

The future of careers work in schools in England

First supplementary paper

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Introduction

In March 2013 I self-published a discussion paper¹ on future options for careers work in schools in England. The paper was written following the change in national policy for careers education and guidance services for young people, which has required schools, from September 2012, to commission careers guidance services for their pupils² and a House of Commons Education Select Committee inquiry³, which reported concerns about the consistency, quality, independence and impartiality of careers guidance now being offered to young people. The purpose of the paper was to stimulate a debate about the future of careers work in schools. It set out three possible options: (1) retaining the school-commissioned careers guidance model but strengthening the arrangements; (2) returning to the partnership model, building on the new, all-age National Careers Service; (3) moving to a school-based career development adviser model.

This paper is the first of two planned supplementary papers. It aims to provide an update on developments since the publication of the original discussion paper and to report on the initial responses to the paper. Specifically the paper covers four recent publications: the Department for Education's revised Statutory Guidance for schools (March 2013); the Government's response to the Education Select Committee's report (April 2013); an interim report from the Labour Party's Skills Taskforce (May 2013), which includes an indication of a policy option for careers services for young people; the National Careers Council's first report (June 2013). A second supplementary paper, planned for the autumn 2013, will cover Ofsted's thematic review of careers guidance in schools, undertaken in the spring term 2013 and which is due to be published in September, and the Government's response to the National Careers Council's report.

Revised statutory guidance for schools

In March 2013, shortly after my discussion paper was published, the Department for Education (DfE) revised its statutory guidance for schools⁴. The update came about as a result of the Government's decision to extend the duty on schools to secure access to independent and impartial careers guidance down to year 8 and up to age 18, with effect from September 2013. In the first year of implementation, 2012-13, the duty has applied only to pupils in years 9, 10 and 11.

While the document has been revised to extend the age range to which the duty applies, the DfE has not taken the opportunity to strengthen the guidance to schools in the ways in which the Select Committee's report recommended. 'Independent' careers guidance is defined as 'external to the school' but the guidance continues to offer schools the opportunity to interpret this as making available access to a website or telephone helpline, and does not insist on the external source of careers guidance being a careers adviser. Similarly, the revised guidance does not require schools to employ only qualified careers professionals, nor does it require them to use only matrix accredited

¹ Copies can be downloaded in pdf format from www.davidandrewsceg.co.uk

² Education Act 2011

³ 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

⁴ *Statutory Guidance. The duty to secure independent and impartial careers guidance for young people in schools.* (DfE, March 2013)

organisations. The opportunity to strengthen the quality assurance framework for careers guidance provided by schools has not been taken by the Government on this occasion. The statutory guidance will be reviewed again by March 2014.

Government's response to Select Committee report

The Select Committee's inquiry into careers guidance for young people and the impact of the new duty on schools concluded that the Government's decision to transfer responsibility for careers guidance to schools was regrettable and that it has led to an overall deterioration in the level of provision for young people. The report included 18 recommendations for improving the situation, all presented within the framework of the current policy and economic climate. The Government responded to the report in April 2013⁵.

The overall response from the Government has been to say that, as the inquiry took place only one term into the new arrangements, it is too early to draw any firm conclusions. The Government admitted that there is scope to further develop the provision of careers guidance for young people, but said that it wished to wait for the publication of Ofsted's thematic review, now expected in September 2013, and of the National Careers Council's first annual report (since published, in June 2013) before considering how best to support future improvements. The response acknowledged that Ofsted has confirmed that it will strengthen the inspection of careers guidance in the next revision of its inspection framework, but the Government's response to the remainder of the Committee's recommendations has been either to wait until the publication of the reports from Ofsted and the National Careers Council or to reject them.

The Government has said that it is open to the suggestion of combining the current Statutory Guidance to schools and the DfE's Practical Guide to securing independent careers guidance and saying more about collaborative approaches but, again, only once it has considered the findings of the thematic review and the National Careers Council's recommendations. It also agrees with the Committee's suggestion that the role and remit of the National Careers Service (NCS) could be strengthened in relation to offering support to schools, but only in relation to bringing business, schools and colleges together and not the capacity-building role that the Committee recommended and the National Careers Council has since endorsed (see later section).

The response goes on to reject several of the specific actions proposed by the Committee: the publication by schools of an annual careers plan; requiring schools to work towards achieving a quality award validated by the Quality in Careers Standard, secure careers guidance from only matrix-accredited providers and ensure that careers advisers they employ are professionally qualified to Level 6; reinstating the requirement on schools to provide careers education and work-related learning as part of their duty. The Government's view on each of these matters is that they should remain voluntary.

In summary, no changes to policy or guidance have been made by the Government in response to the Select Committee's report at this stage and any changes that might be introduced in the future will only be considered after the Government has taken account of the findings of Ofsted's thematic review and the recommendations of the National Careers Council.

⁵ House of Commons (2013). *Careers guidance for young people: The impact of the new duty on schools; Government Response to the Committee's Seventh Report of Session 2012-13. Sixth Special Report of Session 2012-13, House of Commons Education Committee*. London: The Stationery Office

Labour policy review: reference to careers guidance in schools

In May 2013 the Labour Party's Policy Review Skills Taskforce published its interim report⁶. The main focus of the report is on raising the status of vocational education and increasing the level of apprenticeships and other work-based training, but the report includes a section on information, advice and guidance for young people. The Taskforce is critical of the decision to devolve responsibility for careers guidance to schools, citing not only the difficult conflict of interests between offering impartial advice yet also being a provider of some of the opportunities post-16, but also the difficulty of not necessarily being well equipped to have up to date knowledge of local and regional labour markets.

In a section about the need for young people to have high quality guidance, the report suggests that there is a strong case for a sub-regional, independent information and careers guidance service with strong links to employers. Whether this model becomes adopted as official Labour Party policy as it prepares for the next General Election, expected in spring 2015, remains to be seen but it introduces a variation on the second of the three options set out in my original discussion paper, the all-age national careers service. The model would need further debate, particularly about the precise nature of the links with employers and about whether the intention would be to establish the proposed sub-regional careers guidance service for young people alongside the existing NCS for adults (which is already organised through regional providers) or to reform the current NCS into a sub-regional all-age service, but it usefully adds two new issues to the debate about future options. An independent service closely linked to the skills agenda, and organised on a sub-regional level, combines two topical themes: firstly, greater synergy between careers guidance and skills strategies, and secondly, localism. The need to develop closer relationships between careers guidance policy and practice and strategies to tackle skill shortages is being debated actively in several different contexts as we will see in the next section of this paper. The Heseltine report on wealth creation recommended planning the provision of careers guidance at a local level, possibly funded through a single pot⁷, and in collaboration with the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) which are organised at a sub-regional level.

National Careers Council report

The National Careers Council was established in May 2012, to provide advice to the Government on careers provision for young people and adults in England. The Council published its first annual report⁸ in June 2013.

The report sets its findings firmly in the context of a detailed analysis of the economic and social challenges we face, in particular the apparent paradox of high unemployment, especially among young people, and the difficulties employers experience in recruiting people with the skills they need. It calls for a culture change in careers provision to address this mismatch of skills shortages and high unemployment. The Council puts forward seven recommendations, each accompanied by several practical steps (36 in total) setting out the actions it proposes.

The Council argues for stronger links between careers guidance and the labour market and proposes an employer-led advisory board, comprising senior representatives from employers, education and the career development profession, to guide the future work of the NCS and ensure it meets the needs of young people, adults and employers. The report seems to take the view that the provision of careers guidance services for adults is broadly working well but that services for young people need to be enhanced significantly. The Council does not challenge the current policy of devolving responsibility for careers guidance to schools but it does propose a range of measures to significantly expand the

⁶ Labour's Policy Review. *Skills Taskforce Interim Report: Talent Matters – why England needs a new approach to skills*

⁷ Heseltine, M. (2012). *No Stone Unturned: in pursuit of growth*

⁸ National Careers Council (2013). *An Inspirational Nation: Creating a culture change in careers provision*

work of the NCS with schools, young people and parents. These practical steps include: helping schools to access impartial face-to-face professional careers guidance; developing a dedicated area for parents and carers on the NCS website; providing up to date labour market intelligence to schools; working with the Career Development Institute (CDI) to provide professional development and other support to school staff; developing a section on its website for teachers; promoting the use of matrix and of quality awards validated by the Quality in Careers Standard; facilitating the sharing of best practice. All of these proposals have the common goal of building the capacity of schools to fulfill their statutory duty and improving the quality and consistency of careers guidance provided for young people and careers support services for parents.

Since the report was published both the Confederation for British Industry (CBI) and the Association for School and College Leaders (ASCL) have backed the Council's call to extend face-to-face careers guidance to students. The CBI goes on to say that young people need face-to-face advice from the NCS alongside its online services⁹. A subsequent response from the National Careers Council asserts that a National Careers Service that is generally performing well for adults, with both face-to-face and online careers support, should be expanded to young people. These statements suggest a role for the NCS in addition to that of capacity-building in schools, as a provider of careers guidance services for young people.

The report does not make any recommendations about increasing the funding for schools, or to the NCS, but it does include a breakdown of the overall budget for the NCS. The figures reveal some interesting facts. Firstly, there is the by now familiar information that while the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) contributed over £80M in 2012-13, for careers guidance services for adults, the equivalent sum from the DfE was under £5M. As the Minister for Skills, Matthew Hancock MP, pointed out at the launch of the report, the DfE's contribution pays only for the website and telephone helpline: it does not include the funding that schools are committing to commissioning careers guidance from their own budgets. However, it must be acknowledged that the funding that schools are committing to careers guidance has been taken from other areas of their expenditure: schools have not been given any additional funding to pay for their new responsibilities. Secondly, the budget figures reveal that the Ministry of Justice contributed almost three times as much money as the DfE, to pay for careers guidance for individuals in custody. While the report gives no indication about how its proposed enhanced support for schools from the NCS will be funded, it does say that the NCS must remain as a single national service and that its funding should not be included in any 'single pot' for the regions.

Initial responses to my original discussion paper

The paper was published in March 2013. Several individuals and organisations have kindly helped to disseminate the paper via various websites. People who have taken the time to get in touch have indicated a preference either for a genuinely all-age external careers guidance service, providing face-to-face guidance to young people in schools, or for a school-based model. No one has said that we should continue with the current commissioning model.

Some people have asked about the different costs of each of the three models I set out. My view is that, although there may be marginal variations between the costs of the three options, the overall costs would be broadly similar. This is because the largest component of the budget would be spent on providing face-to-face guidance to young people and this would cost approximately the same amount in any of the models: the difference would be the source of the funding (schools' own budgets in Options 1 and 3; DfE funding in Option 2). When I have attempted to estimate the annual costs, based on the numbers of schools and secondary age students in England and the average salary and

⁹ CBI Director, John Cridland, speaking at the Grammar School Heads' Association annual conference on 19 June 2013

on-costs for a careers adviser, the end result is a figure just over £100m, which is close to the costs quoted in Lizzie Taylor's paper¹⁰ on the business case for funding careers guidance in schools, published by Careers England in March 2013. How much will it cost will be an important question for the future but so too will be the question of who will be expected to pay for careers guidance services for young people in schools? At the moment the costs are being covered by schools, from a budget that has not been increased to take account of their new statutory responsibilities.

Continuing the debate

There is one fundamental point on which everyone agrees: high quality careers guidance for young people is vitally important. It is, therefore, essential that we keep the debate alive about future options, both in the short term and the longer term. The 'official' discourse, through the Select Committee's inquiry and the National Careers Council's report, concentrates on strengthening the current arrangements. My paper offers this as one option for the future, but also offers two other possibilities, namely establishing an all-age national careers service that provides face-to-face careers guidance to young people or moving to a school-based model. Since its report was published the National Careers Council has said that the remit of the NCS should be expanded to include the provision of face-to-face careers guidance in schools, thereby suggesting support for the first of these two further options. For the sake of young people progressing through schools now, we need to focus on strengthening the current arrangements but we should not restrict our action to only this option when we consider the longer-term future of careers work in schools in England.

For the next stage of the debate, I suggest the questions should be re-framed to the following:

- 1. Building on the Select Committee's report and the National Careers Council's recommendations, what practical steps should be taken, by whom, to strengthen the current arrangements for careers guidance for young people in schools?**
- 2. How should such support be funded?**
- 3. For the medium to longer term, should we continue with the commissioning model?**
- 4. If not, should we move to a partnership model based on a national, all-age careers service, possibly organised sub-regionally, or to a school-based model?**
- 5. In what practical ways should we bring about the greater alignment between careers guidance policy and practice, and the interests of the economy, that is proposed by the National Careers Council?**

We must continue to debate these issues.

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¹⁰ Taylor, L (2013). *Cost to the Economy of Government Policy on Career Guidance: A Business Case for Funding and Strengthening Career Guidance in Schools*. A discussion paper written by Lizzie Taylor and published by Careers England