

What is Employment Guidance?

2.1 Career guidance or employment guidance?

Practitioners generally use the term guidance to describe what they do. Terminology and definitions within guidance can be confusing as terms like lifelong guidance, career guidance, guidance, vocational guidance and employment guidance (amongst others) are often used interchangeably.





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In this toolkit we have used definitions agreed by the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) and the National Guidance Forum. We include these key definitions below but draw your attention to the wide range of definitions which can be found in the ELGPN glossary <http://www.elgpn.eu/publications/elgpn-tools-no2-glossary>

Guidance is an umbrella term that encompasses counselling (active listening) as well as activities such as informing, coaching, teaching, assessment and advocacy (ELGPN).

Both the terms **Lifelong Guidance** and **Career Guidance** are defined as:

'A range of activities that enable citizens of any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which these capacities and competences are learned and/or used.'
(ELGPN)

Lifelong Guidance or Career Guidance is a continuous process that involves a range of activities - both individual and collective including²:

- information-provision
- counselling
- competence assessment
- support
- decision-making
- fostering career management skills

Lifelong guidance is considered an approach rather than a one-off or single point in time activity. The lifelong guidance approach promotes proactive delivery, accessibility throughout life and a lifelong perspective. It is also life-wide, accessible in formal, non-formal or informal settings across all sectors (education, initial training, employment and continuing training) and at any stage.

² European Council (2008) Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies

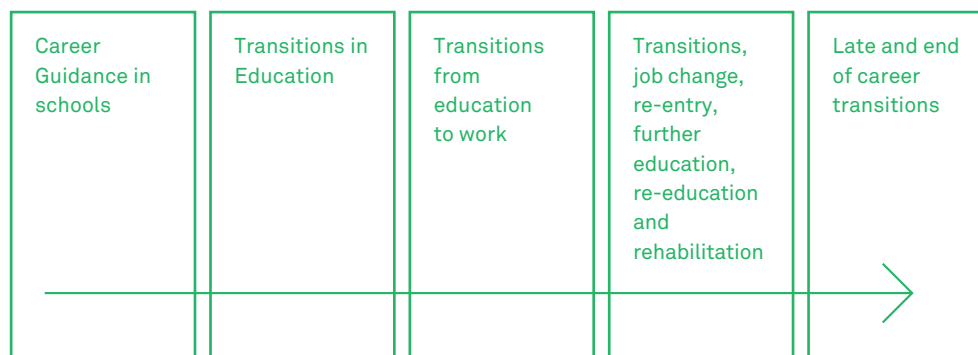


Figure 2.1
Phases of the Career Pathway (Arnkil, Spangar and Vuorinen, 2017b)

In Ireland the National Guidance Forum agreed the following definition of Guidance:

Guidance facilitates people throughout their lives to manage their own educational, training, occupational, personal, social, and life choices so that they reach their full potential and contribute to the development of a better society
(National Guidance Forum, 2007).

Employment guidance

Employment guidance is a specific form of lifelong guidance which aims to build people's employability i.e. the ability to gain and maintain a job in a formal organization (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004), and self-sufficiency in the labour market. Its focus is on paid work, employment and careers.

Employment guidance involves a combination of factors which enable individuals to progress towards, transition into, and sustain employment, and to progress during their careers. The employability of individuals depends on:

- a) personal attributes (including adequacy of knowledge and skills)
- b) the way these personal attributes are presented in the labour market
- c) the environmental and social context (incentives and opportunities offered to update and validate their knowledge and skills)
- d) structural issues such as transport, childcare, and the broader social organisation of work (casualisation, working days and times)
- e) the economic context

(ELGPN Glossary)





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Employment guidance is defined as ‘*Counselling or guidance that addresses one or more of the following domains: career/ occupational decision-making, skill enhancement, job search and employment maintenance. Activities include: assessment, development and implementation of an action plan, follow-up and evaluation.*’

It includes (but is not limited to) a range of activities, for example:

- assessment and development (individual attributes, competences, aspirations, preferences; psychological state; employability; informal and non-formal learning)
- screening and profiling
- career management coaching (Personal Action Plans; managing job changes)
- individual intensive employment counselling
- job brokering and advocacy
- vocational preparation (pinpointing skills/competences and experience for job-seeking)
- individual and group job-search assistance (job-search techniques; applications; CVs; interviews; work tasters)
- information on learning and labour market opportunities
- specialised employment counselling (addressing perceived challenges to re-employment e.g. addiction, homelessness, care, financial problems)
- working with particular groups of disadvantaged job-seekers (e.g. migrants, ex-offenders, ethnic minorities)
- referrals (to specialist services e.g. health, housing, social services).

(Arnkil, Spangar, and Vuorinen, 2017a)

Educational guidance by comparison helps individuals to reflect on personal educational issues and experiences and to make appropriate educational choices (ELGPN, 2015). It differs from employment guidance as its focus is on the individual within an education context. It is often used to describe a broader range of activities which includes advising pupils or students on their educational progress, on career opportunities, or on personal difficulties or anxieties (UNESCO).

In Ireland education and career guidance has generally been provided by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) at second level, in Further Education and Training (FET) through the Adult Education Guidance Service, and at third

level through college and university career services. Employment guidance is generally provided by PES and through private recruitment employment agencies.

2.2 Delivering employment guidance

Employment Guidance as defined above refers to the help and support available to people who are job seeking and who wish to make choices about employment and career options. Career is described by Hooley (2017) as ‘the passage of the individual through life, learning and work’ where individuals utilise their talents and skills to create their own careers within the limitations of the education system and the labour market.

How employment guidance is delivered can vary depending on a range of factors including the practitioner and their approach and training, the organisation providing the service and their culture and funding, the labour market policy in place in the country, the labour market itself and its needs (amongst other factors).

For example, during times of high unemployment, the allocated time allowed for individual employment guidance meetings is often reduced due to high caseloads. Thus, how guidance services are organised and delivered can have a significant impact on their coverage and effectiveness (Cedefop, 2008c³).

Practitioners operate within these systems to support the individual to explore their talents, competences, skills and abilities. They focus on the structural issues inhibiting people’s employability, like issues around transport, access to care, or secure housing. They create links with local services and employers and often advocate on behalf of the individual to enable access.

³ Cedefop, 2008c. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4106_en.pdf





2.3 Employment guidance in Ireland

The design and organisation of publicly funded employment guidance has evolved and changed in Ireland over the last five decades. In the 1960s the Irish PES, whose primary function was mediating supply and demand, and placing and guiding people into employment, was dominated by an enabling concept (IPA, 1968). Job seekers had conditional obligations to seek and accept employment and the policing of such conditions, and application of sanctions, was the function of the welfare system not the PES. The separation of benefits from job search was informed by an early Institute of Public Administration (IPA) report (1969) on the Placement and Guidance service which identified a major defect in the system at that time, being the dominance of the welfare payment function at the expense of the placement or guidance function. The IPA recommended that the placement service be 'entirely divorced' from the benefit paying function (p.33). Thus, from the 1970s, welfare recipients could claim job seeker benefits without being required to undertake upskilling, education and training, or work experience (McGauran, 2013; Whelan, 2018).

In the early 1990's countries around the world began to merge income supports and public employment services in what is known as 'the activation turn'. In Ireland however, a supportive enabling approach in the form of the Local Employment Service Network (LESN) was implemented. Originally designed to support the long term unemployed through the provision of a specialised guidance focused service, the LESN delivered services over a 1-2-year time frame. It aimed to enable the individual to focus on employment related challenges, access additional supports, improve soft and hard employability skills and move closer to the labour market. Its ethos facilitated a friendly, supportive and informal environment where people seeking employment could discuss their personal relationship with the world of work and their specific labour market challenges.

This system of employment guidance remained in place until 2012 when, post the financial crisis, the Irish government adopted a work-first approach replacing the previous separated systems of payments and employment assistance, with a new and narrower 'activation' approach informed by the OECD 'mutual obligations' approach to activation.

As a result, in 2012 the LES under the statutory direction of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) was primarily used to 'soak up' Intreo overflow, and its original conception as a guidance led service for those more distant from the labour market was considerably restricted and diluted.



2.4 Employment guidance in PES



The place of guidance - in its broadest sense - in PES has always been problematic (Sultana & Watts, 2006). Tensions exist between the longer-term focus of career guidance towards sustained employability, and the short-term focus of PES in supporting unemployed individuals into employment as quickly as possible.

Practitioners within PES often have a dual role both to support people in career decision making while also protecting public resources through the monitoring and sanctioning aspects of conditionality (OECD, 2004). Employment guidance practitioners could be considered as belonging to 'human service professions' who manage and deliver services of the welfare state, but who are guided by a 'professional logic' which justifies their focus on social justice and allows them to act for the individual (Brante, 2014). This dual role could potentially lead to role-conflict which arises when individuals are faced with inconsistent or incompatible demands (Biddle, 1986). Previous research (e.g. Tubre and Collins, 2000) suggests that role conflict should be minimised as it can lead to dissatisfaction, anxiety, lower commitment, and lower performance in the workplace.

Within this context, practitioners provide guidance within an existing policy system. The policy shapes the rules and objectives, the processes and procedures, the targets and metrics. In Ireland, the current labour market policy *Pathways to Work* is implemented through a range of public, private, and not-for-profit organisations. The mechanisms and approaches to service delivery differ within each of these settings with tensions between guidance and active labour market programmes (ALMPS) more pronounced in services that place more emphasis on an employment guidance approach.

Changes to the provision of employment guidance in the Irish PES

Prior to the financial crisis (2008-2009) PES were delivered through a dual stranded employment strategy with FÁS, the national training and employment authority, and the LES, a network of 24 community based employment services managed by local development companies and NGOs. However, as a consequence of the economic crisis, the significant job losses during 2008-2012⁴ and significant pressure from the Troika⁵, the Irish government

⁴ 329,000 jobs were lost during the period 2008-2012

⁵ The International Monetary Fund, the European Union and the European Central Bank referred to as the Troika





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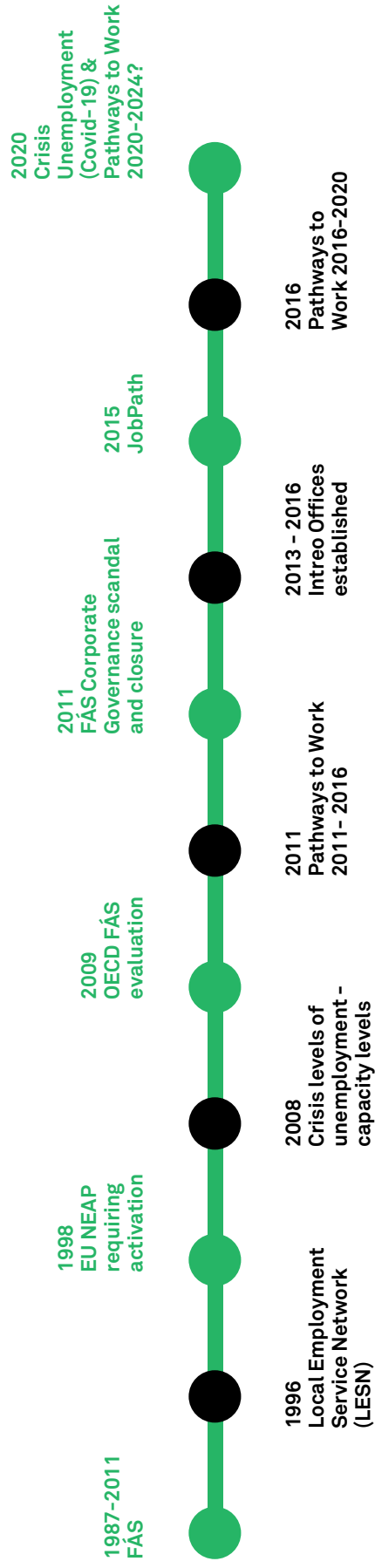
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committed not only to the implementation of activation, but to reform of the institutions responsible for its delivery. In addition, internal corporate governance failures within FÁS, and a loss of public confidence in the organisation (Martin, 2015), led to its disbandment in 2011, and organisations which had previously been responsible for welfare payments, and PES, were subsequently amalgamated. The employment services function of FÁS along with the Community Welfare Services of the Health Service Executive (HSE) were subsumed into the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) and a new public employment service *Intreo* – a ‘one-stop-shop’ or single point of contact for all job seekers - was established in 2013.

Roll-out of the *Intreo* service involved the establishment of 61 *Intreo* offices nationwide during 2013-2016 and the provision, not only of income support, but also assistance for job seekers in both preparing for and accessing employment. The vocational training function of FÁS moved to a new national agency called SOLAS, and to the new regional Education and Training Boards.

Since 2011 the LESs have been contracted directly by the DEASP on an annual basis to provide employment assistance, and since 2016, performance has been measured exclusively in terms of job placement (Indecon, 2019). Since 2015 the LESs role in the provision of labour market policy has changed numerous times and now appears as a service contracted to deliver a work-first approach, albeit within a less pressured context, due to its current grant funding model. There are currently 24 LESs, twenty-one are based in Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) across the country, and three are situated in NGOs. While not every area is covered by an LES, the LCDCs through their range of services and flexible and adaptive approach can provide pre-employment related services more widely.

Figure 2.2
Timeline of changes in LMP and Governance 1987-2021





Across the LES organisations staff maintain their commitment to the LES network ethos and continue within the constraints of a work-first model to deliver employment guidance. Staff include mediators, guidance practitioners, key workers, and case officers from varying backgrounds, disciplines and experiences. This multidisciplinary workforce ideally brings a variety skills and approaches to the practice of employment guidance. The objective is a model that can be personalised to meet individual needs rather than a prescribed model with little flexibility. This adaptable approach enables the provision of tailored supports where the practitioner is a conductor, a co-creator, an enabler, identifying approaches and methods suited to individual needs, connecting individuals to resources, and re-connecting them with their working lives.

In addition to the services provided by Intreo and the LES, the DEASP in 2015 procured a Payment-by-Results programme called JobPath to provide specialist services to the LTU. This nationwide programme commenced in July 2015 and is delivered by two organisations, Seetec and Turas Nua, who provide services in two divisions of the country. They are tasked with progressing the LTU into secure and sustainable employment achieved through one-to-one, intensive and regular engagement with a personal adviser, who assess skills, experience, challenges and work goals and assists them in finding full-time sustainable employment.

2.5 Who uses employment guidance services?

Employment guidance services are generally aimed at the unemployed, and others who depend on social welfare payments including some lone parents and people with disabilities, some of whom will have experienced short periods of unemployment, others will have longer unemployment spells, some individuals will be underemployed or job changers. Employment guidance uses a life-long approach, supporting young adults through to older workers, and is life-wide, acknowledging challenges across society such as care, early school leaving, addiction, housing, low skills, mental health etc.

Guidance for all is an important tenet of this model implying that differing levels of service should be available depending on individual need.

It assumes that an appropriate triage assessment, which includes the use of a profiling form or system, will be conducted by a skilled practitioner who will then recommend referral to an appropriate practitioner.

Approaches to profiling can be distinguished by whether they are *rule-based*, *caseworker-based*, or *statistically based*.

- **Rule-based** approaches rely on administrative eligibility criteria, such as age, benefit category, educational level, and/or unemployment duration. These approaches classify jobseekers into client groups for service targeting. Practitioners have little discretion or leeway for decision-making in tailoring support to individual client needs.
- **Caseworker-based** profiling, prioritises the professional judgement of practitioners when assessing client-needs (and is often supported by quantitative and/or qualitative tools to assist decision-making).
- **Statistical** models are increasingly being used to profile clients based on their estimated labour market disadvantage and predicted risk of experiencing long-term unemployment. For example, Ireland's PEX (Probability of Exit) profiling model, can be used 'to automatically classify jobseekers' in ways that override the professional judgement of caseworkers (Desiere, Langenbucher & Struyven, 2019).

2.6 Employment guidance provision

To date much of the career guidance available to adults has been provided by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) through the Adult Education Guidance Service. More widely guidance is provided at second level, Further Education and Training (FET) and at Third level and as such has been predominately DES led. Career guidance within this context is a well-developed profession with clear guidelines, standards, qualification requirements and provision at degree and post graduate levels.

Compared to education guidance, employment guidance lacks cohesion, is poorly defined and understood, and has been less developed through the public employment services where it is arguably an essential aspect of employment support. During the 1990s and 2000s FÁS employment officers and LES mediators participated in bespoke programmes delivered by Maynooth University^{6,7}. In more recent times the National College of Ireland and DEASP

⁶ CERTIFICATE IN ADULT GUIDANCE THEORY AND PRACTICE | Maynooth University

⁷ POSTGRADUATE DIPLOMA IN ADULT GUIDANCE COUNSELLING | Maynooth University





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collaborated on the design of a range of professional programmes for Intreo and DEASP staff including case officers although these are only available to DEASP staff.

2.7 A community based model of employment guidance

Good practice in community based employment services incorporates activities which positively promote co-produced services (to some extent) with people experiencing complex challenges (rather than just skill deficits/lack of career clarity) and using therapeutic approaches (e.g. as simple as a friendly welcome, caring and listening) to positively impact a person's journey towards the labour market. These principles of high support and holistic employment focused guidance, directed towards the development of a career plan, aim to strengthen the human (skills and knowledge), social (connection with others) and psychological (hope, optimism, resilience and efficacy) capital required to implement this plan.

It recognises that employment guidance ought to be impartial and promote the best interests of the individual.

IMPARTIAL GUIDANCE means that the guidance offered is in the best interests of the person and does not favour any particular option. Guidance delivery should be transparent, neutral and should not inadvertently or openly promote particular options or fail to refer to alternative options.

Current practice in employment guidance, for example some aspects of the LES approach, focuses on individual factors, personal circumstances and external factors. It generally consists of a process which aims to support the person in developing the skills necessary for labour market access and for sustaining decent work. It also focuses on building self-efficacy and self-esteem, and improving psychological well-being.

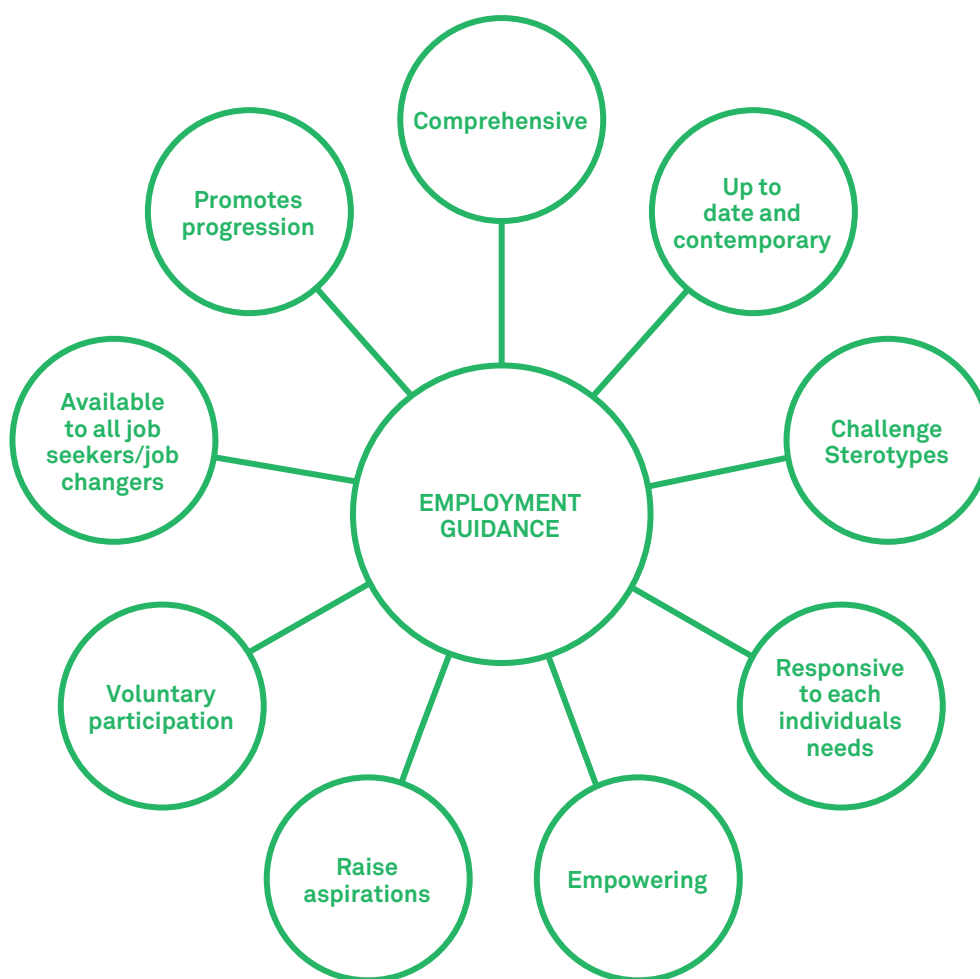


Figure 2.3

The focus of current practice in the LES (based on feedback from employment guidance staff June-Oct 2019)

2.8 Quality in employment guidance

While it is important that people have access to employment guidance, the quality of that guidance and its processes (the mechanisms, approach, tools and interventions) is also important. However, the intangible nature of guidance makes it difficult to measure its quality (Borsch, 1995) and we often use indicators such as job placement and customer satisfaction as markers.





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Guidance has multiple personal, social, economic and work-related benefits (OECD, 2004). At an individual level guidance helps people recognise their own strengths and build on them; it helps to focus on the future; it envisages a desirable but attainable lifestyle and identity; it supports people work out what is important to them; it helps to set achievable goals (Robertson, 2019). For people who are unemployed, approaches which also promote well-being and which lead to sustainable and fulfilling work can help ameliorate the negative mental health effects of unemployment (Redekopp & Huston, 2019; Robertson, 2019). Similarly, for people with specific needs or circumstances e.g. disabilities, health, housing, care, which often impact career choice, the person-centred nature of employment guidance can ensure access to flexible yet fulfilling work.

These benefits are enabled through a process of understanding capabilities, strengthening motivation, and implementing career plans and are enhanced by employment guidance practitioner's supportive approaches. The process aims to support people to manage their return to the labour market and access decent and sustainable work. The quality of the employment guidance process has been found to be an important determinant of successful reemployment outcomes (Behrendt, Göritz & Heuer, 2019; Meyer, 1995). Interestingly, meta-analytic studies have found that intensity (i.e. the number and duration of the sessions) of the intervention is unrelated to its outcome and that the quality of the process is key (Liu et al., 2014). This is important when we consider the shift in recent years towards more administrative processes within PES and the limited focus on the design and quality of employment guidance services.

This toolkit aims to provide a starting point for a collaborative dialogue on what we mean by quality approaches, how we can achieve consistency in the way that employment guidance is delivered, and how we can provide opportunities for continuous improvement. This means both specifying the employment guidance process and envisioning the kinds of organisations that would be capable of creating and delivering these services (Hooley & Rice, 2019).

A useful typology proposed by Hooley & Rice (2019) to distinguish approaches to assuring quality in career guidance could form the basis for local and national conversations on quality assured employment guidance.

The typology includes four types of approaches to quality assurance:

- (1) **REGULATORY** approaches which focus on legal requirements imposed on providers as a way of improving quality, for example, standards for compliance and inspections
- (2) **ADVISORY** approaches which describe what quality looks like, for example best practice guidelines and benchmarking resources
- (3) **ORGANIC** approaches which regard quality as being defined locally (and often co-produced) by providers and professionals, for example quality circles and peer mentoring

- (4) COMPETITIVE approaches which focus on customer responses and feedback, and are often linked to funding arrangements such as payment by results systems.

Of course there are pros and cons to using the various approaches, however they provide a useful conceptualisation to enable greater understanding of quality and to support all stakeholders as they strive for continuous improvement in processes.

