

What do guidance practitioners and end-users want from a CV builder?

Research Project Report P218

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Executive Summary

1. Where we are now

While advisers appear to spend a good deal of time on supporting the writing of CVs, some evidence from this study suggests they use paper-based materials as much and as often as electronic, and that they are dissatisfied with the actual programs and web sites available to them for this purpose.

2. How were the findings generated?

Questionnaire surveys were sent to samples of end-users (both those with and without level 2 qualifications or better) and practitioners, asking them to rate the importance of 20-22 items describing possible features of a computer- or web-based CV builder. A total of 99 end-users and 102 guidance practitioners / advisers in *nextstep* agencies or similar responded to the questionnaires. As a qualitative check on the data from the questionnaires a further 22 end-users took part in focus groups and 20 practitioners were canvassed either in a focus group discussion or by telephone interview. The findings are consistent throughout with no major differences between the groups, only small shifts of emphasis.

3. What features do they want in a CV Builder?

The questionnaire items were, all but one, rated positively by a significant majority of respondents and over half were rated “important” as well. Full details on the rank ordering of these features by the different groups are in the tables on pages 11, 13, 15, and 17. Combining this quantitative data with our findings from the focus groups and telephone interviews gives a consistent picture of what is expected of a computer- or web-based CV Builder. Key features include:

3.1 Content:

- a **definition of the product** – what a CV is, its purpose, variety of forms and how it can be used. Help is needed not just with CVs but with the covering letter and to a lesser extent with application forms as well as interactive links to related materials such as personal portfolios, progress files and records of achievement.
- **examples and templates for CVs and covering letters** in a range of formats, styles and layouts, illustrative and useful for a range of job applications and to a range of people in different industries and occupations and with differing employment situations.
- **advice on how to fill in the blanks in such templates**, what information is appropriate and in how much detail. This should be available step by step as the user progresses through the program and should explain concepts such as *key skills*, or *transferable skills* and how to provide evidence for them. It should also provide a **glossary or thesaurus of key words and phrases** useful for this.
- **advice on how to deal with special issues of personal background and gaps in work history** – for those with e.g. criminal records, relevant disabilities, or significant absences from the labour market, as well as for speakers of English as a second language. Some provision may need to be made for **referral** to specialist agencies in some cases.
- **general advice on job search and application** – especially requested by end-users.

3.2 Functionality:

- **customisation and flexibility.** The program must be easy to customise by advisers themselves for local circumstances and groups and it must also be easy for the end-users themselves to individualise and personalise in various ways. This may also mean giving practitioners the ability to adapt and develop variants of the program to suit local needs.
- **facilities to save personal data files securely, and to export and import files easily** in various formats across different types of hardware and software.
- **a facility to match CVs, once stored, to jobs** - this has major implications for the way the CV builder functions and the kind of CV produced, and may require the development of two different systems. It also has major development and cost implications.
- **spellchecker and grammar checking**

3.3 Format:

- **the system should ideally offer both on-line and CD-ROM versions,** and should certainly make it possible to save records to either. Security and access are major issues for both clients and practitioners here. Paper-based materials are widely used by practitioners at present, and it may be desirable to continue some provision of printed material in association with the CV builder itself.

4. What support is required?

4.1 The Guidance Process. The CV builder is part of a whole process of guidance just as the CV is part of the process of career choice and management. Advisers currently provide a framework of guidance activity around the writing of a CV, which they regard as very important. This needs to be taken into account in the design of any self-help system. This, like the advisers, should encourage self-assessment, facilitate an educational and learning process where necessary, and aim to make appropriate links to other relevant materials and resources. The client in particular needs to feel ownership of the CV. It is not enough simply to present examples that can be copied without thought or personalisation.

4.2 Levels of support. Many clients can use such a tool in self-help mode but along with the advice and <help> buttons within the program there could be other links to help from an adviser **via telephone or email. An on-line forum** was suggested by one end-user, who envisaged trading privacy for the sake of making advice to individuals available to all. Advisers generally felt that at least preliminary advice would be needed, especially with their current clients. The system needs to be designed with different levels of support needed by different groups of end-users in mind.

5. Target groups

5.1 Disadvantaged groups. Some groups will have much greater or more complex support needs. These include prisoners and ex-offenders, mental health service users, people with disabilities, the longer term unemployed, older workers or people returning to paid work after a break, refugees and asylum seekers and other speakers of English as a second language. Any CV builder that aimed to cover all such needs would have to offer multiple versions at least of the advice screens and examples within it, possibly in languages other than English.

5.2 The demands of the two **end-user groups** in the project did not suggest any major *qualitative* differences in the kind of support wanted. Practitioners, on the other hand, emphasise ease of use and clarity of language as key issues.

6. Equal opportunities

There are legal and ethical issues involved in supporting CV building, and end-users should not be encouraged to act in a way that is contrary to their interests as a member of a minority group. Advice and templates in such a program should be carefully checked to avoid this.

7. Associated training

The program should be simple enough in its design to require no training to use. However, there may be a trade-off between complex and sophisticated features and ease of use for the less IT literate. In any case practitioners will need to familiarise themselves thoroughly with the tools they intend to use daily, and if local customisation is taken seriously, this may well require some basic training or a foolproof system.

8. Ongoing development and support

This should not be as extensive as for some other more content-heavy types of program. That is unless a CV database and job matching service is provided when the on-going maintenance and development costs will, of course, be much higher.

Regular feedback and monitoring systems should be set up in any case to ensure that the program stays *au courant* with employers' practice, users' experiences and technological developments.

A. Introduction to the Project

A1. Objectives

A1.1 According to the **National Resource Service Delivery Plan** (Ufi/Learndirect, 25/07/04, para. 5.1.4) “Our consultation told us that, despite the plethora of material on CV writing being available and used by information and advice services, there was a near universal plea for ‘something better’. The principle ‘want’ was a product that clients could use themselves without the need for significant amounts of practitioner input.”

A1.1.2 Owing to the “diverse client groups” dealt with by information and advice services, it was “unlikely that a single approach to CV writing will be suitable. It may be necessary for the NRS to identify the main groups of clients likely to need the product, e.g. pre-level two clients or graduates. There are a number of CV packages available on the internet that are free for clients to use.”

A1.1.3 It was therefore proposed to “review existing CV writing packages with specialist user groups, establishing the ideal.” If no existing package could meet the specified criteria, suppliers would be invited to tender to develop a “fit for purpose” CV package.

A1.1.4 The objectives of the present project were essentially derived from this plan: to establish by consultation

- what practitioners working in this field wanted as a tool for themselves to use with their clients.
- what they thought those clients and other end-users (i.e. those who would use the package to support the writing of a personal CV) might need from an electronic CV builder program or web site that could be designed primarily for self-help use.
- what a sample of end-users wanted from such a resource.
- a draft specification for the CV builder package or packages, highlighting the key issues that need to be taken into account by any supplier or developer.
- a list of the main relevant suppliers who might bid for the development of such a program or web site, if it were put out to tender.

A2. Methodology

A2.1 The Key Issues Paper

A short paper, for internal purposes, was prepared by Marcus Offer, the project manager, on the issues raised in considering an electronic/on-line support package for CV writing, as a basis for developing the key questions to be asked in research and to formulate the questions for the questionnaire.

A2.2. The Questionnaire survey.

Three short questionnaires for two groups of end-users, one for those without level2 qualifications and one for those with level 2 and above, and a third for practitioners/advisers, were sent out, principally by post, accompanied by a prepaid reply envelope, by staff of the Centre for Guidance Studies (CeGS). The 20 items were drawn from the functions, features and services offered by existing CV writing programs and web sites and related computer-

assisted or web-based guidance facilities. All items involved the respondent selecting one of three responses – “Yes!” (= that’s important), “Yes” (= I would like that), or “No” (= that’s not important). Finally, each form of the questionnaire invited any further comments.

A2.2.1 The questionnaires for end-users contained a core of 20 items that were essentially the same, but worded more simply for the pre-level 2 group. Respondents were anonymous but were asked to identify their gender, employment status, and age; whether they had five or more GCSE passes at grades A-C or equivalent and whether they had used a CV Builder before. The original questionnaire forms are at Appendix 1 and the resulting data is discussed in sections 2.3 and 2.4.

A2.2.2 The questionnaires for pre-level 2 end-users were distributed by post to clients who had used the *nextstep* services in Northamptonshire and Leicester. CeGS contacted those who had used the service recently and who next steps had coded as pre-level 2 groups.

A2.2.3. Those for level 2+ users: further questionnaires were sent to potential end-users in Northamptonshire, Lincolnshire and Rutland. A number of additional questionnaires came in from other sources, including postings on web sites – see para. 2.2.6.

A2.2.4 The sample – end-users. While response rates are normal or better than those one would expect in a postal survey (20.63% for pre-level 2 users and 41.25% for level 2+ users) – the original commission was only for 100 clients – the actual numbers are, of course, still a very small sample of the total number of potential end-users (33 and 66). End-users are, as the NRS Delivery Plan noted, a particularly diverse group, so the representativeness of the sample must not be taken for granted, and the data was used, as intended, as a “reality check” on the data collected from practitioners – a means of identifying points at which questions should be asked, rather than a source of answers in themselves.

A2.2.5 The questionnaire for practitioners, a similar questionnaire with a core of 22 items, again largely addressing the same issues or features, was sent to a sample of practitioners designed to be broadly representative of practitioners in *nextstep* agencies as a whole, but drawn in the first instance from CeGS’ network of contacts in the East and West Midlands (eight partnerships or agencies cooperated with us in all). The original commission was for 200 questionnaires, but in practice considerably more were distributed. Questionnaires were sent out with a covering letter from the project manager. They were offered the same response format as for end-users, and were also invited to make open-ended comments. They were asked if they or their organisation currently used a CV builder, and if so, what features from the questionnaire were covered by it. We also asked about their level of qualification for guidance work.

A2.2.6 This initial sample was supplemented in three ways – firstly, the questionnaires were also posted on the advice-resources web site and drew some replies directly from there, and an article was written by the project manager in the June edition of *News and Views*, the newsletter of the National Association for Educational Guidance for Adults (NAEGA), where readers were pointed in the direction of the advice-resources web site and invited to complete a questionnaire. Finally, a copy of the questionnaires was also posted on the National Guidance Research Forum, a web site visited by practitioners, academics and consultants interested in research in guidance. A significant number of additional responses from practitioners in particular – about a third of the total – came from these additional outlets, and these were from a sample much more widely spread geographically than the original CeGS group targeted by a purely postal survey.

A2.2.7 Wider opportunities to comment. The survey thus, despite its initial focus on the Midlands, offered guidance practitioners across England more than one opportunity to comment on the ideal characteristics of a CV builder program – an underlying, if secondary,

purpose of the survey. Practitioners returned 102 questionnaires in all – a response rate of 44.35%. The original questionnaires are at appendix 1 and the resulting data are discussed in sections B1, 2 and 3.

A2.3 The Focus Groups

Two focus groups were carried out during May and June 2005 with practitioners from Leicester nextstep office and Birmingham and Solihull Connexions respectively and three further groups took place in the same period with end-users in Kettering Centre for the Unemployed, Leicester Nextstep office (pre-level 2) and University College Northampton (level 2+). In all, 22 end users and 8 practitioners were involved, and on average the group discussions each lasted about one and a half to two hours with a short break. The attendance of practitioners was rather poor, a number having to cancel at short notice because of other commitments. Backgrounds of participants were broadly similar to those involved in the questionnaire survey. The findings from the focus groups are at section C

A2.4 The Telephone Interviews

Because of this shortfall in focus group attendance, twelve practitioners who were unable to attend the groups to which they had been invited were followed up by telephone instead. Their comments were incorporated with those of the focus groups of practitioners of which they were intended to be part and their comments are merged with those in section C

The Findings

What do practitioners and end-users want from a CV Builder?

B. The Questionnaire Survey: results.

B1. Users who have not yet attained level 2 qualifications or equivalent

B1.1 Definition. The group was defined as those who, at the time of responding, did not have 5 or more GCSEs at grades A-C or an equivalent qualification or accreditation. This group was, for obvious reasons, more difficult to survey using a questionnaire: more of them were expected to have difficulties reading the questions and more were expected to need some help in completing it. We aimed, therefore, to use groups where the respondents would complete the questionnaire with the support of tutors or advisers. We also assumed that this group would be the one to receive priority and targeted support from staff in the *nextstep* agencies. They were, to that extent, also less likely to be using the sort of *self-help* resource envisaged in the project brief, at least on a self-help basis.

B1.2 Design. A questionnaire was designed with an appropriate reading level.¹ However, as the questions were essentially the same as those offered to end-users in the level 2+ group, it remained possible to compare broadly the responses of the two groups.

B1.3 Make-up of the group: gender, employment status, and age. Fourteen of the group (45%) were male and seventeen (55%) female. Eight were employed, and sixteen unemployed; four were full-time students, and there were three “others”. Two did not respond to the question about their status. There was a reasonable spread of ages but nobody was older than 49 and there was only one person under 20. Two said they had used a CV builder program or web site before, thirty had not, and one did not answer the question.

B1.4 Findings: What do they want from a CV Builder? Thirty- three questionnaires in all were successfully completed and returned. A listing of the questionnaire items for this group rank-ordered by their mean score for each item, is given on the next page. Also given, for comparison, are the total score of points for each item, and the total percentage of positive (Yes! or Yes) responses for that item.

B1.4.1 Yes to everything? End-users in this group are very positive about almost all the items listed – more than two-thirds of the group saying that they would like even the least preferred items at the bottom of the list to feature in a CV builder. This is to some extent the result of a questionnaire that offered two possible positive responses and only one negative one, but it does also endorse the original selection of items.

B1.4.2 What’s important? *The top eight items (down to and including item 2) plus items 7 and 17, are each rated “important” as opposed to merely things they “would like” by more than half the group.* These include a number of items that suggest “advice” e.g. on how best to apply for jobs, what to put in the blanks in a CV template, how to present one’s personal background, and “help” to write a covering letter. More technical features are the ability to save and store the CV to use again, changing it as needed, and models and examples of CVs on which to build one’s own. Half the group also think it important to have someone to check their CV for them (item 13).

¹ 86.5 Flesch Readability score and 3.4 on the Flesch-Kincaid Grade score

Pre-level 2 users' responses in approximate order of priority (N= 33)

Item	Mean²	Score³	%+⁴
4 General advice on how best to apply for jobs	2.61	86	100
14 Save my CV to use again when I apply somewhere else	2.61	84	97
6 Help to write a letter to the employer to go with my CV	2.58	83	97
1 Examples of CVs for different jobs and people	2.55	82	97
3 Advice on what to put in the blanks in these CVs	2.52	81	97
10 Advice about how to present my personal background	2.50	78* ⁵	97
16. Change my CV easily when I go for a different job	2.50	76*	94
2 Models for different CVs, that I can use to build my own	2.47	75*	94
13 Someone to check my CV for me before I send it	2.44	74*	94
8 To contact an adviser for help, if I get stuck	2.42	76	94
7 To have my CV matched to actual jobs	2.42	72	88
11 Advice about how to present gaps in my work history	2.41	75*	97
19 Use things I've already written about myself elsewhere	2.41	75*	97
15 Get the computer to check the spelling and grammar	2.41	71*	91
17 Store my CV on the computer (or web site) I'm using	2.35	63**	84
5 Help in filling out an application form,	2.33	71	91
9 Advice on paper or in a book, as well as on computer	2.27	65	85
20 Link to other web sites for more help if I need it	2.19	56*	78
12 Someone to write my CV after asking me the questions	2.19	45*	69
18 Take my CV away to work on it somewhere else	2.16	49*	69

² **Mean** = Average score for each item within this respondent group

³ **Score**. = Yes! (3), i.e. that's important, Yes (2), i.e. I would like that, or No (1), i.e. that's not important. The total score for each item is calculated as the sum of Yes! and Yes answers, minus the No answers. Thus for item 14, 21 respondents said it was important, and 11 that they would like that feature included, while only one said it was not important. The score for item 14 is therefore 21x3 (63) plus 11x2(22) minus 1 = 84. This score gives more weight to the number of positive responses. However, it takes no account of items where responses are missing altogether, so is used for extra information, not actual ranking

⁴ %+ = Percentage of respondents saying the item was important or they would like that feature.

⁵ * = one response missing; ** = two missing; *** = three **** = four missing

B2. Users with qualifications at level 2 or above

B2.1 Definition. These were more likely to be the group envisaged in the original project brief: those who are most likely to use a self-help tool of this kind and who may need to do so, because they are not able to access the full services of *nextstep* agencies for support in writing a CV or other job application materials. The questionnaire used was similar in content to that of the pre-level 2 group: each item number described essentially the same feature or function of a possible CV builder program, but the wording used allowed for more complex, and, possibly, more precise descriptions. However, the items are essentially comparable across the two groups.

B2.2 Make up of the group: educational level, gender, age and employment status. They included a wide range of qualifications and educational attainments, from five or more GCSEs at grades A-C or equivalent to postgraduate level. Thirty-seven were male and twenty-nine female; sixteen were employed, seven unemployed, and thirty-four were full-time students. Four described their employment status as “other” and five did not provide any response at all. More than a third of the group (25) were 19 or under, and just under a third (21) were in the 20-29 age band. The remainder (20) were fairly evenly spread across the older age bands including 4 in the 50-59 group, but none were older than that. The relative youth of the group and the significant number of full-time students in the group, may need to be taken into account when interpreting the findings. Twelve (out of 66) said they had used a CV builder program or web site before, but 51 had not. (Three did not respond to this question).

B2.3 Findings: What do they want from a CV Builder? Sixty-six completed questionnaires were returned. A listing of the questionnaire items for this group rank-ordered by their mean score for each item, is given on the next page. I also give, for comparison, the total score of points for each item and the total percentage of positive (Yes! or Yes) responses for that item.

B2.3.1 Yes to everything? As with the pre-level 2 group, there was a predominantly positive response. 80% or more of the group approved all the items in the questionnaire with the exception of item 12.. Two items, in particular, met with universal approval: the *provision of CV templates and advice on what to put in them*. (items 2 & 3). No one thought either of these was “not important”.

B2.3.2 What is important? *Seven of the top ten items (14,16,2,3,4,15 & 17) are rated “important” by more than half the group.* They include specific *advice on how to fill in blanks in a CV template* and *write a covering letter*, and general advice on *how to apply more effectively for jobs* (items 3, 4, and 6). The top of this list, however, focuses more on technical matters – the *CV templates* themselves, the facility to *save and adapt a personal CV* later, with computerised *spelling and grammar checks, storing the result on the computer or web site used* to create the CV. (items 2,14,16,15, & 17).

B2.3.3 What is less important?: Less than one in three of the group thought items 8, 9, and 12 were important and 19 of the 64 people (30%) who responded to item 9 – associated *paper-based advice* – said it was “not important”. Only question 12 – a *fee-paying CV writing services* – failed to get majority approval from the group, though nearly 14% still thought it important and an additional 27% liked the idea.

Level 2+ users' responses in approximate order of priority (N=66)

Item	Mean	Score	%+
14 Save my CV to use again when I apply somewhere else	2.69	177	98.5
16 Adapt my CV easily when I go for a different job	2.60	167*	98.4
2 Various templates that I can use to build my own CV	2.53	167	100
3 Advice on what to put in the blanks in these templates	2.53	167	100
4 General advice on applying more effectively for jobs	2.53	161	95.5
15 Get the computer to check the spelling and grammar	2.53	157	92.4
1 Examples of CVs for different jobs and types of people	2.47	161	98.5
6 Advice on writing a covering letter to an employer	2.40	152*	96.9
13 Someone to check my CV for me, before I send it	2.38	145	90.9
17 Store my CV on the computer (or web site) I'm using	2.38	139	86.3
18 Export my CV to work on it in another word processor	2.35	147*	95.4
10 Advice about how to present my personal background	2.35	141*	90.8
19 Build on data already saved from ..a personal portfolio	2.32	145	94.0
11 Advice about how to present gaps in my work history	2.29	135	87.9
7 To have my CV matched electronically to vacancies	2.27	128	83.3
20 Link to other programs/web sites for advice on job search	2.20	127*	87.7
5 Help in filling out an application form, when required	2.17	121	83.3
8 To be able to email or phone an adviser for more help	2.02	107	80.3
9 Advice on paper or in a book, as well as on computer	1.94	86**	70.3
12 A CV writing service, paying a fee, if necessary	1.55	24	40.9

NB. Some items have been shortened for reasons of space: for the full text of each item see the original questionnaire at appendix 1 For a note on definitions of mean, score and %+ symbols see footnote to the pre-level 2 users group listing of ranked items on page 11

B3. Guidance practitioners and advisers

B3.1 Definition. The emphasis was on any practitioner who would be likely to use any CV builder or similar resource in their work with clients to support their choices of learning and work, and who would therefore have views on what they would want to use themselves and what they thought their clients, or potential clients, needed in this context. The overwhelming majority of respondents were from nextstep agencies.

B3.2 The make-up of the group.

B3.2.1 The qualifications question was answered by just over half the respondents, and just over half of these had a qualification in guidance: 27 had a Diploma in Careers Guidance Qualification, 33 an NVQ3 in advice and guidance, and 34 an NVQ4. These categories overlap to some extent and are certainly not mutually exclusive. [15 respondents indicated explicitly that they had none of the specified qualifications. 22 showed that they had NVQ3 only and another 17 said “yes” to NVQ3 but did not say if they also had DCG or NVQ4.]

B3.2.2 Of the 79/102 who responded to the question as to whether they already used a CV builder, 25 (32%) had experience of this, while the majority, 54 (69%), had none.

B3.2.3 While the majority of the group (63/102) came from the Midlands nextstep agencies cooperating with CeGS, and 12 were from the Learndirect call centre. The rest (27) were much more widely spread nationally, and responded to questionnaires posted on the web sites.

B3.3 The Findings: what do they want from a CV Builder? One hundred and two responses were received. The items are listed in priority order on the next page.

B3.3.1 A positive response. Practitioners are nearly as positive as the end-user groups: more than 70% say all but item 12 (a *fee-paying CV writing service*) are either important or desirable, and at least 80% would like all but three of the items. Again, it seems that we have identified a set of desirable features and functions.

B3.3.2 What is important? The top ten items (numbers 2 to 18 inclusive in the table on the next page) are all given a positive rating by over 90% of the group, scored as “important” by more than half, and as unimportant by less than one in ten respondents. At the top of the list are items to do with the provision of *CV templates* for various types and levels of CV, with *examples* for different levels of job and types of people, and advice on *how to fill in the blanks in such templates* and how to write a *covering letter*. Technical items favoured include the facility to *save personal data and templates for later use* and adaptation, the *ability to export a CV in various formats* to other word processing systems, and *spelling and grammar checking*. There is also approval for the facility to *customise and localise the tool for specific local circumstances and groups*. Finally, there is a group of items to do with more general advice for *users who have special questions*, e.g. about how to present disabilities or mental health problems or a criminal record, and how to *deal with gaps in the work history*, from whatever causes.

B3.3.3 What is not important? Apart from item 12, the lowest priority items are to do with running a *CV surgery* (nearly 1 in 5 say this is “not important”), *checking that the user is really ready to write a CV*, and providing associated *advice or exercises in a printed format* (approximately one in four regarded these two items as “not important”).

Practitioners' questions in approximate order of priority (N=102)			
Item	Mean	Score	%+
2 A selection of templates for the types and levels of CV.....	2.75	274	97
1 Example CVs for different levels of job and types of people,	2.75	268*	95
17 Offer spelling and grammar checks	2.71	268	96
10 Advice for users who have special questions	2.65	264	97
3 Notes on what to put in the blanks in these templates.....	2.59	250	93
6 Advice on writing a covering letter to an employer.....	2.59	248*	92
16 Save personal data and completed templates to use again....	2.55	252	96
11 Advice about how to deal with gaps... in the work history	2.55	252	96
20 Offer to export the CV in various formats.....	2.50	236*	92
18 Be easy to customise for local circumstances or groups	2.45	231	92
5 Help and advice on filling out an application form	2.32	211	87
7 To match the completed CV to relevant job vacancies	2.32	205****89	
21 Allow you to build on data ...from ... personal portfolios	2.31	215	92
19 Offer to store the CV on the computer (or web site) used	2.31	208	86
22 Link to web sites offering advice on job search and application	2.30	212**	91
14 Encouragement to link back to self-assessment exercises	2.27	213*	92
4 General advice on applying more effectively for jobs	2.27	210	89
8 An email or telephone link to an adviser for more help.....	2.14	190	86
9 Associated advice or exercises on a printed worksheet or ...book	2.03	155**	76
13 An on-line CV checking service or “CV surgery”	2.01	167	81
15 To check that the user is really ready to write a CV....	1.99	141***	72
12 A (fee-paying) CV writing service , for those who want it	1.57	46	44

NB. Some items have been shortened for reasons of space: for the full text of each item see the original questionnaire at appendix 1. For a note on definitions of mean, score and %+ symbols see footnote to the pre-level 2 users group listing of ranked items on page 11

B3.4 Lifelong Learning Advisers.

B3.4.1 A group of 12 lifelong learning advisers from Learndirect's call centres was included in the group and their responses make up part of the data on the previous page. However, because their context is somewhat different from that of the face-to-face adviser, we also lifted out their data to see if it was significantly different in any way.

B3.4.2 In the main their priorities do not differ radically from those of other advisers elsewhere, **with the possible exception of items 4 and 22**, (dealing respectively with the value of *general advice on job application* and *links to web sites* giving such advice), both of which they appear to rate somewhat more highly than do other practitioners. It may be that the experience of the on-line adviser, for whom the facility to provide a safety net of advice to the at-a-distance client, in particular via an on-line link, makes items 4 and 22 seem more practically valuable, given also that they may more often refer clients to on-line resources, whereas the face-to-face practitioner may have other, non-ICT-based, ways to fill this gap.

B3.4.3 A third exception is item 20 – the facility to *export one's CV for working on in other word processing formats* – which they rate somewhat lower than do other practitioners. The reason for this difference is not obvious.

B3.4.4 Caveat: a very small sample. Any "reasons" must be treated as purely speculative. The data are also merely suggestive, and not reliable, in the light of the very small sample of learning advisers involved here. On the whole, however, the result suggests that a tool that meets the requirements of practitioners generally, is likely to meet most of the concerns of on-line advisers, too. For the full listing of learning advisers' priorities see below.

Lifelong Learning Advisers'⁶ responses in approximate order of priority (N=12)			
Item	Mean	Score	%+
2 A selection of templates for the types and levels of CV.....	2.83	34	100
6 Advice on writing a covering letter to an employer.....	2.83	34	100
1 Example CVs for different levels of job and types of people.....	2.75	33	100
11 Advice about how to deal with gaps.....in the work history	2.75	33	100
3 Notes on what to put in the blanks in these templates....	2.67	32	100
16 Save personal data and completed templates to use again.....	2.67	32	100
17 Offer spelling and grammar checks	2.67	30	92
22 Link to web sites offering advice on job search and application	2.58	31	100
10 Advice for users who have special questions	2.58	29	92
4 General advice on applying more effectively for jobs	2.50	30	100
21 Allow you to build on data already saved ..in personal portfolios	2.42	29	100
14 Encouragement to link back to self-assessment exercises.....	2.36	26*	100
5 Help and advice on filling out an application form	2.33	26	92
18 Be easy to customise for local circumstances	2.33	24	83
19 Offer to store the CV on the computer (or web site) used	2.33	24	83
8 An email or telephone link to an adviser for more help.....	2.25	24	92
9 Associated advice/exercises on a printed worksheet or.. book	2.09	19*	82
20 Offer to export the CV in various formats.....	2.08	17	67
13 An on-line CV checking service or “CV surgery”	2.00	20	83
7 To match the completed CV to relevant job vacancies	1.92	15	67
15 To check that the user is really ready to write a CV.....	1.83	16	75
12 A (fee-paying) CV writing service , for those who want it	1.42	1	33

* = Missing one item response NB. Some items have been shortened for reasons of space: for the full text of each item see the original questionnaire at appendix 1. For a note on definitions of mean, score and %+ symbols see note to the pre-level 2 users group listing of ranked items on page 9

⁶ Lifelong Learning Advisers employed by the Learndirect call centres. ..

B3.5 Does it make a difference if a practitioner or their organisation currently uses a CV builder?

B3.5.1 Do you use a CV Builder? Practitioners were asked to indicate (Yes/No) on their questionnaires whether they or their organisation already used a CV Builder. The table on the next page shows a comparison between the rank order of items between those who responded Yes or No to this question. Only 79 practitioners answered this question (none of these were the twelve Lifelong Learning Advisers from the Learndirect call centre, as the question was not put to them) and of these, only 25 said “yes”.

B3.5.2 Explanations? This, in itself is of interest. Two explanations spring to mind, but neither has been tested: it may be that there is some evidence of a need to be met in this area, given the apparent enthusiasm with which practitioners and end users endorsed the features of an ideal CV Builder – the majority thus appear not to have access to a tool they would like to use and whose functions and features they regard as important. More than one practitioner commented that such a tool “would be a great addition to resources.”

B3.5.3 On the other hand, it may be that current guidance practice in the nextstep agencies makes it difficult for advisers/agencies to use a tool, in their current practice and with their target clients, which is seen as primarily a self-help resource for use by those who do *not* have access to the enhanced services of an adviser. Finally, it may be that for the non-user group, support for CV writing is a less significant part of their work, hence there has been less provision of related resources. One respondent commented that “CV building would be a new area of expertise to us”.

B4. Qualitative data: from the questionnaires

All three questionnaires offered open-ended opportunities to add any further comments to the questionnaire responses, after completing the forced choice questions.

B4.2 End-users

Only three or four users offered any comments at all. Of these one was about item 12 – the suggestion of a fee-paying CV writing service.

I think it's more important that it comes from you (unless suffering from dyslexia (sic) or similar problem)

This echoes some comments made by practitioners (below). The same commentator then added the suggestion that for such users (dyslexics and similar) “**spoken instructions**” might be offered. Another underlined the need for **security** of personal information, if a CV is to be saved on computer.

B4.3 Additional Features?

B4.3.1 Practitioners were much more forthcoming. They were asked specifically “**Are there any other features you think should form part of a CV Builder but which we have not listed here?**”

B4.3.2 Responses which covered aspects not specific to existing questionnaire items included:

- help with visual **layout and style**, “colours and design coordination”, length and fonts. Drafts should be available in “alternative fonts and styles”.
- a thesaurus, with “**sets of phrases to pick from**” and “buzz words”. This overlaps in part with the suggestion of lists of skills people may have from previous jobs, “home working or care situations” that may otherwise be overlooked, and examples of “evidence” of skills.
- “a list of the ten most **common CV writing mistakes**”.
- “**case studies**” – to supplement example CVs.
- **voice activation** and text-to-speech facilities, as well as the use of symbols or pictures used as an aid, which “do not come out in the printed CV” but are helpful to those with certain disabilities.
- **confidentiality and security** were emphasised as important issues not specifically addressed in the questionnaire itself, by more than one person.

B4.4 Other comments: Technical Issues

B4.4.1 Several respondents stressed the need for the technology to be accessible in various ways: Most clients, said one practitioner, “*have problems with the IT aspects so need IT support as well as the links to an adviser*”. Any technological resource, but particularly one that is to store personal data, “*needs to be robust and not liable to fail*”.

B4.4.2 Others commented that they would prefer it to be “on-line rather than software” possibly for reasons of access, too.

B4.4.3 However, defining who the target group(s) are is quite important – some can get by with minimal support: *“For the IT literate we allow access to Word and the Word Résumé wizard and have books and our own leaflets giving samples of layout and advice on what to include etc.”*

B4.4.4 But a CV builder must also be made *“accessible to people using a range of ...technology”* - the old issue of compatibility across different types of hardware, Macs and PCs, perhaps, but the writer may also have been thinking of mobile phones...?

B4.5 Other comments: Support Issues

B4.5.1 Practitioners have a variety of attitudes to the level of support required for such a tool, over and above technical issues. The following respondent expresses one end of the scale:

“If one is going to use a CV Builder and no help is required, I would rather see a straightforward programme that enables information to be gathered, unformatted and then displayed in a preformatted CV. All other CVs should be produced under supervision and with one-to-one guidance. I would fear that the CV builder would dispense with the support required.”

B4.5.2 Another essentially agreed: *“Only standardised material”* should be saved on the computer or web site, *“linked to guidance about sifting and selecting additional appropriate material for an appropriate application.”*

B4.5.3 Other respondents clearly differed, but some see a mix of services both on- and off-line, making up the process. *“Some of the responses provided do not reflect our service. We do not include some as part of CV service: we operate them separately.”*

B4.5.4 The idea of support via an email or phone link from the CV writer to an adviser, received mixed reviews in comments on Question 8. One thought it *“ideal, but not always feasible”*, another suggested that Learndirect and the nextstep agencies themselves already provided links to an adviser by email and telephone.

B4.6 Other comments: Content Issues

B4.6.1 The content *“needs to be more than just a list of headings,”* wrote one respondent. *“Aspects clients struggle with (1) understanding, identifying and presenting generic skills (2) the need to focus CV on specific job/occupational area; (3) how to adapt CV for career change (4) how to condense many jobs and (5) how to ‘cut out’ the irrelevant”.*

B4.6.2 **Templates and examples** are endorsed for use *“with care”* by many commentators, provided that they open the user’s eyes to the fact that there are many ways of doing it and thus *“generating ideas”* as well as demonstrating what is meant by more abstract advice. Others worried that users would simply use examples to *“avoid doing it themselves and the resulting cvs would be too formulaic”*. Templates were similarly criticised by some respondents: *“We see too many template-based CVs that don’t suit the individual or the job in terms of style, content or focus”* and lack *“individuality”*.

B4.6.3 Targeting of the CV is stressed by several of those who added comments: “*It needs to be stressed that CVs need to be targeted at each application*”, wrote one adviser “*The vacancy should inform the CV*”, said another. The emphasis should be on using the “*person specifications to inform the content of key skills required (working backwards from job adverts)*”. At the same time, advice on sending *speculative CVs* is needed.

B4.7 Other comments: Customisation and Flexibility

B4.7.1 How flexible can it be? Eight people chose to comment on the importance of this: “*There needs to be a degree of flexibility in the original package*”, wrote one respondent, “*which will then enable users to customise it and to adapt it to meet their individual requirements at the time – whether it be end-user or practitioner /individual guidance issue / group sessions / specific career or general on spec approach. Can one package be that flexible?*”

B4.7.2 Too prescriptive? Others indicated that their reasons for dissatisfaction with, or non-use of, existing CV writing programs were based on a perception that these programs “*rarely have the flexibility to customise a CV to an individual’s requirements*”. Another said, “*We have always avoided using a CV Builder because they can be so prescriptive. A CV Builder should reflect the individual – will a CV builder end up with us all sounding the same, using the same phrases – and possibly overselling someone?*”

B5. Conclusions from the questionnaire data

B5.1 Wide publicity. The project has stimulated debate about the uses and features of a computer-/web-based CV builder program. Despite the relatively small sample of respondents, and the initial focus on the Midlands, a large number of practitioners from other areas have been alerted to the issues and offered an opportunity to make an input.

B5.2 General Approval of the featured items. While it is not strictly possible to compare all items across the three questionnaires as there were slight differences in wording, the items were nevertheless describing the same features in most cases (practitioners were asked two extra questions that only concerned them). *With the exception of item 12 (a CV writing service), all the items contained in the questionnaires were based on features and functions offered in existing programs and web sites, and were approved by the overwhelming majority* of both practitioners and end-users. This suggests that we got the initial listing right, if not necessarily complete, and that features offered by a wide range of existing resources are probably based on what the customers want. If that is so, the questionnaire items might be turned (with the addition of one or two items from section 4, such as confidentiality and security features) directly into a specification for the content and functionality of such a tool.

B5.3 Agreed items. A majority in every group put the following features among the top ten of their list of items and these should probably form the core of any resource:

- **Templates and examples** of CVs for different levels of job and types of person along with advice on what to put in the blanks in the templates (items 1,2, & 3)
- **The option to save the CV** once created for later use and adaptation (users' item 14, practitioners' item 16)
- Advice and help with **writing a covering letter** to an employer (item 6)
- One of the questions asked of practitioners only, but regarded as *important* by 57% of them, concerned the ease of **customisation for local circumstances or groups** (item 18)
- The majority of practitioners and level 2+ users and 50% of pre-level 2 users thought **spelling and grammar checking facilities** *important* (users' item 15, practitioners' item17)

B5.4 Important to some. Some features appeared to be "*important*" to some groups but were given only an "*I would like that*" rating from others.

- An overwhelming majority of end-users appeared to feel quite strongly that **general advice on how to apply effectively for jobs** (item 4) would, for them, be a key feature of a CV builder program (it was top of the list for pre-level 2 users), though only just over a third of practitioners felt so.
- **Advice on how to present one's personal background** was thought important by most pre-level 2 users and a similar item (**advice for users who have special questions** to do with disability, offending, etc.) was thought important by most practitioners, but level 2+ users were slightly less urgent about this, though still generally positive to the idea.

- Over 90 % of end-users thought a **CV checking service** (a CV “Surgery”) a good idea, and about half thought it was also *important*, but only 19% of practitioners thought so, although a further 62 % agreed it was a good idea. This may have something to do with the comment made by one of them: “ What happens if the ‘doctor’ says it’s fine and the person does not get the job?” Another thought that “LearnDirect can do this”.
- An associated item (11) on **how to present gaps in the work history** got a high priority from practitioners, but slightly lower, though still positive, ratings from end-users.
- Most practitioners thought that help was needed with **filling out an application form as well** as building a CV, but this seemed to be a rather lower priority for end-users
- **Exporting one’s CV to another word processor or system** was also thought important by practitioners, but less highly rated by end-users.

B5.5 Low priorities. Only one or two items were clearly low priority.

- **A CV writing service** (paying a fee if necessary) did not get majority approval from either practitioners or level 2+ users – over half of both groups thought it *not important*. The item 12 on the pre-level 2 users questionnaire was somewhat differently worded and cannot be accurately compared, but for them, too, the idea of “someone to write my CV after asking me the questions” was thought *not important* by nearly a third of the group (about the same number who said it was *important*). So item 12 – a CV writing service – seems to be the lowest priority.
- Also less favoured were “**Advice on paper or in a book...**” and “**Associated advice or exercises on a printed worksheet or... book**” (Item 9), despite the common prevalence of such materials in nextstep agencies. Perhaps it is precisely because it is so often provided in printed format that it is not seen as essential to include it in the electronic resource as well?

C. The focus groups and telephone interviews

It was intended that the focus groups should provide qualitative evidence to illuminate and supplement the questionnaire data. This is what they did.

C1 Pre-level 2 end-users

C1.1 Make-up: There were twelve participants in all, equally balanced in terms of gender, and with a broad spread of people in their twenties, thirties and forties. One of the groups included two speakers of English as a second language – refugees from Kosovo and Somalia - and eight were unemployed at the time, the rest being either in full-time study, employment (1), or voluntary work (2).

C1.2 Previous experience of writing CVs. Seven had recent experience (in the last two years) of developing a CV and most had received some support in doing so, including from nextstep agencies, which they described positively. One had also given support to others in completing a CV. Other group members had not tackled the issue for many years, if at all, and/or needed to create a CV soon.

C1.3 Experience of CV builders or similar systems. The groups started with some discussion of what a CV was (defined by them as “primarily a tool used to apply for jobs or college courses”.) and the context in which it would be used. Some employers specifically required an application form, not a CV, it was suggested.

C1.4 A number had had experience creating a CV in an electronic format, using templates, but several others appeared nervous about using such a tool, and would prefer to use a normal word processor program instead. One participant preferred to type or write it by hand, because, as she said, “the Internet is not my thing – it terrifies me.” One regular user felt it was “much easier” to use a CV builder than a “template” because of the helpfulness of prompts through the program. Another felt the program he had used was “useless” because it made presumptions that made it harder to use – the program in question was one he had bought off the shelf in a computer store. Yet another felt that the product of a web-based CV builder would not look as smart as one produced with the help of an adviser. One or two of the doubters changed their minds during the course of the group discussion.

C1.5 Others were more impressed, including one who particularly cited “information on what format to use” as something that was important to him. Another had liked using Hotmail CV help and had radically changed his CV as a result, in order to tailor it to the work he was looking for.

C1.6 Key Features. Members of the groups endorsed a significant number of the features ranked highly by pre-level two end-users who completed the questionnaire survey, and four or five picked the following items from the questionnaire as their key preferences:

- ***General advice on how best to apply for jobs***
There was some consensus on the need to cover the whole job application process, including covering letters, application forms and job search
- ***Examples of CVs for different jobs and people***
“Real life examples of good and bad CVs” was one way of putting it
- ***Models for different CVs that I can use to build my own***
Group members wanted to be provided with different CV formats, with clear explanations, guidance on their use, and templates.

- ***Advice on what to put in the blanks in these CVs***

Group members wanted visible but optional help or prompts at each stage of the program: It was also suggested that additional help functions should be available for those with e.g. visual and other impairments, including a text-to-speech facility and simpler language.

- ***Someone to check my CV for me before I send it***
- ***Advice on how to present gaps in my work history***
- ***Help to write a letter to the employer to go with my CV***

One person also wanted ***Advice on paper or in a book***. This might also include a booklet on how to use the CV Builder itself.

Also valued and identified as important items from the questionnaire were:

- ***Spellchecking, dictionary and thesaurus***
- ***Advice on how to deal with sensitive issues such as mental health service use***
- ***Links to other web sites for job matching and similar facilities***

C1.7 Other Features:

- One person suggested that a key difficulty he had in completing a CV was in remembering specific dates and lengths of time with particular employers. Though it is, perhaps, not clear how such a need could be supported in a CV Builder, he suggested that some kind of facility to help verify information would be helpful, such as a link to Friends Reunited for reminders of school dates.
- Another suggested a specific section for voluntary work was needed in the CV.

C1.8 Support and guidance needed.

C1.8.1 Users clearly valued, and many wanted, face-to-face support, including face-to-face guidance on how to use the CV builder, particularly “someone you can ask questions of, to help with wording”. Individuals might have difficulty putting some things into words and such a problem would not be helped by on-line communication.

C1.8.2 There was some agreement also that **general guidance** prior to the writing of the CV would be beneficial, building self-awareness and self-confidence. One group member felt this would be more successfully delivered as a development course or class on a face-to-face basis than on-line or as part of a computer program. Another agreed that in such a context, individuals could learn with an adviser how to navigate the CV writing process and the CV builder software, and hence be more likely on subsequent occasions to use it on their own. One thought that individuals lacking in self-confidence would benefit from face-to-face help to identify skills and deal with gaps in the employment record. So would those with dyslexia or general learning difficulties.

C1.8.2 One group particularly thought there was a need for the program or web site to build in some kind of **checklist** that would identify and **refer** people with special issues, including those to do with mental health service use, ex-offenders, refugees/asylum seekers, to specialist services for additional support.

C1.8.3 There was, both groups suggested, a key requirement to acknowledge and support **speakers of English as a second language**.

C1.9 Technical Issues.

C1.9.1 Clearly the technical process also should be user-friendly and not demand high level of computer literacy, and some individuals may need support. Provision for users with some disabilities has already been mentioned.

C1.9.2 Online versus CD-ROM: there was considerable discussion of this issue in both groups. On the whole the preference in both groups was for the facility to *save* any personal CV produced off-line, to disk, for security reasons, if nothing else. This tended to be the view among some female participants. One of the men was less concerned, suggesting the advantages of having an on-line CV for job matching or which employers could access, although another was sceptical of this happening in his experience. In principle, however, this group was in favour of employers having access. The other group went for a web-based tool overall, in part as being more likely to be up to date, while the first group settled for a system that offered a choice of formats – web-base or CD-ROM. Those with less technical confidence might prefer the latter.

C1.9.3 Security and confidentiality were important components of this debate, and concerns about them were evident, especially with regard to the saving of data. Password protection, no personal contact information beyond an email, and encoding, were also considered factors that would make it easier to consider saving a CV on-line, particularly if it was to be accessed by potential employers. Otherwise saving to a CD was seen as more confidential.

C2. Level 2+ end-users

C2.1 Make-up of the group. There was only one focus group with potential level 2+ end-users. All ten members of this group were following a full-time higher education course at University College, Northampton, although one had recently completed her final year. The group comprised seven women and three men. All were under 30, with the exception of one female participant who was in her fifties. One male participant indicated that he had mild learning difficulties and was the only male participant in the 20-29 age group.

C2.2. Previous experience of writing CVs. All of the group had written CVs in the past, some as many as 20 or more, although only a minority had written a CV recently. Most had had little help or advice in doing so outside of friends and family, though one had attended a New Deal programme that included CV writing paper-based resources and a checking service.

C2.3 When is a CV *not* appropriate? Four of the group spoke of advertisements, which specifically ask for an application form instead, and of the need for demonstration and audition in areas involving special talents such as music and art. Another had experience of temporary work agencies and claimed these prefer to interview applicants before constructing a CV appropriate to the companies to whom they are to be sent. One respondent had also been encouraged to use her professional development portfolio for teaching as a substitute for a CV.

C2.4 Experience of CV builders or similar systems. None had used a CV builder before, though one had used CV templates given to him by a *nextstep* agency, and, another had used the Internet for “advice on structure and headings”. They appeared generally open to the idea of such a tool.

C2.5 Key Features. The group particularly picked out the need for *information on constructing covering letters* as a vital feature (item 6 on the questionnaire), and made it clear they wanted corresponding templates and examples of good practice in this area. In addition, at least four or five members of the group identified the following features from the questionnaires as the most important:

- *Examples of CVs for different jobs and types of people*
- *Advice on what to put in the blanks*
- *General advice on applying more effectively for jobs*
- *To have my CV matched electronically to vacancies*
- *Get computer to check the spelling and grammar*
(They stressed the need for any spellchecker to user British, not US English)
- *Store my CV on the computer (or web site) I'm using*

Three members of the group also included as one of their five most important features:

- *Various templates that I can use to build my own CV*
- *Adapt my CV easily when I go for a different job*

They also wanted a *CV checking service* among other forms of support

C2.6 Other Features. Apart from the matching of CVs to vacancies, these are all items from the top half of the list selected by similar end-users in the questionnaire survey. There were one or two additional features:

- One participant also said he would like the system to give advice on how to phrase various aspects of his CV *“in order to avoid discrimination and stereotyping.”*
- Another was concerned about the CVs becoming too standardised and wanted to stress *flexibility* for users to personalise different formats particularly for experiences that don't fit into a particular option of section of the program.
- The group also wanted a product that provided an *“initial checklist or diagnostic tool to select different options such as prompts and general advice, i.e. advice on phrasing and content”*.

C2.7 Support and guidance needed.

C2.7.1 Preliminary Advice. When asked if they would like advice before constructing a new CV, the majority of respondents agreed that it would depend on the circumstances, specifically how much time was available to write the CV and how much they wanted the job. One of the younger male participants preferred to ‘get on with it’, whilst the other stated he would like a ‘skip option’ for guidance within the CV Builder program that could be used if more time was available. Another respondent commented that she would find it useful to have advice about how much detail she should give about different job experiences.

C2.7.2 How should it be delivered? The group wanted a range of support options – email, telephone, on-line forum and face-to-face. A significant minority, largely female, suggested that they would welcome or prefer face-to-face support to on-line help. Their reasons differed slightly: one individual expressed concern over the security of the Internet, explaining a previously experienced incident over identity fraud, although she did concede that ‘online is okay if it is quick’; and the other remarked that ‘it wouldn't feel right over the Internet’. Another preferred face-to-face guidance for advice on ‘how to pick out skills for specific jobs’, but did not mind online help with a telephone number for shorter queries.

C2.7.3 On-line help? Seven members of the group would be satisfied with online help if needed while writing their CV. Two of these preferred online telephone number to email, however, in order to seek advice on specific queries, while one noted that email would be ‘easier’ for her. Two respondents expressed enthusiasm for a live **on-line forum** where they could post questions and receive quick responses, noting that the answers would be in the public domain and possibly help other users. They also noted as another advantage that an Internet forum would be available out of office hours.

C2.8 Technical Issues: Security and Confidentiality.

C2.8.1 The group were obviously more confident about IT than the pre-level 2 groups had been. However, there was debate between three groups members over whether the CV could be safely stored on-line or not. Concerns expressed by the older female group member over the possibility of Internet scams and identity fraud, were disparaged by two younger male respondents who did not believe that these were viable issues. One said he believed the Internet to be ‘the most secure form out there...there is less security in trusting a person with your CV because you don't know what they'll do with it’. The other remarked that there is a ‘big stigma’ against the Internet and that he would have no problems putting his details online. When challenged on how he would determine that a website was trustworthy, he concluded that he would look for a known name, a high quality site and a disclaimer indicating that the site would not email you asking for personal and/or login details.

C2.8.2 Online or CD-ROM? In the end, the majority of the group said they would like both options available. An on-line version, it was felt would be more likely to be “up-to-date and accessible” unless one did not have access to the Internet. If storing CVs online, this should be accompanied by the use of username and password technology and clear information about the risks of making CVs available online before the option was selected. The group agreed that both options would be useful – one for storing the CV online and the other allowing the user to print and/or download to disk or hard drive. An information leaflet should accompany a CD on how to use the program.

C3 Guidance practitioners and advisers

C3.1 Who they were, and what they do.

Eight advisers took part in the actual focus groups and a further 12 who were unable to attend on the day were interviewed later, individually, by telephone, using the same stimulus questions. The responses from all participants in either format are summarised here, since they were originally intended to be part of the same process.

C3.1.1 The make-up of the groups. The group members and telephone interviewees comprised a range of different roles among advisers working with adult clients of various kinds: a majority were advisers/ careers advisers working in *nextstep* agencies or related organisations in the Midlands from Staffordshire, Birmingham and Solihull to Leicester, Derbyshire and Lincolnshire. One of these had previously worked on the Learndirect help line. All were involved with adult clients, mainly over the age of 20 and many, naturally, were focused on clients without level 2 qualifications, often with basic skills needs and sometimes learning difficulties or English as a second language. At least two were FE college-based advisers, working with students, including adults, and another was a basic skills tutor in a community college. There were several involved specifically with groups of disadvantaged clients – one an employment officer working for a national charity with individuals with visual impairments, another developing employment skills with ex-offenders on probation and another working with prisoners themselves; one helped to run a city centre drop-in centre, another was an assistant librarian/adviser at a “Learning Shop”.

C3.1.2 Client Groups. With one exception, participants almost all, commonly provide CV support of various kinds to a wide range of client groups. These included refugees and asylum seekers, individuals from EU member states who are seeking work, “high level professionals”, the unemployed including long-term unemployed, recent graduates, people who have been made redundant (often after a significant period in the same job). Clients vary also by geographical area – there are urban and rural areas and former mining towns. “People come with varying expectations of what a CV is going to do for them” said one.

C3.1.3 The Context of Use. The majority of the group members and telephone interviewees provided a **CV service** or support of some kind, usually designed to develop CVs from scratch or at least to build the confidence and understanding to do so. It appeared, in fact, to be a fairly major element of some advisers’ work. One said that in total, 6-8 CVs are completed a day with clients (the vast majority needing a complete update or having to start from scratch). Some might use a **group context, training programme, or a course on CV development** to get the message across, rather than one-to-one guidance, but most gave one-to-one support at least to pre-level 2 clients, and other participants also provided a “CV checking service” within a wider guidance process.

C3.1.4 Roles and time. Advisers broadly agreed that their role was to help clients ensure their CV was appropriately tailored, contained enough information (but only that which is relevant to the post) and formatted so that it has an immediate impact on the employer. However, at least one adviser warned that his organisation was “only funded to provide one session to each individual meeting the criteria and therefore discussions are constrained by time.” CV writing can be “a lengthy process” especially where the adviser is involved in “drawing out evidence of skills, etc.”

C3.1.5 Covering letters. Many services also provide support with covering letters. One group member indicated that clients often use their service to develop a generic CV that is then accompanied by a tailored covering letter.

C3.1.6 Application forms. Application forms proved a more contentious issue. There were mixed views amongst some in the groups regarding the level of support their organisation was prepared to provide in relation to the preparation of application forms and one adviser claimed that their organisation was reluctant to assist with application forms for fear of the repercussions in the event that the client does not get the job. In contrast, another said their organisation was prepared to support clients with application forms and had not experienced any complaints from clients who were unsuccessful in their application. Many advisers argued that the only time when a CV is not appropriate is in instances when an employer states that a CV should not be submitted as part of the application process. Employers that stipulate that candidates should submit an application form only tend to be equal opportunity employers, who do so to ensure overall uniformity in the style in which applicants are presented. In instances where employers only require an application form, many advisers agreed that a detailed CV provides a useful reference point from which the relevant information can be drawn.

C3.2 Previous experience of using a CV Builder.

C3.2.1 Unsatisfactory experiences. Rather fewer had experience of using a full CV builder and, where they did, tended to be critical of the relative “inflexibility”, “rigidity” and “simplistic” nature of such a tool. Clients were, for example, offered a facility to enter factual information but “not to explore their personal qualities”. Several said they were also “too difficult to use”. One commented that those systems she had seen appeared to be “more suitable for school leavers.”

C3.2.2 Preference for paper-based materials?. There were various combinations of IT and paper-based systems mentioned by advisers. Most advisers in fact used paper-based resources, booklets and handouts, sometimes supplemented by computer-based templates or similar. Where more complex computer-based tools had been used, advisers often could not remember much about them, not even the name.

C3.2.3 CV3 and others? One adviser’s agency used a “**CV pack** with individuals who are IT literate and happy to work on their CVs on their own, after an initial advice session and with a final review that includes checking the CV”. For other clients the centre has **CV templates**, which clients complete and which are then reviewed by an adviser offering “help on more complex sections”. IT facilities are available in this organisation for use, again with adviser help, and IT training may be suggested if the client has limited skills. A well-known tool (**CV3**, from Careersoft), mentioned by more than one adviser, was considered by one agency too “limiting” because clients were unable to alter the way it appeared, and although it offered templates including instructions on how to complete each section, it lacked “more sophisticated functions such as suggested words and phrases which the adviser who mentioned it felt would be beneficial. According to another, one of the major problems with CV 3 is that “neither the organisation nor the individual can make alterations to the document. It is important to be able to alter the look of the document and the layout to suit the client and the post they are applying for. It is important to ensure that the client is able to expand the text boxes/sections to accommodate everything they need to say and delete sections that are inappropriate”.⁷ One adviser’s organisation used, instead, a series of three simple templates on the word processor: generic CV, functional CV and targeted CV. One other participant had

⁷ This is a partially inaccurate description of CV3: the program does not print out headings for sections that are not used, and offers the *tutor or adviser* freedom to create and add any number of their own templates with their own advice notes to aid users, and delete headings in existing ones, but does not give access to this without a password which is normally held by an adviser. It does offer a facility to export finished CV files to another word processor so that layouts can be changed and made more sophisticated. But it is aimed primarily at users who have either not done a CV before or not used a word processor, so is kept at a fairly basic level for its target group.

access to CV 3 but had chosen not to use it, again preferring to use simple templates. Another organisation had access to a **CD ROM designed to explain the purpose of a CV**, but this had not been well used because it contained an inappropriate amount and level of English for the majority of client groups. Again, **simple templates in Microsoft Word** had replaced the CD ROM in this organisation.

C3.2.4 Locally developed systems. However, it appeared that several agencies had developed their own computer/web-based CV writing tools in this area. A list of these is at appendix (x) One organisation had “dedicated word processors for CV writing” as opposed to those that are “linked to the internet and used specifically for job searching”

C3.3 Needs, and common problems

C3.3.1 The purpose, structure and content of the CV. There was general agreement that some client groups, in particular those who are well-qualified and/or in professional/managerial roles, are very well informed about the content and purpose of a CV, but sometimes need help to present the information in an appropriate format for prospective employers. Other client groups are not at all clear about the purpose, structure or content of a CV, for example, clients who find themselves redundant after spending their whole working life in the same job. Practitioners working with clients with basic skills needs or low qualifications were particularly likely to say that they felt their clients did not fully understand the purpose of a CV or how to go about it and would need help to start from scratch. Several advisers suggested that clients in general are unsure about the appropriate layout and structure of the CV.

C3.3.2 Selling oneself – identifying, and providing evidence for, “transferable” skills and experience targeted at the job. Repeatedly advisers said that, above all, clients failed to understand how “sell” themselves and articulate their skills to a potential employer. Instead there was a common misconception amongst clients that a CV should present their ‘life history’. They had difficulty identifying their own skills, and sometimes in describing them (due to limited vocabulary) understanding how they might be transferable, including skills not exercised in paid employment, for example in voluntary work or parenting. They also needed prompting to provide evidence of these skills once identified. They often failed to target such an account of their skills and experience at a particular job: such a personal statement should be derived from the details of a job advert to show how well one fitted the job specification. (Of course, speculative CVs that cannot be tailored towards a particular post should be structured in order to provide a more detailed overview of the individual than a CV that is tailored for a specific job application.)

C3.3.3 Gaps in the work history – special issues for special groups. CV content is of particular concern to clients without any qualifications or any (recent) work experience. The two participants who work almost exclusively with clients with sight and/or hearing impairments agreed that a significant aspect of their role is supporting clients to present gaps in their work history in a positive light and demonstrate the skills they have gained in environments other than formal education and/or work settings. The same was particularly true for those advisers working with prisoners and ex-offenders on probation. for whom this was a major issue.

C3.3.4 Finding the details. Clients often do not have the information required for a CV, according to more than one adviser: for example, they may have difficulty giving the contact names and full addresses of previous employers and/or referees.

C3.3.5 Knowing what, and how much, is appropriate. clients often do not understand the ‘do’s and don’ts’ of CV writing, “e.g. that date of birth and nationality are not required”.

Many clients, it was said are unsure about how much information they need to give about the roles and responsibilities of previous jobs. “Without guidance, they are usually too specific” about duties in previous jobs.

C3.3.6 Lack of IT skills. Some individuals have difficulty using IT application due to lack of experience and/or disability. In one of the organisations represented here, clients who wish to use CV services have to be able to word process. Clients who are unable to do this are referred to another service able to word process the CV on their behalf.

C3.4 What type and level of support do clients need?

C3.4.1 A market for self-help tools? It should be noted here that because of current policy requirements the group of advisers assembled here only tend to see the small proportion of people who have identified that they need support with CV building. The advisers made this point themselves and acknowledged that there are, however, a significant number of individuals who have the skills to produce a CV with minimum support, and for whom a self-help tool would be appropriate. Indeed, one group member indicated that many of her clients simply use the CV templates provided to produce their own CV and never ask for any feedback or guidance from an adviser. The advisers generally agreed there was a market for on-line self-help tools including CV builders. There wasn't time to offer adviser help to everyone and IT literate individuals would in most cases, some advisers thought, be able to use such tools effectively once the process and product had been introduced and explained.

C3.4.2 Or is some personal support always needed? That said, there was also a majority view that, at least with their normal client groups (who often lack confidence and basic skills), support and “guidance” inevitably needed to be provided before, during and after the writing of a CV. However, clients with high levels of qualification can need support, too. Advisers questioned when, and indeed whether, a piece of software can and does check “the competency of the end user”. The group agreed that there is a tension between current trends that have placed increased emphasis on the need to meet consumer needs quickly through electronic services and the need for, and importance of, good quality guidance from a professional adviser. Some advisers suggested that they are increasingly supporting clients who have produced poor CVs using self-help services.

C3.4.3 Both/and. Particularly common was the suggestion of the need for a preliminary discussion of the purpose and nature of a CV. However, these group members recognised they “may be biased” and would be interested in the views of pre-level 2 end-users on the use of self-help tools and the importance of face-to-face guidance. Ideally, a tool that could be used in either supported or self-help mode, was what was needed. As one adviser pointed out, this is not necessarily an either/or question: some clients may value a resource that can be used on a self-help basis following a CV workshop.

C3.4.4 Referral. Support issues relating to specialised or minority group needs require, it was thought, “a built-in referral mechanism to an appropriate *local* agency for example, Apex, NACRO, REMPLOY, Prescriptions for Healthy Learning, Job Centre (Disability Employment Adviser) and agencies for refugees and asylum seekers. However, referrals must be handled carefully, ensuring sensitive issues are disclosed during a discussion built on a trusting relationship. Users requiring additional support could be identified through a simple system that required users to tick a series of issues that applied to them. Users could then be referred to a support agency that specialises in the areas they have indicated are issues for them. (Some advisers suggested a similar process for referrals for face-to-face advice and guidance for clients generally. If a stand-alone system is developed. for use in a library, for example, it would need to include a mechanism for referrals to face-to-face support elsewhere.)

C3.4.5 Translation. The group member who works primarily with the hearing impaired indicated that, for the majority of their clients, English is their second or even third language, with British Sign Language being their first. Clients, therefore, require additional support to translate written documentation into British Sign Language and to write up a CV or application form in English. Although refugees, asylum seekers and EU migrants with English as a second language often have a low level of spoken/written English, too, they have a relatively high reading ability. The support they require is, therefore, primarily associated with translating and presenting their native CV into a format that is suitable for a UK employer. (This may involve changing some *cultural* assumptions about the role and use of a CV?)

C3.4.6 On-line / built-in support. There are, of course, ways in which any electronic system can build-in “support” – e.g. spelling and grammar checking, prompts and advice available during the program via a help button or similar. While many advisers’ preferences seemed to be for this process to be completed on a face-to-face basis, if this was not possible, some were prepared to contemplate the use of help offered via telephone, e-mail or text, provided staff involved were suitably qualified.

C3.5 The guidance process

The groups’ current experiences as advisers suggest that writing a CV involves activities and needs that span the whole the guidance process. By helping the client to develop their own CV, the adviser is also helping them to reflect on what they have done and what skills they bring to the workplace as well as helping to empower them so that they are able to articulate their skills and abilities in the interview situation. This is one reason why it is not regarded as appropriate, for the adviser to simply write the CV for the client. The document must reflect the client’s own voice. The groups agreed that the development of a CV helps to raise client’s self-awareness of their skills and strengths, which, as a result boosts their confidence in their abilities. The process also helps the adviser to identify skills gaps and training needs. Advisers are consequently able to make more informed decisions regarding client referrals to appropriate training provision. The fact they see it as an integral part of the guidance process also helps to explain the reluctance to accept an entirely self-help approach.

C3.6 Key features of an electronic CV Builder

C3.6.1 A number of the participants felt, as apparently did those who responded to the questionnaire, that all the features were relevant but did not want to add any more. However, the following items from the questionnaire were underlined by ten out of the twelve advisers as important issues.

- **Example CVs for different levels of job and types of people, e.g. skilled manual, professional/managerial, unemployed, volunteer (Item 1 on the questionnaire).**

Advisers valued this, among other things, because “there is no definitive CV and that individuals can choose models most suitable to them” and “particularly for those with limited employment history, e.g. skills-based CVs” with examples from “different occupations and industries.” Participants also stressed these should be “real life” examples, and some wanted them also to illustrate the idea of chronological, functional, targeted and skills-based CVs, demonstrating how one might construct, for example, a CV for “cold canvassing” or speculative application purposes.

- *‘Notes on what to put in the blanks in these templates when the user is unsure’.* (Item 3).

It is important for templates to have clear guidelines on each of the sections of the CV, “including the personal profile”, but guidelines in the form of a “drop down menu of ‘buzzwords’ or phrases” would help clients express their skills and experiences in appropriate ways. This might also provide a link to a “glossary of skills “ and related phrases and hints on how to give examples/evidence of skills and experience. The advice prompt would also suggest what kind of information is needed and where, and what is not necessary or appropriate.

- ***‘A selection of templates for the types and levels of CV, including targeted, functional and chronological CVs’ (Item 2).***

A *selection* because clients need to be able to choose a template that is most relevant to their needs. This, too, could help to raise awareness of the different types of CVs that are used for different purposes as do the examples in item 1. Templates should also be adaptable using different systems, for example, Microsoft Word.

- ***‘Be easy to customise for local circumstances or groups by a tutor or adviser’.*** (Item 18)

This item carried a lot of the strong feeling in the group about the need for various kinds of “flexibility”, and they meant customisation by end-users as well as by advisers or tutors. A CV builder needs to be adaptable to both organisational and individual cases and tastes – e.g. facility to alter fonts, borders, or add a photo: this can add motivation for some clients as well as allowing the expression of individuality. It must also adapt to the needs of those with disabilities or special issues.

C3.6.2 At least half the participants in the focus groups and telephone interviews also selected the following items as particularly important:

- ***‘Offer to export the CV in various formats so that it can be worked on, e.g. in another word processor’.*** (Item 20)

It is self-defeating to develop an online resource that is not compatible with commonly used computer packages and formats (PC, Microsoft Word, Apple Mac), as one of the principle benefits of the electronic format is that it is portable. It is not sufficient to just have hard copy print outs, as clients need to be able to amend and update their CV easily. Clients can more easily take ownership of the document if they can take it away and edit it at home. One common complaint about some existing CV builders was the inability to do this and hence to use layouts and styles of one’s own.

- ***‘Advice about how to deal with gaps of any kind in the work history’.*** (Item 11)

There was a clear need for several groups of end-users to explain these gaps and present them in a positive light. Advice on how much information to provide and how to phrase is needed. ‘I have a gap in my employment history how do I handle it?’

C3.6.3 Four people selected:

- ***‘Advice for users who have special questions about completing a CV because of e.g. disabilities, criminal record, mental health record’;*** (item 10)

This goes with the preceding item. The group included advisers working with hearing and sight-impaired clients, with ex-offenders on probation, and prisoners. For all of these a CV builder should be flexible and customisable so that the section e.g. on ‘disclosing a disability’ could be expanded or contracted depending on the nature of the application. This is not a one-size-fits-all solution, however, and the individuality of each case must be taken into account somehow. There are also people with special issues to discuss for a variety of reasons, including those with learning difficulties.

- **Items 4 5 and 6** - dealing with *covering letters, application forms* and *guidance on the whole job application process as well as CVs*.. Although many clients know how to go about applying for a job, they often benefit from help and advice on how to do it more effectively. An important feature of the CV Builder would be to provide tips on how to tailor a CV and/or application to a specific post or role. As already mentioned, many organisations offer help with both covering letters and application forms. The treatment of covering letters should include a full set of examples and templates to match the provision for CVs.

C3.6.4 Other items selected as important by more than one person include

- ***‘To match the completed CV to relevant job vacancies’.* (Item 7)**

Respondents interpreted this feature in two ways, which were not necessarily how we envisaged it when we drew up the question in the first place. The first interpretation was that the CV Builder should enable the client to tailor (“match”) their CV to a specific vacancy. This was regarded as important because CVs that are not closely matched to job vacancies do not have the desired impact on employers, as already mentioned above under the subject of “targeting” a CV. The second interpretation (and the original intention) was that the CV Builder should have the facility to link to job vacancy websites in order to match individual CVs to appropriate positions. This was regarded as important because of the natural synergy between on line resources that support CV building and job search.

Many advisers expressed some enthusiasm for the idea of storing a CV on-line for matching to vacancies though associated advice on submitting CVs electronically, particularly via email and the issues involved, would be required, they felt.

- ***Offer spelling and grammar checks* (Item 17)**

Participants stressed that any stand-alone system would have to pick up and correct text language and American spelling.

- ***‘An email or telephone link to an adviser for more help when the user has a difficulty or needs more specific advice’.* (Item 8)**

Although only one group member regarded this feature in their ‘top five’, all agreed that it was important to ensure that the CV Builder contained information on how to get additional help for those users who need it.

- ***‘Save personal data and completed templates to use again when the user makes a different application’.* (Item 16)**

Although only one rated this feature in their top five, at least two group members indicated that they store CVs on behalf of clients and that many clients have a number of different CVs on file. The group agreed that a key feature of a CV building tool

could be a repository for clients' educational and work histories. Clients could then access relevant information and incorporate it into their tailored CV. However, all group members agreed that clients often need support to draw out this information in the first place and questioned whether this process could be mimicked online.

- *To check that the user is really ready to write a CV, and does not need to work on e.g. achieving greater self-awareness first (Item 15)* was the highest priority for one member of the group. Others questioned whether this would be feasible given the immediate demand for a CV from clients, funding and time constraints. However, the rest of that group did all agree that this would be the highest priority in an ideal world.

C3.7 Additional features.

There was a range of additional features the groups felt were important:

- *(Graphic) design issues:* In order to ensure an online CV Builder was suitable for clients with English as a second language, the text should be kept as simple and brief as possible, ideally in a bullet-point format. The use of pictures and symbols to illustrate the text would also be helpful for this client group. There are a number of design features that would make the tool more user-friendly for individuals with sight impairments which include: keyboard navigation; alternative text for graphics and buttons; and style sheets that allow the colour contrast (e.g. yellow on black text or blue on white text) and font size to be customised. The style sheet feature would also be beneficial for dyslexic users who sometimes experience difficulties with certain colours and fonts.
- *Clarity regarding the role and function of the tool and of the CV:* The groups emphasised the importance of managing clients' expectations of the role and function of a CV Builder. It should also explain the purpose of a CV and the various contexts of its use.
- *Synchronous communication:* In addition to referral mechanisms to other websites and face-to-face or telephone support, an online CV Builder that could facilitate synchronous communication between a client and adviser would be highly beneficial, particularly for those advisers who provide telephone support to clients nationally.
- *Self-assessment:* Some mechanism designed to assist clients to reflect on and analyse their skills, abilities and motivations would be a useful function for some clients. However, it was claimed that for others, input from an adviser is required if this process is to be effective. (This picks up some of the point of questionnaire item 14.) The bottom line is that Simply "filling in the boxes" is not enough.
- *Educational aspects.* There was a need to educate users on the process of CV development and the identification of transferable skills. One adviser wanted to use this as a teaching tool for adults and others wanted the end user to be able to develop an understanding of the process for future application e.g. what are key skills, where to identify them and how to present evidence of them, perhaps in connection to diagnostic tools. Most agreed that it was important that the product explained 'CV language' and encouraged end user ownership of the document produced.
- *Feedback, monitoring and updating.* One member of the group claimed that they had adapted the style of their CV as a result of telephone response from clients who had received feedback on their CVs during interview. Others pointed out the need to monitor how clients used the tool and to keep it abreast of developments: there are

“changing trends in CVs and what employers are looking for and therefore such a resource would need to be regularly updated.” One group member argued that it is what is acceptable to an employer that is important, and questioned whether the research should have included focus groups with employers. One other member of the group also thought this was important but questioned whether it was feasible for any organisation other than one like the Confederation of British Industry to do a survey of this nature. Advisers stressed the importance of market-testing any new product, with links to employer requirements.

- *A glossary or thesaurus of key words and phrases*, including those for key skills. This can help build paragraphs, such as the personal statement. This was a common suggestion and has already been mentioned in discussion of questionnaire item 3 above.
- *Ease of use – language, navigation and layout*: the system should, of course, be simple to use, requiring few technical skills if at all, and be couched in simple language, easy to understand. It should also be easy to navigate, with a clear layout. It should not be overloaded with functions or information.
- *Training*: one adviser thought that an initial training package for advisers would be needed if it were to be successful

C3.8 Relationship with other resources

C3.8.1 Integrative links. A number of advisers stressed the importance of “synergy with other resources” – by which they meant, in part, that the tool should interface with other online resources such as vacancy databases – “really useful for individuals with the ability to use them effectively”. Another adviser thought it would be useful if the resource “highlighted the connection between CV writing and job searching, providing links to further information about where to search for jobs”. Links to resources with information about further education would have particular merits for mature learners who are returning to study. There was a caveat that too much complexity and sophistication, too many features, would be confusing for many and some advisers preferred a CD-ROM to an Internet connection for that reason, while others took the reverse view (see also below) especially for more IT-experienced users.

C3.8.2 Progress file and personal portfolio. Advisers are clear about the similarities and differences between CVs and personal portfolios, progress files and records of achievement – all increasingly on-line or in electronic format. A CV may fill the gap where such a personal record does not exist otherwise, but clearly links to and from any pre-existing electronic personal record could be very useful and stimulating in both directions.

C3.8.3 Links with careers education programmes. One, college-based, adviser said it “would be useful if programme managers on vocationally-oriented courses could link the CV Builder to their courses.

C3.9 Technical Issues

C3.9.1 On-line versus CD-ROM. The groups were fairly evenly divided in their opinions on this issue in the main, but one or two pointed out special situations (e.g. working with prisoners) when access to the Internet was unavailable or difficult (e.g. some rural areas), or where individuals with low IT skills lacked the confidence to use an electronic resource without additional support or initial training. One adviser was concerned that an online storage facility would encourage users to rely on the computer and Internet access at *nextstep* centres. These, he claimed, do not have the capacity for regular use by clients. A CD Rom version, as well as an Internet version, would provide more control over, and less reliance on,

the quality of the IT or web link, it was claimed, and although there were “clear advantages to web-based tools, they are susceptible to crashes” according to one adviser. To overcome this problem, it would be helpful if the tool were also available in CD ROM format. On the other hand, an adviser from a college said that her college prohibits use of CD ROMs as they have “crashed the network in the past, and she expressed a preference for a web-based tool. The UCAS electronic application system, on the other hand, was mentioned as a piece of good practice which prevented mistakes and prescribed what needed to be placed where.

C3.9.2 Security and storage. The key in the debate was security, confidentiality and practicality, when storing personal data. Users need to be “able to store and access their CV securely online”. This is particularly important for “users who do not have access to a PC at home”. However, in the experience of the members of one of the two groups, “clients are not overly concerned about security”. (Our own findings on end-users’ views are relevant here). One agency, according to its advisers, would store users’ CVs on their database if requested to do so, and provided that these were password protected. One group member reported that their organisation does not store CVs on behalf of clients, rather they provide the client with their CV on a disc, which costs 50p. In this way, the client retains ownership over the document. Many advisers were concerned about storing CVs on a website and did not feel this was appropriate unless there were very clear explanations about the implications for the end user.

C3.9.3 Troubleshooting. Users need access to support when they experience technical problems.

D. Existing Suppliers of CV building programs

D.1.1 Existing Products? There is a wide range of products currently on the market. They divide into different categories:

D1. CV building programs on web sites associated with employment agencies and holding the CVs in a database that can be searched by employers or offering to match the CV against a database of job vacancies. These include examples such as Monster.co.uk, but also Graduate Prospects. Of necessity their CV formats are uniform and adapted for the purposes for which they are written, and of little immediate value as such in other contexts even if they are downloaded or printed off. They often offer little in-depth advice within the program for the novice in CV building: they assume you already know what a CV is and how to use it in the format required for their site, or they offer that advice somewhere else, outside the program pages.

D2. CV building programs based on career guidance-related web sites such as Careers Wales, Careers Scotland, Connexions Card, Springboard, or an increasing number of *nextstep* agencies themselves, for example the Humberside *Nextstep* Agency – see also at appendix 3. These offer more support in prompting the novice during the process of writing a CV and may be downloadable to use or adapt elsewhere. Printed out they may also be usable as they stand. Sometimes a vacancy database may be connected and the CV can be used with it. However, because of the context

D3. Established suppliers of careers software such as CASCAID or Careersoft or Stuart Mitchell Associates or publishers of careers literature and resources such as Lifetime Careers Publishing or Prospects Careers Services, who may have a range of other computer-assisted guidance programs or printed materials within which their CV building program fits as one piece of the toolkit. They will not offer matching to vacancies, but will provide more in the way of support for the novice writer of a CV in the way of examples, templates and prompts and help screens as to what to put in the blanks. The outcome of their programs is usually a printed CV, which may be exported sometimes into other word processing formats.

D4. Commercial CV writing services, usually web-based. If they (rarely) offer a program for CV building this will be an extra part of their commercial service.. They prefer on the whole to do it for you for a price rather than teach you how to do it yourself or to provide you with a product that enables you to do it yourself. However, they have a lot of expertise in certain professional and managerial fields. Bradley's CVs is one of the better ones and have taken part in Guidance Council working parties in the past.

D5. Few, if any, of the existing programs and web sites, however, have all or most of the features end-users and practitioners have opted for here though a small number have a selection of the key features. Those that get closest would still need significant development work to come up to the standards we have set in this report.

D2. Some of the major suppliers who might be expected to be interested in supplying or tendering to develop, a CV Builder program.

Where there is a program or web pages already available, I have given the name or URL in brackets after the suppliers' name,

Anglia Training Associates, [Jobseeker], The Old Crown, The Street, Ovington, Thetford, Norfolk, IP25 6RX, tel. 01953 883 953 www.uktraining.com/jobseek.htm, Email: info@uktraining.co.uk/ The program contains a CV builder facility but covers the whole job search process. and claims to cover electronic CV preparation and “European CVs”.

Bradley's CVs, [www.alec.co.uk], 7 West End Avenue, Gatley, Cheadle, Cheshire, SK8 4DR, tel. 0845 2000365, email: enquiries@bradleycv.co.uk. A CV writing service, not a software supplier.

Careerssoft, [CV3], Mulcture House, Mulcture Hall Road, Halifax, West Yorkshire, HX1 1SP, tel. 01422 330450, email: admin@careerssoft.co.uk The most flexible and customisable program currently available, though aimed at novice users and basic skills needs.

Careers Scotland, [www.careers-scotland.org.uk/] 31 Albert Square, Dundee, DD1 1DJ, Tel 01382 495070 Email: Andrew.coull@careers-scotland.org.uk.

Careers Wales, [www.careerswales.com] Paul Messer, Online Manager, Van Court, Caerphilly Business Park, Van Road, Caerphilly, CF93 3ED. Tel: 029 2085 4880 ext 111, Email: paul.messer@careerswalesassociation.co.uk. CV and Personal Portfolio are linked.. Materials are licensed through Illumina – Email Andrew.chitty@illumina.co.uk Tel. 0208 600 9300

CASCAID Ltd. – [Pinpoint, in development, due 2006], John Kelly, Marketing Manager, Holywell Building, Holywell Way, Loughborough, Leics., LE11 3UZ. Tel. (to 1st August) 01509 283426 (1st August onwards) 01509 226870 Email: jkelly@cascaid.co.uk. Program will be embedded in a larger program on job search and application.

Channel 4, [CV Sorcerer]: [www.channel4.com/life/microsites/B/brilliantcareers/] a subsection of a larger set of interactive web pages on career choice and job seeking.

Connexions Service Unit,[Careerzone CV Builder]
[www.connexionscard.com/x/c/cxc.jsp?P1=CVHM] For users with “work experience” rather than “employment history “

Graduate Prospects. [My Prospects], Lucy Madahar, Prospects House, Booth Street East, Manchester, M13 9EP. Tel. www.prospects.ac.uk/, email: L.Madahar@prospects.ac.uk,

Lifetime Careers Publishing [Pro MICAD] 7 Ascot Court, White Horse Business Park, Trowbridge, Wiltshire, BA14 0XA. Tel: 01225 716023, email: sales@lifetime-publishing.co.uk, web: www.lifetime-publishing.co.uk and <http://213.228.232.18:960/publicationsdetail.asp?ProductID=123>

Stuart Mitchell Associates [CVBuilder], 11 The Brambles, Godalming, Surrey, GU7, 2QY. Tel. 01483 423943. Email: stuart@stuartmitchellassociates.co.uk, web: www.stuartmitchellassociates.co.uk/ Current supplier of Careerbuilder.

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E. Conclusion: a specification for a CV builder program or programs and key issues to take into account

E1. Where we are now

E1.1 A critical moment “Writing a CV” is a significant point of entry to the guidance or career choice process: the moment when someone decides the time has come to “go public” about themselves and apply for a job. It represents a switch from private reflection to public presentation – a step change in a process that will eventually result in (public) validation or invalidation. Self esteem and future employment relationships can both depend on it. The writer of a CV is forced, to some extent at least, to take stock of their skills and experiences and of how others might perceive them. Supporting this process is no trivial matter, and most of the practitioners in this survey currently spend a significant part of their time and energy doing so, although usually face-to-face rather than at a distance. It should be noted that most are dealing, as policy dictates, with pre-level 2 users who often lack confidence and have basic skills needs. Their comments should be read in this light

E1.2 Current use. Such materials as they use are subordinated to this interaction with the client, used as a follow-up or preparatory resources. The electronic resources they have experience of are not generally rated highly, and are criticised widely for being inflexible, difficult to use and simplistic – by which is generally meant that they provide boxes to fill in a certain order but little of explanation, interpretation, or advice where it is most needed, during the actual process of completing the CV. This is borne out to some extent by an examination of some of the main programs and web sites on offer, including, it must be said, some of those developed by *nextstep* agencies themselves. It seems likely that to meet the kind of demand evinced by this report requires a new tool or some development of those that already exist. There is also a need to offer materials and programs (or a suite of programs) that suit a wider range of users than at present.

E2. Key Features of a CV Builder

E2.1 Content: defining the product: the CV. But what is a “CV” and what content should a “CV Builder” cover? There are short forms of self-description targeted at a potential employer and designed to achieve instant impact and attract attention, often as part of speculative or “cold canvassing” application. There other contexts, however, in which the CV is used as the basis for an extensive job interview and may be expected to carry all the relevant information required for that purpose. And there are stages in between these two extremes. The CV is not just one kind of thing: it comes in a variety of forms, adapted to, and by, a number of people in a variety of situations. Any effective program should leave the user aware that there are more ways of drawing it up, laying it out, and using it, than they had thought of before. This is especially important for the kind of user who may have been in one job or type or work for many years without the need to write a CV.

E2.2 Content: defining the product: covering letters and applications forms. Advisers and end-users were clear that they would expect support for writing covering letters to be as extensive as that for the CV itself, with examples, and templates, and help with completing application forms as well as the traditional CV. The CV can also act as a repository for personal information that can then be transferred more easily to an application form.

E2.3 Content: related materials: The CV’s relationship with a personal **portfolio, progress file, personal development plan** or **record of achievement**, on- or off-line, is also important here: the differences need to be recognised, and the similarities explored. The one can

develop naturally from the other, but should not be confused. Where such records exist in electronic form, there is obviously a degree of synergy to be exploited (cf. the example of Careers Wales Personal Portfolio and CV builder programs)

E2.4 Content: a range of formats, examples and templates. A CV Builder should therefore take account of the full range of possible formats and offer advice as to which is more appropriate – e.g. when should a CV be “**targeted**”, “**chronological**”, “**functional**” or “**skills-based**”. Probably the most common expectation of such a tool is that it will give **examples and templates** for CVs appropriate to a range of levels (professional, managerial, skilled manual, clerical), occupations, jobs and industries, and types of user (changing career, just made redundant, longer term unemployed, someone returning to paid work after a break, etc.) Existing tools of this type already do some of this, but clearly there is a demand for a much larger databank of examples and templates than is currently offered. There was also a demand for “case studies” to supplement the example CVs. A balancing concern is that this increased complexity be managed in a way that does not confuse or frighten the less confident or novice user: one needs to be able to thread a coherent and personally customised path through the maze.

E2.5 Content: advice on how to fill in the blanks, what information is appropriate and in how much detail. Feedback on this project made clear that all users expect something more than simply a “set of boxes to fill in”. They want advice on what is most appropriate to put in these boxes (and how much), prompts and suggestions as to where they might find that information in their own record of work and learning. This also means defining “**key skills**” or “**transferable skills**” and offering guidelines as to how to turn what one has done in contexts beyond paid employment into “**evidence**” for these. A **glossary or thesaurus of key words and phrases** to help the user articulate what they have to say about themselves was suggested in the focus groups. Such advice should be available throughout the program, not just before using it: a drop-down menu or help button that links the users with a query to possible answers and examples. There is a need to avoid “spoon-feeding”, while building confidence in the user that they have things to say about their achievements and personal qualities that are relevant. Users with **English as a second language** may also need some “**translation**” (and that includes those with hearing impairment for whom sign language is the “mother tongue”).

E2.6 Content: advice about how to deal with gaps in the work history, and to users with special issues to do with their background. A key concern for many advisers and their clients is how to present gaps in the work history incurred for a variety of reasons – having taken time out to look after children or sick or elderly relatives, having been in prison, or in hospital. Mental health service users, ex-offenders, refugees and asylum seekers, as well as those with various disabilities, or simply older workers, may need advice on how best to present themselves and when it is appropriate to offer explanations or details of their background, if at all. There are some legal issues here too, and the advice cannot be cut and dried: there may be a need to develop some **referral** mechanism within a CV builder program that links the user at certain points to an appropriate source of more specialist advice or to one-to-one support from an adviser. Referral also suggests some **preliminary diagnostic** process – a checklist or other facility to identify those likely to need more in-depth help.

E2.7 Content: general advice relating to job search and application. Clearly the CV is part of a more extended process, “a means to an end”, and cannot be considered entirely separately from it. There was demand, especially from end-users, for the CV builder to include such advice as well, or link to it on other web sites.

E2.8 Functionality: Customisation and flexibility. A common complaint by practitioners about existing tools was the lack of “flexibility”. This carried various meanings: in one sense it echoes item 18 of the practitioners’ questionnaire: *be easy to customise for local*

circumstances or groups. This means that as, for example, in the CV building program CV3 (Careersoft), although the program comes with ready-made examples and templates with advice or prompts as to what to put in a particular place, tutors or advisers can get access to strip out the text of advice screens, the headings of existing templates, and replace them or add to them templates, examples and advice notes of their own. However, anecdotal evidence from the focus groups suggested that the ability of the end-users to adapt the layout, style and headings of the CV format themselves was equally important. That means facilities to alter fonts, borders, or add a photo. There is third and final sense in which such a tool needs also to be adaptable to the needs of users with disabilities, including those with impaired vision or who for other reasons need to change the size of text, background colours, and so on, but also those with special issues who may need to delete, alter or replace certain headings, as well as get specialised advice. It seems a tall order for any one program to be flexible enough to encompass all these meanings of the word, and it may be one indication that more than one program or level of program is required.

E2.9 Functionality: saving, exporting and importing data. Saving the data to be edited and adapted later, as required, was a key issue and most current tools offer this. Users will often want to create more than one variant from the original CV: the ability to adapt a CV to new situations, job applications and personal developments is paramount, but that implies not just saving the data, but the possibility of saving it to another word processor or similar, to be worked on there.

E2.9.1 Exporting files. Some current tools, such as CV3, are aimed at basic needs and novice users: those who want more sophistication must then be able to export the file elsewhere to work on. There are implications for compatibility – PC (Word) or Mac formats – and perhaps also about whether the system is on the Web or CD-ROM (see also below). The easier it is to save and export in various formats, the better.

E2.9.2 Importing files is another issue: if an on-line “CV surgery” is provided, where users can get their CVs checked and commented on by advisers or mentors, then files must also be easy to attach to an email, and virus protection measures will need to be kept regularly up to date. At least one current provider of a “CV Surgery” refuses to accept any CVs other than those in their own format, because of concerns about virus infection. Similar issues arise when importing files into a CV database for matching to jobs.

E2.10 Functionality: CV databases and matching to jobs. There was some hesitation here about the exact meaning of “matching” in the questionnaire item: some interpreted it as matching the needs of an individual job for which one was applying – a variant on the idea of *a targeted CV*. However, as in many current on-line systems, the purpose of building a CV is often precisely so that it can be made searchable by employers and matched to a set of vacancies held on the same site. (*My Prospects*, from Graduate Prospects, is an example, and is the Monster CV builder) This met with approval, especially in the focus groups, but has major implications for the way a CV builder functions, of course, and some trade off would presumably have to happen in relation to the much more consistent demand for “flexibility”, “targeting” and “customisation”. The sort of CV builder that aims at electronic matching and searching requires a uniformity of structure and layout, and is therefore rather different from one to be sent by post to a potential employer. The solution may be, again, about the ability to export and save in different formats, but it requires technical and policy decisions, as well as essentially different tools. But the option certainly seems to be one people would like to have.

E2.11 Functionality: Spellchecking and grammar checking. There must of course be a facility to check spelling and grammar – most respondents agreed this was important, stressing it needed to be UK and not US English.

E2.12 Format: On-line, CD-ROM or paper-based? This was a discussion point in all the focus groups. Both users and practitioners would generally prefer to save their CV on a CD-ROM or similar, unless it were to be used for matching to jobs.

E2.12.1 Security. The concern is more to do with the perception of the insecurity of personal data held on the web than with technical format as such, although both users and practitioners seemed to acknowledge that there were advantages and disadvantages on both sides. The ideal solution would be one which gave users the option as to how data should be saved, and where the program itself could be accessed both on- and off-line.

E2.12.2 Access. Either way, there could be people who would miss out – some people (prisoners) would not be able to access the Internet, and others (e.g. in some rural area) might find it difficult, or need higher levels of IT literacy. On the other hand there were clients without PCs at home who needed to be able to store a CV securely on-line, and colleges where the use of CDs by individuals on the college network would not be allowed.

E2.12.3 Paper-based materials, however, are often used by practitioners, according to our sample – frequently in conjunction with an electronic CV writer or templates. While the demand might not be great from users, some paper-based material could be useful in some situations, especially where the CV was being used as an educational tool in groups.

E3. The “guidance” context

E3.1 Part of a whole. For the guidance practitioner or adviser, writing a CV is not a self-contained activity, but part of a process that begins with heightened self-awareness. Within the traditional DOTS model of guidance outcomes, for example, CV writing fits under the heading of “*transition learning*” along with more general job search and action planning, at the end of a whole cycle of decision making. There are other models, of course, but, whichever you use, an effective CV will usually grow out of a thorough knowledge of oneself and of one’s skills, and draw on all the relevant experiences that evidence them. It is the penultimate chapter of a coherent narrative. This is, of course, an ideal that is rarely completely realised.

E3.2 Self assessment. Some mechanism for enabling end-users to reflect on and analyse their skills, abilities, motivations and experience would be a useful function for those starting from scratch. This is what advisers generally appear to be doing when offering “guidance” to those seeking their support in writing a CV. If the tool is to be used in a self-help context, then it should attempt in some way to do what the adviser does face-to-face. This may be facilitated if the program can build on outputs from self-assessment tools used earlier.

E3.3 An educational role? Some advisers use CV templates and materials as **teaching tools** in a group context and hope to impart an understanding of key concepts and processes (what are key skills? what counts as evidence of them? etc) which the student can act on for themselves later on. This has a bearing on the provision of paper-based and advisory materials (printable advice screens, self-assessment exercises and checklists) as well as the interactivity of the tool.

E3.4 Integration. Like other similar tools, a CV Builder should integrate easily with other related (local and national) resources. These may be print-based, workbooks or advice sheets. They may also be other web- or computer-based tools: a CV Builder that uses the output from a **self-assessment package, personal portfolios, progress files and records of achievement** or an electronic portfolio, for example, as the basis for the construction of a CV, is a

significantly more effective resource than one that does not, where the user must start over again when they want to write their CV. Practitioners felt that integrative links were valuable – especially links to on-line vacancy databases and information about further or higher education and where to search for jobs. As with all the demands however, there was a caveat that too much complexity and sophistication, too many features, would confuse some users.

E3.5 “Ownership” One can pay someone else to write one’s CV. However, both practitioners and end-users felt the CV builder should not attempt to fulfil this role: the object is to boost the users’ confidence in their own ability to present themselves and enable them to own the product that results. It should not simply present examples that can be copied without thought or appropriate customisation.

E4. Support needs

E4.1 A self-help tool. It is worth remembering that the project’s original brief was for a tool that can be used effectively without significant adviser input, probably on-line and at a distance. But practitioners had a lot more to say about this issue – though they generally deal with a client group who are more likely to be offered face-to-face support anyway.

E4.2 Levels and modes of support. A person’s need for support in using resources may vary for a number of reasons. While some may be quite capable of using such a tool on an entirely self-help basis, and need little more than a means to provide a polished layout for otherwise effective content, some support or referral mechanism must be built in to meet the needs of other, less confident, users. This might be as simple as a <help> button at various points to pull down tutorial advice screens, or a link to a related web site offering relevant advice. For a more personalised, in-depth service, there might be a link to one-to-one advice from a tutor, adviser or mentor, via an **email address or telephone helpline number**. One of the end-user focus groups came up with the idea of an **on-line forum** for users to ask questions of advisers, trading in a certain loss of personal privacy for the sake of getting to share advice given to others.

E4.3 The adviser’s role. Some advisers felt that their current clients would almost always need face-to-face support, but also acknowledged that it would be surprising if, as adviser, they did not say that! Some wanted preliminary one-to-one discussion to establish the purpose and principles of the process, with the CV builder as a follow-on tool that might then be used on a self-help basis. As several people also acknowledged, this is not necessarily an either/or question: any tool that is developed will probably be used in a graduated series of situations from full face-to-face support from an adviser through to complete self-help by the most confident and IT-literate.

E5. Target groups

E5.1 Some groups may have special needs for certain kinds of support. Because the CV operates at the interface between the individual and the labour market, it also marks the spot where individual differences may require careful presentation to avoid arbitrary rejection.

E5.1.1 Ex-offenders and mental health service users, the longer term unemployed and people with disabilities, for example, may need advice on when and how much to disclose, or how to explain lengthy gaps in the employment record as positively as possible. Older workers or people returning to paid work after a career break may overlook the experience and skills they have, and require particular encouragement to see the connections between personal life and workplace effectiveness. International job seekers and speakers of English as a second language, including economic migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, face special issues with application forms and

CVs. There are cultural differences in the format and use of the CV between one country and another that will concern users applying for jobs in other EU countries, let alone in the rest of the world.

E5.1.2 Any CV builder that aimed to comprehensively cover all such needs would surely have to offer multiple versions and examples, or a considerable openness to local or specialist customisation. In some cases this might mean supplying advice screens in a second or minority language (or sign language in the case of some hearing impaired clients) as well as English. It may be that special versions of the program might need to be developed to support these needs, though it is in the advice screens and examples and case studies that the key differences will be seen, and a different route into the program for such groups with tailored advice pages, might be a solution.

E5.2 Pre-level 2 and level2+ The two samples we took of these groups did not show major qualitative differences. The concerns of practitioners were largely focused on the former, who are their current target client group. They stressed the need for text in any program to be kept in as plain and simple English as possible, for any program to be as simple and user-friendly as possible, and cautioned frequently against too many features, too much sophistication and complexity, in case it confuses the less confident user. This might suggest a program operating at different levels and in more or less “advanced” versions rather than an entirely different program: the decision as to which program to buy or use would cause practical and policy difficulties in that case.

E6. Equal opportunities

There are also issues to do with anti-discriminatory legislation, in supporting the writing of a CV. The user should not be encouraged to act in a way that is contrary to their interests as a member of a minority or disadvantaged group. Meeting the principles laid down in sections 3, 4, and 5 would go some part of the way towards this, in a positive sense, but, for example, offering the heading “Marital status” as a matter of course on a CV building format, is controversial, and could, on one view at least, potentially encourage, or collude with, discriminatory if not illegal practices. It is surprising to find “date of birth”, for example, regularly inserted without comment in the templates of some existing CV builders. Any CV builder should be monitored to avoid such effects, and all advice should be screened to ensure it represents the best “diversity” practice.

E7. Associated Training

E7.1 Since, as the original brief suggested, we are looking to develop a primarily “self-help” tool, it should need little or no training to use. Most practitioners comments argue for simplicity and ease of use as a major concern: they themselves may not want to undertake significant training to use such a tool, but the evidence of current usage of the available programs suggests that some training would be valuable.

E7.2 There is no substitute for **hands-on experience** of such a system and practitioners are always short of allocated time to do this. In this sense, the need is for “learning” rather than “training”. This can sometimes be met by offering, as some careers software providers do, associated training (a) to familiarise the user with the program and what it does and can do, and (b) how it relates to, and can support, what they currently do face-to-face. If advisers are to use the tool confidently with end-users or recommend it to them, they need a good understanding of what the program can do, and to have thought about how it fits into the rest of their work and their clients needs.

E7.3 If there is significant need to **customise the program for local needs**, that will, of course, generate a need, either for more IT literate users, or for more specific training (or for a foolproof system that needs none).

E8. Ongoing development and support

E8.1 Unlike an occupational database, a CV builder, as such, is not going to need such constant updating and amendment, **unless, as some suggested, it is part of a web site where the CVs are linked to a vacancy database** for matching or the stored CVs are made **searchable by employers**.

E8.2 The extent of support required otherwise may depend on how the **storage of CVs** is organised – on-line or off-line. Preferences seemed to be for the latter except where matching to jobs is involved.

E8.3 However, some advisers commented on the need to keep abreast of developments in the style and use of CVs, and employers' requirements and recruitment practices, and to build in **feedback from users** and a system of regular **monitoring**. This could lead to requirements for at least annual review and some updating of examples, templates and cases studies, as gaps in provision or problems in practical use appear.

E8.4 The more complex the tool, and the more user groups it tries to accommodate, the more likely it is that it will require more maintenance of this kind. **Technological developments** – e.g. mobile devices becoming a more common way of accessing this kind of material – might lead to more rapid obsolescence and a need to (re)develop the CV Builder in some way. Overall, practitioners, however, favour simplicity and ease of use, and are not desperate to be at the cutting edge.

Appendix 1

The Questionnaire survey forms.

> Practitioners

> End-users: pre-level 2

> End-users: level 2 +

NB. All forms ended with the words:

Please note that your responses will be reported anonymously. No one outside of the research team will have access to your name and your responses and your contact details will not be used for any other purpose.

Many thanks for your help!

[Practitioners version]

What do you want from a CV Builder?

What is this about?

This questionnaire is part of a survey carried out for **advice-resources, Ufi**, the national resource service for *next steps* agencies.

We want to find out what you would ideally expect a computer- or web-based CV builder to do, if used by individuals on a stand-alone basis, or, in some cases, supported at a distance by email or telephone, or as part of a face-to-face discussion.

This will inform the specification for a national CV builder which may be put out to tender later this year.

What do you mean by a CV Builder?

By “CV builder” we mean any computer program or web site that functions to help the user produce a better, written, application for a job. This might be a CV or résumé, an application form, a letter of application, or a covering letter.

We already have our own local CV Builder

That’s fine. In that case, we would like to hear from you what features it has and how you would like to develop it, if at all. Any information about it would be welcomed. We would like to build on local experience of what works and what works best, as well as what you think would be ideal, given the resources to develop it.

What do you want to know?

The attached questionnaire is only 22 questions long and almost all can be answered simply Yes or No.. It should not take you long. (We appreciate that you have many other things to do!)

Please underline or circle

“Yes!” (= That’s important),

Or “Yes” (= I would like that)

Or “No” (=that’s not important)

Add any additional comments you would like to make.

All answers are in confidence and will be used for research purposes only.

A CV builder should offer.....

Underline or circle...

“Yes!” = *That’s important* or “Yes” = *I’d like that*, or “No” = *that’s not important*

- | | | | |
|---|------|-----|----|
| 1. Example CVs for different levels of job and types of people, e.g. skilled manual, professional/managerial, unemployed, volunteer | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 2. A selection of templates for the types and levels of CV, including targeted, functional and chronological CVs | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 3. Notes on what to put in the blanks in these templates when the user is unsure | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 4. General advice on applying more effectively for jobs | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 5. Help and advice on filling out an application form | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 6. Advice on writing a covering letter to an employer, with examples | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 7. To match the completed CV to relevant job vacancies | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 8. An email or telephone link to an adviser for more help when the user has a difficulty or needs more specific advice | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 9. Associated advice or exercises on a printed worksheet or in a book | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 10. Advice for users who have special questions about completing a CV because of e.g. disabilities, criminal record, mental health record | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 11. Advice about how to deal with gaps of any kind in the work history | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 12. A (fee-paying) CV writing service, for those who want it | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 13. An on-line CV checking service or “CV surgery” | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 14. Encouragement to link back to self-assessment exercises, personal portfolios etc, for evidence of skills, interests or achievements | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 15. To check that the user is really ready to write a CV, and does not need to work on e.g. achieving greater self-awareness first | Yes! | Yes | No |

The system should

- | | | | |
|--|------|-----|----|
| 16. Save personal data and completed templates to use again when the user makes a different application | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 17. Offer spelling and grammar checks | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 18. Be easy to customise for local circumstances or groups by a tutor or adviser | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 19. Offer to store the CV on the computer (or web site) used | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 20. Offer to export the CV in various formats, so that it can be worked on, e.g. in another word processor | Yes! | Yes | No |

21. Allow you to build on data already saved from self-assessment or diagnostic exercises, or in personal portfolios Yes! Yes No

22. Link to web sites offering advice on job search and application Yes! Yes No

Are there any other features you think should form part of a CV Builder but which we have not listed here?

.....

.....

.....

I/ We already use a CV Builder ***Yes*** ***No***

(If Yes) It is called

.....

It offers the following features from the list above
Please give the item numbers e.g. 3, 5, 14, 21etc.

.....

The person who can tell you more about it is

Name..... Tel.....

(or) email

Your organisation.....

Your job title or role.....

Do you have any of the following qualifications?

Diploma in Careers Guidance/Qualification in Careers Guidance	Yes / No
NVQ 3 in Advice and Guidance	Yes / No
NVQ 4 in Advice and Guidance	Yes / No

Any other comments?

[Pre-level 2 Users' version]

What do you want from a CV Builder?

What is a CV Builder?

A “**CV Builder**” is a kind of computer program or web site. It helps you write a better application for a job.

(CV stands for “Curriculum Vitae” – the words mean the “story of your life”. Many employers ask for this when you apply for a job)

What can it do for me?

On the **next page** there are **20 things a CV builder could do**.

What do I do next?

Please circle **Yes!** = That's important!
or **Yes** = I would *like* that
or **No** = that's not important

All answers are in confidence and will be used for research purposes only.

Your answers will help us to make a CV Builder for you to use.

About me:

Please select and circle

I am	Male	Female				
	Employed	Unemployed	Retired	Full time Student	Other	
Aged	14 – 19	20 – 29	30 – 39	40 – 49	50 – 59	60+

My Qualifications: I have got 5 or more GCSE O Levels at grades A – C or I have equivalent vocational qualifications at NVQ level 2.

Yes / No / Don't Know

I would like.....

circle **Yes!** = That's important! or **Yes** = I would like that or **No** = that's not important

- | | | | |
|---|------|-----|----|
| 1. Examples of CVs for different jobs and people | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 2. Models for different CVs, that I can use to build my own | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 3. Advice on what to put in the blanks in these CVs | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 4. General advice on how best to apply for jobs | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 5. Help in filling out an application form, | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 6. Help to write a letter to the employer to go with my CV | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 7. To have my CV matched to actual jobs | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 8. To contact an adviser for help, if I get stuck | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 9. Advice on paper or in a book, as well as on computer | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 10. Advice about how to present my personal background | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 11. Advice about how to present gaps in my work history | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 12. Someone to write my CV after asking me the questions | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 13. Someone to check my CV for me, before I send it | Yes! | Yes | No |

I would like to be able to....

- | | | | |
|--|------|-----|----|
| 14. Save my CV to use again when I apply somewhere else | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 15. Get the computer to check the spelling and grammar | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 16. Change my CV easily when I go for a different job | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 17. Store my CV on the computer (or web site) I'm using | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 18. Take my CV away to work on it somewhere else | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 19. Use things I've already written about myself elsewhere | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 20. Link to other web sites for more help if I need it | Yes! | Yes | No |

Have you used a CV Builder before? **Yes** **No**

Any other comments?

Please turn over

[Level 2+ Users' version]

What do you want from a CV Builder?

What is this about?

This questionnaire is part of a survey of users carried out for **advice-resources**, the national resource service which provides resources to help you get better information and advice on learning and work when you visit the offices or web site of your local *Next Steps* agency. (For more details see <http://www.nextstep.org.uk/>).

We want to find out what sort of tools people would like to have to support them in writing a CV or making any other kind of written application for a job. **This information will be used to help design a better CV Builder. Please help us to help you and people like you!**

What is a CV Builder?

A CV builder includes any computer program or web site that helps the user to produce a better, written, application for a job. This might be a CV (sometimes called a *résumé*), an application form or a letter of application.

What can it do for me?

On the next page there are 20 things a CV builder *could* do. Which are important?

What do I do next?

1. Please Circle or underline one of these
- | | |
|--------|------------------------|
| “Yes!” | = That's important! |
| “Yes” | = I would like that |
| “No” | = that's not important |

2. Then add any additional comments you would like to make.

All answers are in confidence and will be used for research purposes only.

About me:

Please select and circle

I am	Male	Female				
	Employed	Unemployed	Retired	Full time Student	Other	
Aged	14 – 19	20 – 29	30 – 39	40 – 49	50 – 59	60+

My Qualifications: I have got 5 or more GCSE O Levels at grades A – C or I have equivalent vocational qualifications at NVQ level 2.

Yes / No / Don't Know

Please turn over

I would like.....

Underline or Circle...

Yes! = that's important, or Yes = I would like that, or No = that's not important

- | | | | |
|---|------|-----|----|
| 1. Examples of CVs for different jobs and types of people | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 2. Various templates that I can use to build my own CV | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 3. Advice on what to put in the blanks in these templates | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 4. General advice on applying more effectively for jobs | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 5. Help in filling out an application form, when required | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 6. Advice on writing a covering letter to an employer | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 7. To have my CV matched electronically to vacancies | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 8. To be able to email or phone an adviser for more help | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 9. Advice on paper or in a book, as well as on computer | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 10. Advice about how to present my personal background | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 11. Advice about how to present gaps in my work history | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 12. A CV writing service, paying a fee, if necessary | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 13. Someone to check my CV for me, before I send it | Yes! | Yes | No |

I would like to be able to....

- | | | | |
|---|------|-----|----|
| 14. Save my CV to use again when I apply somewhere else | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 15. Get the computer to check the spelling and grammar | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 16. Adapt my CV easily when I go for a different job | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 17. Store my CV on the computer (or web site) I'm using | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 18. Export my CV to work on it in another word processor | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 19. Build on data already saved from e.g. self-assessment exercises or a personal development portfolio | Yes! | Yes | No |
| 20. Link to other programs/web sites for advice on job search | Yes! | Yes | No |

Have you used a CV Builder before?

Yes No

If yes, can you remember what was it called?

Any other comments, or features you would like?

Appendix 2: CV Builder programs or web sites already in use

Some examples of CV Builders and packages described by focus group members or already in use in nextstep agencies with name of contact (where available)

Name of CV Builder	Organisation	Contact	Telephone	Email address
CV Writer	Leicestershire nextstep	Karen Heywood	0116 262 9993	kheywood@nextstep-leics.org.uk
In-house CV pack – paper-based plus Word templates	Leicestershire nextstep	Karen Heywood	0116 262 9993	kheywood@nextstep-leics.org.uk
Printed info and template set up on Word	Learning Shop, Birmingham	Barry Griffiths, Angela Kennedy	0121 464 2581	barry.griffiths@birmingham.gov.uk angela.kennedy@birmingham.gov.uk
Instant CV	Birmingham & Solihull Connexions	Joanne Crumpton	0121 704 6711	joanne.crumpton@connexions-bs.co.uk
[CV Solutions?]	Prospects Services Ltd	Julia Beard	01522 686515	
CV3 Plus CV examples on own web site	Derbyshire nextstep	Lynn Sargeant	01773 747834	lynn.sargeant@connexions-derbyshire.org
Careers CV program	Brownhills Community Association	Janet Davies	01543 452119	st-davies-j@brownhills.walsall.sch.uk
CV Workbook – paper only	Guidance Enterprises	Rosie Cantrell		RCantrell@guidance-enterprises.co.uk
Profile (developed by the OU)	Open University	Ellen Cocking	0115 971 5596	e.cocking@open.ac.uk
IAG CV Builder	Humberside Nextstep Agency	Margaret Roberts	01482 862741	mroberts@connexionshumber.co.uk

Karen Heywood (Leicestershire) writes: “We have a basic CV builder on our website which was developed by the Lincolnshire and Rutland IAGP in 2001. It performs the main functions of a CV builder, breaking each section down and providing help via notes on skills, experience etc. However, it cannot be bookmarked or saved so you need to complete it in one go and it doesn't allow the flexibility of producing different styles of CVs (although they could be manipulated later).

The main resource we use with our clients is our own paper-based CV builder pack and a word template to use at home or on our PC's. The majority of our clients do not want to self help which is why we have continued to develop our paper based CV pack where we can guide them through the initial stages and they can complete the pack at home before using the computer template, with support if necessary.

For those that do want to self-help then they can use our website CV builder but likewise, depending on their circumstances/qualifications, they can use any from the list of websites we may recommend to them from learndirect futures to Prospects. The client would have a range

to choose from as we are aware that there isn't a CV builder that covers all of the points in your questionnaire and there is a personal choice element regarding which format clients prefer. That being said, we would like to see a CV builder that incorporates all of the features you have listed on your questionnaire (not a lot then!) for those clients who can self-help. It is also important that the CV can be changed afterwards, as not all clients want a "standard" format, for example, graphic designers or fashion designers want to reflect their creativity in a CV. As it is mainly clients with higher-level qualifications that want to self-help, it is important that the CV builder reflects the additional skills and/or experience they may have and can produce a suitably professional CV. CV builders tend to produce one style of CV only that cannot be easily manipulated afterwards.”

Appendix 3. Additional comparative tables from the questionnaire surveys

NB: The data samples are too small to provide any significant conclusions but they may provide starting points for some further research should it be thought important to explore such issues.

1. Comparisons of rank ordering between other practitioners, and Learndirect lifelong learning advisers

Practitioners not from Learndirect	N=90		Learning advisers	N=12	
Item	Mean	Rank	Item	Mean	Rank
1	2.75	1	2	2.83	1=
2	2.73	2	6	2.83	1=
17	2.71	3	1	2.75	3=
10	2.66	4	11	2.75	3=
3	2.58	5	3	2.67	5=
6	2.56	6	16	2.67	5=
20	2.55	7	17	2.67	5=
16	2.53	8	22	2.58	8=
11	2.52	9	10	2.58	8=
18	2.46	10	4	2.50	10
7	2.37	11	21	2.42	11
5	2.32	12	14	2.36	12
19	2.31	13	5	2.33	13=
21	2.30	14	18	2.33	13=
14	2.26	15=	19	2.33	13=
22	2.26	15=	8	2.25	16
4	2.24	17	9	2.09	17
8	2.12	18	20	2.08	18
9	2.02	19	13	2.00	19
13	2.01	20	7	1.92	20
15	2.01	21	15	1.83	21
12	1.59	22	12	1.42	22

2. Comparison of the rank ordering given to items by practitioners with, and without, experience of a CV builder program.

USERS (<i>N=25</i>)			NON USERS (<i>N=54</i>)		
Item	Mean	Rank	Item	Mean	Rank
2	2.76	1	2	2.76	1
1	2.72	2=	1	2.74	2=
11	2.72	2=	17	2.74	2=
17	2.72	2=	10	2.63	4
3	2.68	5	6	2.59	5
20	2.67	6	16	2.54	6
16	2.64	7=	18	2.52	7
10	2.64	7=	3	2.50	8=
6	2.42	9=	20	2.50	8=
7	2.42	9=	11	2.41	10=
18	2.38	11	5	2.41	10=
22	2.32	12	21	2.36	12
19	2.24	13	7	2.35	13
14	2.16	14	19	2.31	14
4	2.12	15=	14	2.30	15
8	2.12	15=	22	2.26	16
21	2.12	15=	4	2.24	17
5	2.04	18	15	2.12	18
13	2.00	19	8	2.07	19
9	1.96	20	9	2.06	20
12	1.84	21	13	2.00	21
15	1.79	22	12	1.43	22