



Briefing Paper

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Understanding the role of the Careers Adviser within 'Personal Guidance'

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Introduction

Statutory guidance¹ places on schools and colleges a responsibility to make sure all young people have access to a programme of independent career guidance; that is, the full range of stable, structured activity defined by the eight Gatsby Benchmarks². Ofsted stresses this requirement in the Ofsted Inspection Framework for Schools³ among the evidence used to evaluate personal development and how career guidance benefits pupils in choosing and deciding on their next steps.

A key aim of the statutory guidance is to ensure that career guidance is delivered by individuals with the right skills and experience. Indispensable to this provision and typically involved in its delivery is the Careers Adviser.

The statutory guidance confidently asserts that:

“Careers advisers are expert at interpreting LMI and using this with students to enable them to make effective career decisions” (p.19).

“Careers advisers can help students to identify ambitious education, training and career options, and progression routes, by exploring potential opportunities with the student, supporting them in assessing their abilities, interests and achievements, enabling them to reach an informed career decision and empowering them to move forward” (p.38).

The guidance says that *“Schools and colleges should make sure that careers advisers (internal and external) providing personal guidance to students are trained to the appropriate level” (p.39) and encourages schools to view the UK Register of Career Development Professionals held by the Career Development Institute (CDI). Registration shows that a Careers Adviser is professionally qualified at level 6 or higher in career guidance/development, abides by the CDI Code of Ethics which includes impartiality, and updates their skills and knowledge by undertaking 25 hours CPD each year. These stringent eligibility requirements strongly demonstrate that to deliver personal guidance effectively requires a certain level of knowledge, understanding and skills.*

Personal Guidance and career guidance counselling

Of the Gatsby benchmarks, number eight is ‘Personal Guidance’. The guidance states that:

“Personal guidance is the opportunity for students to make sense of the careers activities they have experienced across the other benchmarks and reflect on what this means for their career plans, with the assistance of a qualified careers adviser” (p.38).

The Gatsby Foundation review of personal careers guidance in secondary schools in England emphasises the importance of senior leaders ensuring sufficient time is allocated to careers advisers to perform their duties to a high standard (4). Within the statutory guidelines it states that, *“CDI guidance recommends that at least 45 minutes are allowed for every personal guidance interview” (p.38).*

At the heart of the provision of Personal Guidance lies career guidance counselling. Some prefer the term career coaching, although more often this refers to a series of career interventions. In schools and colleges it is not unusual for a young person to be seen by the Careers Adviser once only for career guidance counselling.

So what is career guidance counselling? It is not just the provision of information. Nor is it simply information tailored to the needs of the individual (advice). Career guidance counselling is the skilled process of helping a young person know themselves (self-awareness), engaging with their career hopes and aspirations, and supporting them in assessing realistic options and creating a meaningful future. This involves considering educational and training options. It encompasses engagement with the world of work. It includes helping young people to cope with disappointment, the management of relationships, and for some, concerns at having no idea what they want to be – because of course everyone else does.

In providing career guidance counselling, Careers Advisers draw on career theory and models of practice to support them in building a rapport with the young person, exploring their situation and career ideas, gently challenging as appropriate, filling the gaps in their knowledge, and understanding and agreeing actions (goal setting) that enable the young person to move forward. Using open questions, Careers Advisers raise matters the young person may never have considered but to which they generally have the answer. Similarly, the influence of past experience and expectations on present and future thoughts about work and life are revealed, as the Careers Adviser reflects back the young person’s story using their counselling skills of summarising and paraphrasing.

Careers Advisers have a significant role in influencing and driving forward the growth our economy needs through empowering young people and assisting them into meaningful careers where they add value⁵. In opening up the world of work to the young person, the Careers Adviser is able to explain the rhetoric around employability skills, resilience and adaptability, alongside constructing CVs/personal statements and improving performance at interviews. Using networking, consultancy and advocacy skills to develop organisations and systems, they are able to help individuals to succeed within such organisations and systems. Also, being aware of professional boundaries, where the young person’s needs fall outside their expertise, they are able to make referrals to organisations better placed to assist.

The benefits of a professionally qualified Careers Adviser

Research evidences a consensus that enabling young people to manage the complexities of education, training and career decision making in a fragile and changing employment market, benefits from investing in the services of a professionally qualified Careers Adviser. Someone who is mindful of the underpinning theory and stages of adolescent development. Someone able to support the young person in identifying their career goals and how to achieve them, through analysing experience and prior knowledge. Someone aware of personal, social and cultural influences, able to lead the young person to a deeper understanding of themselves and the opportunities available, how to decide between them how to successfully navigate transitions through education to meaningful employment.

Personal guidance delivered by a professionally qualified Careers Adviser empowers the young person to apply their learning from the full range of career guidance activities to themselves. It enables them to assess their own strengths and prepares them for future success. The Careers Adviser accomplishes this through providing unbiased information about potential next steps, interpreting and utilising up-to-date labour market information and identifying connections to the education system and the labour market that have meaning for the young person.



What do those supported by professionally qualified Careers Advisers say about their contribution to Personal Guidance?

"We offer one-to-one personal careers guidance sessions to all students from Year 10 upwards. These sessions are 40 minutes with an independent careers guidance adviser from CXK and a follow up written action plan. (...)The impact of these sessions means that the students are confident that they can seek expert help and advice and know where to go to get it." – Headteacher¹¹

"The more effective careers guidance interviews were generally carried out by external, qualified careers guidance professionals or an internal specialist who had had significant experience and training in providing individual careers guidance. (...) The examples the students gave of successful careers guidance included (...) initial and follow-up individual interviews with a professional careers adviser." – Ofsted¹²

"For some of our students guidance interviews can act as a good motivator as students are given the truth based on their current performance – which seems to act as a 'reality check.' For others, it helps them to realise their potential and guides them into provision that is right for them. When students have that goal, it encourages them, motivates them, and generally improves attendance, behaviour and academic performance." – Careers Coordinator¹³

"I would say from a personal guidance point of view, the students come away from a careers appointment feeling more comfortable with decision making than they did before and more empowered. For example, it might be a student who [is] broadly interested in educational psychology but is panicking that they are not doing the right subjects, and they are able to come away with the knowledge and understanding that there is a variety of different paths they can take." – Careers Coordinator¹⁴

And finally, not having spoken to a Careers Adviser prior to entering higher education a student explains:

"I feel it [career guidance counselling] was a hidden gem. I've been battling with these decisions for quite some time now and to actually discuss it with someone and get a different perspective was really nice...I didn't realise the extent I needed the help." - Student¹⁵

Education is an investment in a young person's future. Career guidance counselling from a qualified Careers Adviser helps ensure that the outcome of that investment is more young people achieving successful transitions through learning to meaningful employment. It is this expertise that adds value to Personal Guidance.

Every school and college seeks to ensure that pupils can attain the qualifications appropriate for them to progress to the next stages of their education, training or employment. Within the career guidance programme, Careers Advisers play an essential role in supporting schools and colleges so that young people understand what qualifications or standards have to be met to go on to meaningful destinations and are ready for the next stage of education, employment or training.

Career guidance

(Section 42A of the Education Act 1997 requires governing bodies to ensure that all registered pupils at the school are provided with independent careers guidance from year 8 (12-13 year olds) to year 13 (17-18 year olds).

Career guidance is understood to be the full range of activity delivered under the eight Gatsby Benchmarks. It must be presented in an impartial manner and in the best interests of the young person. It must include information on the range of education, training and apprenticeship options and not be biased towards any particular institution, education or work option. This includes opportunity for a range of education and training providers to inform young people about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Careers guidance is considered during Ofsted inspections. Destinations are now also an established part of the accountability system, and a successful careers guidance programme will be reflected in higher numbers of pupils progressing to positive destinations, such as apprenticeships, technical routes, school sixth forms, sixth form colleges, further education colleges, universities or employment.

This accountability is grounded in research^{6,7,8,9} that evidences the impact and efficacy of career guidance in helping individuals to manage their careers and maximise their potential. Findings demonstrate that it can reduce the likelihood of individuals dropping out, and increase their likelihood of engaging with learning¹⁰. Communicating developments in the labour market, discussing effective use of qualifications and skills and addressing skills mismatches are core functions of career guidance. Hence, by enabling individuals to improve their capabilities in ways that contribute to enhanced jobs, skills and growth, career guidance has been shown to provide substantial benefits for the economy.

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