

# The future of careers work in schools in England

## Second supplementary paper

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### Introduction

At the beginning of 2013, in January, the House of Commons Education Select Committee reported concerns about the consistency and quality of careers guidance now being offered to young people following the introduction of a new national policy for careers education and guidance in England<sup>1</sup>. The change in policy means that local authorities are no longer required to provide a universal careers guidance service to young people: instead, schools and colleges are required to secure access to independent and impartial careers guidance for their pupils and students. In March 2013 I published a discussion paper<sup>2</sup>, in response to the Committee's findings, in which I set out for debate three possible options for the future of careers work in schools: (1) retaining the school-commissioned careers guidance model, but strengthening the arrangements; (2) returning to the partnership model, building on the new National Careers Service; (3) moving to a school-based, career development adviser model. This was followed, in July 2013, with the first of two planned supplementary papers<sup>3</sup>, which provided an update on developments over the preceding months since the publication of the original options paper, in particular the Department for Education's revised Statutory Guidance for schools, the Government's response to the Education Select Committee's report and the National Careers Council's first report. The July 2013 paper concluded with a reframing of the questions for debate, which included the following:

1. what practical steps should be taken to strengthen the current arrangements for careers guidance for young people in schools?
2. for the medium to longer term, should we continue with the commissioning model?
3. if not, should we move to a partnership model based on a national, all-age careers service, or to a school-based model?

The intention for this second supplementary paper is to examine the findings from Ofsted's thematic review of careers guidance in schools, publication of which had been expected originally in June or July 2013 but was put back to September 2013, and the Government's response both to Ofsted's recommendations and the recommendations from the National Careers Council. The paper offers a commentary on the Ofsted survey<sup>4</sup> and then goes on to examine critically the Action Plan for careers guidance published subsequently by the Department for Education (DfE) and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)<sup>5</sup>. It concludes not with a further set of questions, because those that were posed at the end of the first supplementary paper still remain, but with some practical proposals for improvement which extend beyond the actions planned by the DfE and BIS.

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<sup>1</sup> House of Commons (2013). *Careers guidance for young people: The impact of the new duty on schools. Seventh Report of Session 2012-13, House of Commons Education Committee*. London: The Stationery Office

<sup>2</sup> Copies can be downloaded in pdf format from [www.davidandrewsceg.co.uk](http://www.davidandrewsceg.co.uk)

<sup>3</sup> Copies can be downloaded in pdf format from [www.davidandrewsceg.co.uk](http://www.davidandrewsceg.co.uk)

<sup>4</sup> Ofsted (2013.) *Going in the right direction? Careers guidance in schools from September 2012*. London: Ofsted

<sup>5</sup> Department for Education and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2013). *Careers Guidance Action Plan. Government's Response to Recommendations from Ofsted's Thematic Review and National Careers Council's Report*. London: DfE and BIS

## Ofsted's survey of careers guidance in schools

The publication of Ofsted's report represented an important milestone in the debate about careers guidance for young people, not only because it was the first survey of the impact of the Government's policy to be based on robust evidence but also because it allowed the debate to move forward. Up to that point the Government's response to reports such as those from the Select Committee and the National Careers Council had been to wait until Ofsted had published its findings. Once the report was out in the public domain the debate could move forward, although it should be noted that there was no time available for discussion of the findings before the Government published its own response to the recommendations, as the DfE's and BIS's Action Plan was made available on the very same day.

Ofsted's survey is critical of the current state of careers guidance for young people. The opening paragraph says that "the new statutory duty for schools to provide careers guidance is not working well enough", and the report backs up this statement with the following findings:

- only one in five schools are ensuring that all students receive the level of information, advice and guidance they need
- too few schools have adequate arrangements to provide individual careers guidance from a qualified external adviser
- not enough schools work well with local authorities to support their more vulnerable students
- teachers who are required to deliver careers guidance in tutorials and assemblies have not had sufficient training or briefing on the range of options available
- the National Careers Service does not focus sufficiently on supporting young people - its website and telephone services are not promoted well in schools and are under-used
- too few schools use partnerships with employers to ensure that the careers guidance given to students is in line with the broad range of pathways available locally and nationally
- the extent to which schools promote opportunities in vocational training and apprenticeships varies considerably
- only just over a third of careers guidance interviews are conducted well enough
- only one in five schools evaluate the quality of their careers guidance effectively
- too few schools use destination data well to analyse the range of opportunities taken up by their students.

The overall picture portrayed by the report is one of inadequate provision of careers guidance for young people, both from the schools, which now have responsibility for securing access to careers guidance for their students, and from local authorities, which have retained responsibility for supporting the most vulnerable and disadvantaged young people. Ofsted did find a small number of schools that had taken the opportunity of having been given responsibility for careers guidance to put in place effective provision, and the report includes some short case studies of good practice.

The report begins by saying that "it is vitally important that young people have access to good and realistic information and guidance about the full range of career pathways available to them". What then follows demonstrates that this is clearly not happening in a large number of schools at the moment and that action is needed. The report includes sets of recommendations for a range of parties: Government; National Careers Service; local authorities; schools; Ofsted. In the next section of this paper I will examine whether the actions proposed by the DfE and BIS represent the level of response that will be necessary to bring about the improvements that are so clearly needed.

Before moving on from the Ofsted report, however, I want to make two further points. Firstly, although the report will be vitally important to informing future developments at a national level, it is equally important that schools themselves should use the report to review their own policy and practice. The value of thematic reviews is that they provide a template against which all schools can examine their own provision, and ask themselves the question - how would we have been portrayed if we had been included in the survey sample?

Secondly, while I welcome the report as a very useful analysis of the current state of careers work in schools in England, I am disappointed in two omissions. I would have liked to have seen more attention paid to the position of careers education. In particular, we need to know what impact the removal of the statutory duty to provide careers education in the curriculum has had. My other disappointment is that the report does not answer the question in its own title. Are we going in the right direction, and the problem is just that we have not got there yet, or is the direction itself wrong? That is to say, is the problem the policy or its implementation in schools? The report itself leaves this question unanswered and the recommendations are based on an implicit view that the direction of travel is right, but more needs to be done to achieve the destination. To return to the questions at the end of my first supplementary paper, the report provides suggestions for steps to strengthen the current arrangements but offers nothing in relation to whether the school-commissioned model is the right way forward in the medium or longer term.

### **Careers Guidance Action Plan (DfE & BIS)**

On the same day in September 2013 that Ofsted published its review of careers guidance in schools the Government published an action plan for careers guidance, in response both to Ofsted's recommendations and those put forward by the National Careers Council in its report in June 2013, together with an Inspiration Vision Statement<sup>6</sup>.

The action plan and vision statement are both written from the starting point that the current policy of requiring schools to secure access to careers guidance for their students is the right way forward. Through the two publications the Government proposes several practical steps to improve the quality and delivery of independent and impartial careers guidance. The first commitment is to revise the Statutory Guidance to schools, with stronger references to working with employers, providing information to students on all the available options at 16, and the importance of face-to-face guidance. The Government will also share best practice, improve the quality of destination data and ask schools to publish on their websites details of the careers guidance support they provide. The National Careers Service is to extend its work with young people by facilitating school-employer links, promoting to schools and careers guidance professionals the availability on its website of LMI and making available resources to support schools, young people and parents. Finally, Ofsted will give greater priority to careers guidance in school inspections.

All of these actions should help contribute to an improvement in the provision of careers guidance for young people, but will they be sufficient to remedy the situation described in Ofsted's report? My view is that the actions should be supported but they are not enough. The Action Plan needs to be bolder. Admittedly there is still scope to be more ambitious in some of the proposed actions. For example, as the Statutory Guidance is revised it could be further strengthened by including, as already proposed by Careers England<sup>7</sup>, requirements that schools should work towards a CEIAG quality award that has been nationally validated by the Quality in Careers Standard (QiCS) and must commission careers guidance services from an external provider that is matrix-accredited and employs advisers with appropriate professional qualifications in careers guidance. The revised Statutory Guidance could also include a recommendation that schools should prepare an annual plan for their provision of careers support. This was first proposed by the Select Committee but then quickly dismissed by both the main professional association for secondary school headteachers and the Government as a bureaucratic exercise. The Ofsted survey found that only 20% of schools review and evaluate the quality of their provision effectively and an annual plan would provide a basis for such review and evaluation. Asking schools to publish details of their careers support on their websites deals with the issue of public accountability, particularly to parents, but effective use of annual plan would provide a framework for systematic review and development.

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<sup>6</sup> HM Government (2013). *Inspiration Vision Statement*. London: BIS

<sup>7</sup> Careers England (2013). Press Notice 18 September 2013 *Careers Guidance: the statutory duty on schools must be unambiguous*

## Supporting schools to make the new arrangements work well

Strengthened Statutory Guidance will help but more is needed, both from Government and from the careers profession. In the next section I will set out not an alternative action plan, but an additional action plan. Since I published the initial discussion paper in March 2013, I have witnessed little appetite for debating options other than the school-commissioning model. I still believe we should return to the questions about the model itself, and possible alternatives, as we approach the next General Election but, in the meantime, the Ofsted survey shows that many young people in schools today are being deprived of the good quality careers guidance they need and deserve. In the short term our priority has to be to make the current arrangements work effectively, but it will be important also not to overlook the possible conclusion that the model itself might not be the right direction.

I suggest that the starting point for determining what actions are required by Government and others should be to make explicit what 'good' would look like. For the provision of careers guidance to be judged as working well in a school, what features would be in place? The Ofsted thematic review, plus other relevant research, suggests the following characteristics of good practice:

- a clear strategy for careers work, set by the headteacher and governors and linked to the school's aims and mission
- a careers leader, with delegated authority to lead and manage the school's provision of careers education and guidance, and with relevant professional development
- a good quality programme of careers and work-related education, with effective employer engagement
- freely accessible and up to date information on the full range of options available in education, training and work
- an effective process for identifying students' careers guidance needs
- access for students to independent and impartial careers guidance from an external provider with matrix accreditation and qualified advisers
- regular review and evaluation of careers education and guidance, including feedback from young people, resulting in an annual development plan
- training and briefing for school staff involved in careers education and guidance
- a statement available on the school's website, describing to parents the provision of careers education and guidance and explaining how they can engage with the support for their sons and daughters.

Although schools could establish these arrangements without any support from Government or other agencies, the evidence presented by Ofsted is that only a small minority have done so to date. I believe more schools could achieve this position, with appropriate support and challenge. The Government's Careers Guidance Action Plan offers support, by strengthening the Statutory Guidance to schools, improving the accessibility and information on the National Careers Service website and, through the National Careers Service, facilitating partnership working between schools and employers. It also provides challenge, through asking Ofsted to give careers guidance a higher priority in school inspections. My concern, however, is that these measures will not be sufficient.

Before I go on to provide some proposals for further support I want to examine more closely the role of employers. Several statements over recent months, from Ministers and others, have stressed the contribution employers can make. It is of course true that inspirational talks from employers can enhance a school's provision of careers support but such talks, and other partnership activities with employers, cannot replace the need for access to independent and impartial careers guidance. Engagement with employers can help schools to inspire, inform and advise young people about career opportunities and can significantly enhance programmes of careers education that aim to develop students' career management and employability skills. But to be truly effective such activities must be managed by the school, integrated into planned programmes of careers education and complemented by access to timely, independent and impartial guidance from qualified careers advisers.

## Practical steps forward

Additional support does not all need to come from Government. The careers profession itself has been providing support to schools and will continue to do so. The development of the Quality in Careers Standard (QiCS), by a consortium led by Careers England, means that all schools have readily available, nationally-validated quality frameworks for reviewing and evaluating their careers policy and practice in line with the statutory requirements. The recently established Career Development Institute (CDI) is well placed to disseminate examples of good practice and to provide professional development. At the same time, however, the Government should be taking a lead in supporting schools to take on the new responsibility it has given them. Through the National Careers Service it could make a significant contribution to building the capacity in schools, with a very modest level of funding. I will finish this paper, and short series of papers, therefore, not with a wish list but with two practical suggestions which, if given serious consideration, could make a real difference.

My first proposal is that the DfE should ask the National Careers Service to compile, and keep up to date, a directory of careers guidance providers which is then made available to schools via its website. For the past 40 years schools have had access to a freely-available careers guidance service but they have only known one provider - their local service. Now that they are having to buy in such support they are free to go anywhere in the market but it is, to them, an unfamiliar market. It would be a straight-forward task to put together a directory of providers with lists of services and contact details.

My second proposal tackles another weakness in the current market-based approach. Not only are schools operating in an unfamiliar market, they are being asked to do so with no additional funding. It has become clear that the £200 million that was spent on careers guidance services by local authorities will not be devolved to schools, but schools would respond positively to some acknowledgement that the new duty does involve additional expenditure. My proposal is that the DfE should offer schools a capacity-building grant, for two or three years, to help them set up appropriate arrangements for careers guidance. The money would be added to the school's budget on a clear understanding that it would be only for a fixed period, as development funding, and it would come with conditions, focused on ensuring that the schools use the funding to establish arrangements that reflect recognised good practice. One way of achieving this would be to require all schools in receipt of the funding to commit to working towards a QiCS-validated quality award. After all, the Government itself supported the development of the QiC Standard. A small, nationally coordinated but regionally-based team of advisers, employed through an extension of the National Careers Service contracts, could support and monitor developments. This is not a new idea by any means: it simply takes an approach that has worked well in other areas of schools' work in the past and applies it to the development of careers guidance for young people.

Schools want to do a good job for their students and a small investment from the DfE would secure the goodwill of many. While the big questions I set out at the beginning of these papers remain open and need to be addressed, we can also take additional action to ensure that the current generation of young people in schools is no longer denied access to the careers support everyone agrees they need.

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