunities : SouthEast routes	1405
Personal Planning Pack	448		
Study choices	634	Study choices	661
Who is this for?	669		
		Work in Kent and Medway	465
		Work in Oxfordshire	392

Most Popular 100 Pages from 1st Feb 2009 to 30th Nov 2009 compared to 1st Dec 2009 to 16th Oct 2010

Page title	Unique Page views 01/02/09 -30/11/09	Page title	Unique Page views 01/12/09 - 14/10/10
Home : Learning Opportunities in the South East	4157	Home : Learning Opportunities in the South East	4876
Learning Opportunities :	1972	Learning Opportunities :	1405

SouthEast routes		SouthEast routes	
Foundation degrees in the South East	922	Foundation degrees in the South East	1143
Info sheets - the higher education journey	741	Find a course	872
Who is this for?	669	Study choices	661
Study choices	634	Careers in Sports and Exercise Science	606
Career matters	620	Work in Kent and Medway	465
Ask a question	562	Brighton & Hove graduate jobs	425
Find a course	492	Career matters	412
Personal Planning Pack	448	Work in Oxfordshire	392
Financial help	422	Finding employment	390
Finding employment	336	Info sheets - the higher education journey	377
For advisers	323	For advisers and FREE shop	349
For advisers and FREE shop	258	Ask a question	313
Page not found	213	Who is this for?	278
Redundancy-making the best of it	183	Jobs with training to degree level (A to H - Administration to Hotel and catering)	276
For employers	172	Work in Hampshire	251
Didn't get into uni this year?	171	Redundancy - make the best of it	225
Work in Kent and Medway	160	Financial help	206
Personal planning pack	159	Personal Planning Pack	203
Contact us	135	Page not found	201
I'm leaving school and want a decent job with prospects.	128	Work in the Isle of Wight	195
Returning to learning	128	Didn't get into uni this year?	190
Redundancy - make the best	122	Contact us	183

of it			
I didn't do well at school, but I'd like to have another go at learning	120	Work in East Sussex	181
Careers in Sports and Exercise Science	110	About Learning Opportunities	177
My firm is laying staff off, I'd like a career change but I'm in my 40's. Is that too old?	104	2012 Olympics	176
Work in West Sussex	99	Work in West Sussex	169
Work in the Isle of Wight	99	My firm is laying staff off and I would like a career change but feel too old at 45.	159
Work in Hampshire	98	Educational terms explained	138
I'm 25 and never had a proper job. Is it too late for me to start training?	94	I didn't do well at school, but I'd like to have another go at learning	118
My firm is laying staff off and I'm thinking of a career change but am I too old at 45?	93	I'm 27 and never had a proper job. Is it too late for me to start training?	118
Exploring your university options	91	Routes to higher education	118
University Careers Services in the South East	78	Quick guide to Learning Ops	117
Routes to higher education	70	For employers	113
Business, Administration & Finance	68	General sources of help finding employment	112
Alphabetical Info Sheet List	67	Jobs with training to degree level (J to S - Journalism to Social work)	112
Disability information	66	Alternatives to uni	107
Useful resources	66	Work in Surrey	86
My boss said it would help me get on if I got some qualifications	63	Work in Buckinghamshire	81
General sources of help	60	East Sussex job searching	78

finding employment			
Apprenticeships	59	Financial help for study	73
Jobs with training to degree level (A to H - Administration to Hotel and catering)	59	Returning to learning	73
Disability Information	57	Disability information	71
Educational terms explained	56	I'm leaving school and want a decent job with prospects.	71
Work in East Sussex	55	What IAG is	69
I'm 27 and never had a proper job. Is it too late for me to start training?	47	Career development advice	66
Site map	44	Kent and Medway job searching	63
Work in Berkshire	43	About us and quick guide	62
Qualifications and Levels	41	Personal planning pack	61

Appendix 4 - Financial Summary

	From 31.8.08 to 11.11.10		From 31.8.08 to 31.12.10 (predicted)	
	INCOME	EXPENDITURE	INCOME	EXPENDITURE
INCOME	560,455 ¹		569,971 ¹	
Staff pay		290,034		311,979 ²
Casual staff		4,403		4,403
Agency staff		37,230		42,874
Consultancy		56,208		57,059
Marketing & Publicity		13,497		13,497
Office costs		45,699		47,663 ³
Web dev, hosting and maintenance		62,062		63,462
	<u>560,455</u>	<u>509,133</u>	<u>569,971</u>	<u>540,937</u>
SURPLUS		51,322		29,034⁴

NOTES:

1. This includes initial agreed income from SEEDA, LLNs, LSC and additional contracted work
2. This includes redundancy and holiday pay
3. This includes rent, telephones, cleaning, postage, travel & subsistence, hospitality and general office equipment
4. A further sum of £1,000 is due to be added to this once the final payment for Brighton & Hove Graduate Jobs is received.

