



New strategy to transform the quality of careers education, advice and guidance for young people

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Executive summary

With effect from September 2012, responsibility for securing access for young people to impartial careers guidance has been devolved to schools. Four years after this policy change, the government has announced that it will publish a strategy to improve careers education and careers guidance in schools. This will extend to more than the annual updating of the Statutory Guidance and represents an at least implicit acknowledgement that the new policy is not working sufficiently well for all young people.

This paper, based on my experience of having been directly involved in careers work for young people over 35 years, offers some personal suggestions about what should be included in the forthcoming strategy. The aim of this strategy should be to ensure that the careers support that young people experience provides them with the help that they need to progress successfully through learning and into work. It should prepare them for lives and careers where they will have to navigate a complex and challenging landscape of education, training and employment.

The problem is that the provision of careers support for young people in England is patchy and the quality of the support pupils experience is entirely dependent on which particular school they attend. The government has already introduced several developments to address the problem and further foundations for improvement exist in the Gatsby benchmarks of good practice, the quality awards which are nationally validated by the Quality in Careers Standard and the Teach First pilot programme of continuing professional development (CPD) for careers leaders in schools. These initiatives can work with the framework for careers education published by the Career Development Institute (CDI) as well as the organisation's Register of Career Development Professionals. The suggestions offered in this paper would build on these foundations and help to bring all schools up to the quality of the best.

I have proposed actions at four levels of implementation.

1. **Immediate.** The Statutory Guidance should be re-structured around the Gatsby benchmarks and revised to: highlight the roles of careers leader and professionally qualified careers advisers; stress the importance of careers education; require schools to publish details of their provision to parents; and strengthen the recommendation to work towards a quality award.
2. **Short term.** Schools should be allocated development funding to help build their capacity to take on their extended responsibilities for careers. This should be conditional on committing to work towards a quality award.
3. **Medium term.** The DfE should invest in a national programme of CPD for careers leaders.
4. **Long term.** It may be necessary to change policy by reinstating the statutory duty to provide careers education in the curriculum and extending it to age 18. But it may also be necessary to move away from the school-commissioning model if the current patchiness remains. We could re-establish a national career guidance service, delivered locally, but in a contemporary context or we could explore moving to a school-based model.

The option we cannot take is to do nothing: our young people deserve better support than they are currently experiencing. The measures suggested in this paper present a framework for critically appraising the new strategy when it appears.

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1. Introduction

This short paper has been prepared to set out my own thoughts on the state of careers work in schools. It also seeks to identify what needs to be done to improve the current provision so that young people are given the support they need to progress successfully through education and into training and work. The paper follows the Government's announcement that it plans to publish a new strategy for careers and offers some ideas about what the strategy should include.

Background and context

The Education Act 2011 introduced the biggest change in careers support for young people for four decades. For almost 40 years young people in England had had access to careers guidance from a national service, delivered locally and which was free of charge to schools. The legislation removed from local authorities the requirement to provide a universal careers service and removed from schools the requirement to provide careers education in the curriculum. Instead schools were given a new statutory duty to secure access to independent careers guidance for their pupils, at their own expense. The national service, locally delivered, was dismantled and the introduction of the National Careers Service in 2012 proved to be a missed opportunity to provide a nationally coherent, all-age careers guidance service, as its provision of face-to-face guidance was restricted to adult clients only. At the same time the Government brought about further erosion to the support available for young people by ending the financial support for both Aimhigher, which helped to promote higher education as an aspiration, and the education-business partnerships, which helped to broker links between schools and employers.

The context for these policy changes was characterised by the twin principles of school autonomy and free-market, and the pursuit of austerity measures. For the past four years decisions about how to meet the statutory duty to secure access to careers guidance, and whether or not to provide careers education, have been left to individual schools. While schools have been free to use any provider of careers guidance of their own choosing, they have had to find the costs from existing budgets. The Government provided no funding and very little support. When this was combined with limited regulation, it is hardly surprising that Ofsted (2013) reported that the new arrangements were not working well enough, and that only one in five schools were providing young people with the information, advice and guidance they needed.

We are now in the fourth year of the implementation of the new policy, and still problems persist. Research commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) (Gibson *et al.*, 2015) found that only two-thirds of schools were meeting the statutory duty to secure access to independent careers guidance for pupils aged 12-18 by engaging external professional careers advisers. The same study reported that 16% of schools did not provide careers education in the curriculum. The Government has taken some action to address the problems. The Statutory Guidance to schools has been strengthened; the contracts for the National Careers Service have been extended to include a new role in helping to broker school-employer links and the Careers and Enterprise Company has been established to further support work with employers; National Networks for Collaborative Outreach have been established to promote higher education as an option; Jobcentre Plus advisers have been appointed to work in schools to provide information and advice on the labour market and apprenticeships; Ofsted has strengthened the position of careers education and guidance in its framework for school inspections. While each of these measures

represents a positive contribution to supporting careers work in schools, taken together they can appear to schools as an overly complex range of initiatives. By announcing its intention to publish a new strategy for careers, the Government has clearly acknowledged that more needs to be done, in terms of both the support provided and the coherence of the approach.

2. Problems and solutions

Understanding the problem in the provision of careers support

It is wrong to say that the provision of careers support for young people in England today is poor. It is not poor, it is patchy. Indeed, a recent report based on students' experiences (Archer and Moote, 2016), concludes that careers provision is not just 'patchy', it is also 'patterned', particularly in terms of social inequalities. Girls, minority ethnic and working class young people, lower attaining students and individuals who are unsure of their aspirations are all significantly less likely to report receiving careers support.

A policy based on school autonomy and the free market, with no additional funding or support and very little regulation, is almost bound to lead to inconsistent practice. The quality of careers support that young people in England now experience is entirely dependent on which particular school they attend. It should be acknowledged that some schools have embraced the new arrangements and have put in place support that represents a significant improvement on that which was there immediately previous to the new policy, but this is not true in the majority of schools. The challenge is to bring all schools up to the quality of the best: careers guidance for future generations should not be a postcode, or catchment area, lottery.

Foundations for improvement

There are a number of developments which provide the foundations for improvement in this system.

- *The Gatsby Benchmarks*. The Gatsby Charitable Foundation (2014) has provided a framework of eight benchmarks of good practice which are becoming widely accepted.
- *Quality in Careers Standard*. More schools are working towards achieving a quality award for careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) now that the awards have become nationally-validated by the Quality in Careers Standard (2016).
- *Teach First's CPD programme for careers leaders*. The current policy for careers support for young people places greater responsibilities upon schools themselves. This, in turn, requires strong leadership inside schools and Teach First (2015) is piloting a programme of continuing professional development (CPD) for careers and employability leaders.
- *CDI framework for careers and employability learning*. The increased emphasis on engaging with employers highlights the need to integrate such activities into the school's programme of careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) and the Career Development Institute (CDI) (2015) has recently provided a revised framework for careers, employability and enterprise education.
- *CDI register*. It is recognised that work with employers does not replace the need for access to impartial careers guidance. Indeed, it can be argued that the more encounters young people have with employers, apprenticeship providers, universities etc., the greater the need for access to impartial guidance from a professionally-qualified careers adviser. The CDI (2016) has established a register of such careers professionals.
- *The Careers & Enterprise Company*. By setting up and funding the company, the government has recognised the need for support and has established a mechanism for managing national programmes.

3. A new strategy

This concluding section of the paper sets out some suggestions for practical ways forward, on a timeframe that moves from the immediate to the short, medium and longer terms.

Immediate: revising the Statutory Guidance

The Statutory Guidance should be revised in the following ways.

- The guidance should be structured around the eight Gatsby benchmarks.
- The role of the careers leader in schools should be highlighted and all schools should be required to identify one.
- The importance of careers, employability and enterprise education should be stressed.
- Careers advisers working in schools should be required to be qualified to a minimum of Level 6.
- All schools should be required to publish details of their provision of CEIAG to parents.
- All schools should be *required*¹ to work towards a Quality in Careers Standard validated quality award for CEIAG.

Short term: Providing funding to build capacity

The new policy has given schools a major new responsibility but without any funding to take on this new task. It is estimated that local authorities spent almost £200 million on the universal careers service immediately prior to the change in legislation. Since 2014 the government has begun to reinvest in careers with the formation of the Careers and Enterprise Company. At present this is at a far lower level of funding than in the past but it represents a positive change in direction. However, at present none of this new funding has been directly available to schools. This seems flawed as schools have the lead responsibility for the delivery of this activity. Additional funding for schools could make a real difference. Schools could be given a capacity-building grant, to review and develop their provision of CEIAG. This could be spread over, say, three years and be conditional upon improving their careers provision. For example, 50% of the funding could be allocated in return for a written commitment from the governing body for the school to work towards achieving a quality award (or seeking re-accreditation if the school already holds such an award) and the other 50% could be allocated on having achieved the award, or re-accreditation. An alternative approach would be to build on the approach of the current Good Career Guidance national pilot in the North East. Schools could be allocated the funding in return for reviewing their provision against all eight Gatsby benchmarks, and preparing and implementing an action plan for improving their careers support. This process could be supported and monitored by new, CEIAG Adviser posts in each local enterprise partnership (LEP) area, funded in a similar way to the current Enterprise Coordinator posts and working in partnership with those roles.

¹ The 2015 version of the Statutory Guidance recommends that schools should work towards achieving a quality award. If every school were to achieve an award, they would all, by definition, have in place good quality provision, thereby removing the current inconsistencies and ensuring an entitlement to good quality support for all young people.

Medium term: Strengthening careers leadership

The new arrangements require strong leadership for careers work inside schools. Investing in CPD for senior leaders with overall responsibility for careers and middle leaders with responsibility for the day-to-day leadership, would help build the schools' capacity to manage their new role.

The DfE could invest in a national programme of accredited CPD for careers leaders, building on the Teach First pilot and the research the Department commissioned on this issue in 2009-10 (McCrone *et al*, 2010). It could also work with the providers of CPD for headteachers and other senior leaders to ensure that management of CEIAG is included in their training.

Longer term: Reviewing the system

The actions listed so far are all designed to make the current policy arrangements work more effectively, and to help ensure an entitlement to good quality careers support for young people in all schools in England. This final section explores the possibility of changing the policy itself, in two respects.

Firstly, the statutory duty to provide careers education could be reinstated, and extended to age 18. When the previous requirement, to provide careers education in the curriculum for pupils aged 11-16, was removed no convincing case for this change was put forward. And from that point, the need for young people to have good career management and employability skills has been stressed in several reports. With the raising of the participation age, it would be appropriate to continue the provision of careers education to age 18.

Secondly, if all the measures listed earlier fail to achieve the ultimate objective of removing the current 'patchiness', it may be necessary to move away from the school-commissioning model. There are two broad options: to return to a national service, locally delivered but in a contemporary context, or to move to a school-based model similar to that which exists in the Republic of Ireland. This paper is not the place to discuss these in detail; instead they will be presented in outline only.

For the first of the two options, the current National Careers Service could be replaced by an all-age career development service, commissioned through the 39 LEAs, and with a remit to work with all schools and colleges. The DfE and BIS would specify the service, the contracts could be managed and monitored by the Careers & Enterprise Company and the services inspected by Ofsted. This model has many of the features of the approach adopted for young people's career guidance in England in the 1990s, under the privatised careers services introduced by the Conservative government of the day but translated to the current context. It also addresses the problem in the current arrangements of access to careers guidance for young people who, for whatever reasons, are not in a school or college.

For the second option, schools would be required to provide careers guidance, either by recruiting professionally qualified advisers or by commissioning services, and would be allocated ring-fenced funding to cover the costs. The school-based advisers could be supplied with labour market intelligence (LMI) from the LEAs, and provided with CPD from the CDI. The arrangements would be inspected by Ofsted in the course of its school inspections. This option opens up the possibility of transforming the role of careers professionals in England by combining the roles of careers adviser and careers leader, and reforming the professional qualifications to prepare individuals for this single role.

It is acknowledged that both of these two options would require investment of public money, but the costs would soon be outweighed by the savings made by enabling individuals to operate more successfully in the labour market and in the marketplace for learning. Those markets would be more efficient with less dropout and switching, thereby reducing personal, social and economic costs.

4. Personal postscript

I have worked in careers education and guidance for young people for 35 years, initially as a careers teacher in a school. In that time I have experienced its highs and lows. Right now it is not in a very good place and our young people deserve better. The ideas set out in this paper are offered as practical solutions to addressing the problem.

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