

# Going in the right direction?

Careers guidance in schools from September 2012

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Since September 2012, schools have been legally responsible for securing access to independent and impartial careers guidance for all their students in Years 9 to 11. For this survey, inspectors visited 60 secondary schools and academies between December 2012 and March 2013 to evaluate how well this new duty is being carried out.

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## Executive summary

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. However, the new statutory duty for schools to provide careers guidance is not working well enough. Of the 60 schools visited for this survey, only 12 had ensured that all students received sufficient information to consider a wide breadth of career possibilities.

The model of careers guidance provided by the Department for Education (DfE) is a flexible one. It requires that individual students are signposted to different career guidance activities at the relevant stages of their development and decision-making. It is based on the premise that not all students need the same level of careers guidance at the same time and that schools themselves understand best the individual needs of their students. However, the DfE's guidance does not prescribe clearly enough the way that schools should provide students with independent and impartial guidance.

Although nearly all of the schools visited did offer a range of different careers guidance activities, the provision was not sufficiently well coordinated or reviewed to ensure that each student received appropriate guidance. Very few of the schools visited knew how to provide a service effectively or had the skills and expertise needed to provide a comprehensive service. Few schools had purchased an adequate service from external sources.

The information students received about careers was too narrow. Too many students were unaware of the wide range of occupations and careers that they might consider. About half the schools used their own staff to inform students about careers but these staff often had insufficient training and did not provide students with up-to-date information.

Schools did not work well enough with employers to provide their students with direct experience of the world of work, which would help to broaden students' minds about possible future employment. Vocational training and apprenticeships were rarely promoted effectively, especially in schools with sixth forms. The A-level route to universities remained the 'gold standard' for young people, their parents and teachers.

Local authorities retain the responsibility for providing careers guidance and individual support for vulnerable students. Not all the local authorities worked well enough with the schools visited to identify the support that these students would need for their next step after Key Stage 4. Inspectors found that aspirations for many of these students were too low. Students were often not encouraged enough, or inspired, to select more challenging career pathways.

The National Careers Service is responsible for providing independent and impartial careers guidance via a website and a telephone service for all users from the age of

13. However, the service made little contribution to careers guidance for the young people in the schools visited. The youth telephone service was poorly promoted and, therefore, little used. Most teachers and students found the website to be too adult focused to be useful.

Thorough monitoring of the quality of careers guidance provision was rarely observed in the schools visited. Leaders and managers did not know the extent to which their students had the information and guidance they needed to make the important decisions that shape their future careers. In particular, only about a quarter of the schools had begun to use the new data on students' destinations at Key Stages 4 and 5 to evaluate how well their careers work was guiding students to appropriate choices.

From the evidence gathered by this survey, too few schools are providing careers guidance that meets the needs of all their students. It is, nevertheless, possible for schools to provide good-quality independent and impartial careers guidance to young people. This report provides a small number of examples of successful approaches in individual schools that have helped students to: broaden their minds about the options open to them; inspire and motivate them to succeed at school; and to reflect carefully and make informed choices about their future careers. In these schools, forward-looking leaders and governors have made careers guidance part of their strategic efforts to foster better achievement and economic well-being for all their students.

## Key findings

- Only one in five schools were effective in ensuring that all its students in Years 9, 10 and 11 were receiving the level of information, advice and guidance they needed to support decision-making. The highest priority was given to providing careers guidance to Year 11 students and to focusing support for vulnerable students.
- Too few of the schools visited had adequate arrangements to provide an individual careers guidance interview by a qualified external adviser to all the students in Years 9, 10 and 11 that needed one.
- Not enough of the schools visited worked well with local authorities to support their more vulnerable students in making choices, including those who had special educational needs or who were disabled. Most of the work focused on ensuring that support was available for vulnerable students after they left Year 11. Very few of the vulnerable young people interviewed were clear about how different career pathways could help them to achieve their potential.
- In the weakest provision, teachers were often required to deliver careers guidance in tutorials and assemblies but they had not had sufficient training or briefing on the range of career options available. As a result, students did not have opportunities to explore their ideas thoroughly or have access to enough information.

- A small number of the schools visited demonstrated that it is possible for any type of school to provide very effective careers guidance. In these schools, leaders and governors had made careers guidance a high strategic priority.
- The National Careers Service does not focus sufficiently on supporting young people up to the age of 18. More specifically, its website and the telephone services were not promoted well in the schools visited and were considerably under-used. Very few schools were aware that the service could provide local and national labour market information as well as updated information on the full range of further and higher education provision and vocational training, including apprenticeships.
- Links between careers guidance and local employment opportunities were weak. Too few schools used partnerships with employers, local enterprise partnerships and other organisations to ensure that the career guidance given to students was in line with the broad range of career pathways available locally and nationally. Employer networks were not taking enough initiative in making links with schools. Very few of the schools visited had local or national employers on their governing bodies.
- The extent to which schools promoted opportunities available at other providers, including vocational training and apprenticeships, varied considerably. While some schools provided a wide range of taster courses and well-planned visits by post-16 external education and training providers, others only disseminated the dates of a local college open day. The promotion of other post-16 options was particularly weak in many 11 to 18 schools.
- Only just over a third of the 43 individual careers guidance interviews observed by inspectors were conducted well enough. In the better interviews, the students were given practical, realistic advice and clear follow-up actions. Weaker interviews focused too much on providing prospectuses for further and higher education and training courses and directing students to websites.
- About four out of five schools visited did not evaluate the quality of their careers guidance effectively. They did not monitor the individual guidance sessions or explore the impact of the careers guidance to evaluate and improve the quality of the service they provided. Very few of the schools reported systematically to their governing body on how well they were meeting their new statutory duty.
- Not all the schools visited had accurate and complete data on students' actual destinations and too few of these schools were using destination data well to analyse the range of further and higher education and training opportunities taken up by their students.

## Recommendations

The government should:

- provide clear and more explicit guidance to schools on:
  - what constitutes a comprehensive careers guidance strategy
  - how to secure independent, external careers guidance
  - how to monitor the impact of this provision effectively
- ensure that information on students' destinations at the ages of 16, 17, and 18 is complete and accurate, so that schools can evaluate the impact of the support and advice they give their students.

Employers and employer networks, such as local enterprise partnerships and chambers of commerce, should:

- work with the National Careers Service to facilitate links between employers, including small- and medium-sized employers, and all local schools by promoting the advantages of having an employer on school governing bodies with responsibility for providing young people with greater direct exposure to the world of work and the full range of career pathways
- provide more detailed information to schools and careers guidance professionals on local job options, business developments and local skills shortages.

The National Careers Service should:

- have an increased role in ensuring that external careers guidance professionals and school staff are updated frequently on the full range of further and higher education provision and vocational training, including apprenticeships, both locally and nationally
- market its services more effectively to all young people aged 13 to 18
- review the accessibility of their website for young people.

Local authorities should:

- ensure that all vulnerable young people are involved in a wide range of career guidance activities, so that they can make informed and appropriately challenging decisions about the next stage of their education and training.

Schools should:

- develop and implement a clear strategy for careers guidance and ensure that they make good use of the National Careers Service resources, well-trained staff, careers guidance professionals, employer networks, and local

colleges and other providers to ensure that students are well supported in making decisions about their career pathways

- use destination data on students' progression after leaving school or transferring to Year 12 in their sixth form to monitor the choices made by students at the end of Year 11 and Year 13; schools should work with local authorities to monitor the destinations of students who have special educational needs or who are disabled
- ensure that every school governing body has an employer representative, and that the vocational route, including apprenticeships, is given equal status to the academic route, for example, by fostering greater links with employers so that young people and their parents/carers are exposed to a wider range of career options
- promote the wider range of progression routes available at further education colleges, independent learning providers, and communities and skills providers.

Ofsted should:

- ensure that inspectors take greater account of the quality of careers guidance and of students' destinations in judging the effectiveness of a school's leadership and management

## Background

### Policy context

1. From September 2012, schools have been legally responsible for securing access to independent and impartial careers guidance for all students in Years 9 to 11. The statutory guidance then in force stated:

The Education Act 2011 inserts a new duty, section 42A, into Part VII of the Education Act 1997, requiring schools to secure access to independent careers guidance for pupils in Years 9 to 11. Careers guidance must be presented in an impartial manner and promote the best interests of the pupils to whom it is given. Careers guidance must also include information on all options available in respect of 16–18 education or training, including apprenticeships and other work-based education and training.

To support this, the Department for Education (DfE) published *Securing independent careers guidance: a practical guide for schools*, in July 2012.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Securing independent careers guidance: a practical guide for schools* (DFE-00080-2013), DfE, 2012, 2013; <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/s/securing%20independent%20careers%20guidance%20a%20practical%20guide%20for%20schools.pdf>.



2. From September 2013, the statutory requirement was extended to encompass students in Year 8 and to those aged 16 to 18 in schools, further education colleges and sixth form colleges. Local authorities still have the statutory responsibility to encourage, enable and assist young people to participate in education and training.
3. The government is raising the age at which all young people in England must participate in education or training, requiring them, from summer 2013, to continue until the end of the academic year in which they turn 17 and, from summer 2015, until they turn 18. Young people will be able to choose one of a number of options post-16:
  - full-time study, in a school, college or with a training provider (sometimes with a part-time job alongside)
  - full-time work or volunteering combined with part-time accredited education or training
  - an apprenticeship.
4. The National Careers Service, launched on 5 April 2012, replaced the Next Step service for adults and the Connexions Direct telephone helpline and online support for young people. The Skills Funding Agency is responsible for the delivery, design and development of this service.<sup>2</sup>
5. The National Careers Service provides information on careers through a website which offers access to online tools for people aged 13 and over in England. Two contractors provide a telephone helpline and web chat service staffed by careers advisers: one for young people aged 13 to 18 and one for adults aged 19 and over. Between April 2012 and March 13, the young people's helpline handled 67,383 contacts from young people. A careers guidance telephone service for adults ran between April 2009 and March 2012 as Next Step. Under the new National Careers Service contract, the adult service handled 309,468 contacts in 2012/13 according to figures from the DfE.
6. BIS also funds the National Careers Service to provide face-to-face interviews and support for adults aged 19 and over from specialist careers guidance advisers at a wide range of community locations, including job centres. Young people aged 18 may use this service if they receive out-of-work benefits. This

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<sup>2</sup> In 2012/13, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) allocated just over £84 million to it. The Department for Work and Pensions contributed £1.5 million and the Ministry of Justice's contribution was £14 million. In addition, the DfE has provided BIS with funding of £4.7 million for the young person's helpline in 2013/14 and 2014/15. Source: *An inspirational nation: Creating a culture change in careers provision*, National Careers Council, June 2013, p 13; [www.gov.uk/government/publications/creating-a-culture-change-in-careers-provision-an-aspirational-nation](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/creating-a-culture-change-in-careers-provision-an-aspirational-nation).

service is provided by 11 prime contractors; much of it is contracted further to around 350 subcontractors.

## Defining careers guidance

7. Careers education had been part of personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) since 2007. In 2010, it was removed from the non-statutory guidance for PSHE when schools were given greater flexibility to design their own PSHE curriculum for their students. Ofsted's most recent report on PSHE, based on evidence collected between January 2012 and July 2012, found that learning about careers was good or better in half of the 24 secondary schools visited for that survey.<sup>3</sup>
8. The current survey, specifically on careers guidance, uses the DfE's definition of the term 'careers guidance' published in its statutory guidance. It covers a broader range of related services and activities, including careers education. The DfE stated:
 

Careers guidance refers to services and activities intended to assist individuals of any age and at any point throughout their lives to make education, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers. The activities may take place on an individual or group basis and may be face-to-face or at a distance (including help lines and web-based services). They include careers information provision, assessment and self-assessment tools, counselling interviews, careers education programmes, taster programmes, work search programmes and transition services.
9. Essentially, the guidance asks schools to interpret 'careers guidance' very flexibly and to support their students as individuals. The focus is clearly on developing their students' skills in career management and ensuring that the activities and services provided have a long-term impact in terms of helping young people make career-related decisions at any point in their lives.
10. This model of provision for careers guidance is a sophisticated one. It requires frequent coordination of all the different activities and services, as well as continuing evaluation to signpost different students to different activities, at different stages of their development and decision-making. This flexibility is at the heart of the government's policy to devolve responsibility for careers guidance to schools. It is based on the premise that not all students need the

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<sup>3</sup> *Not yet good enough – personal, social, health and economic education in schools: personal, social and health education in English schools in 2012* (130065), Ofsted, 2013; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130065](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130065).

same level of careers guidance at the same time and that schools themselves are in the best position to manage these fluctuating requirements.

## **Scope of the survey**

11. The survey was commissioned from Ofsted by the DfE to explore the extent to which all young people up to and including the age of 16 were receiving comprehensive, impartial advice and guidance in order to make informed decisions about their options pre- and post-16. Between December 2012 and April 2013, Her Majesty's Inspectors carried out one-day visits to 60 maintained 11 to 16 and 11 to 18 schools and academies in inner cities, provincial towns and rural settings across Ofsted's eight regions, and gathered a range of additional evidence from an online survey, discussions and focus groups.

## **Independent and impartial careers guidance**

12. Overall, the new arrangements for careers guidance were not working well in just over three quarters of the 60 schools visited. The response from headteachers and governors to the revised legislation varied considerably from thorough strategic planning and sufficient funding to little or no positive action. No clear pattern to the variation emerged across the different types of schools visited.
13. Only one in five of the schools had well-developed provision for careers guidance. Leaders and managers of these schools had made it a central part of their work to support their students' longer-term achievements and economic well-being. They focused successfully on providing them with a wide range of information and activities to support decision-making about options pre- and post-16. The students had good opportunities to explore the different progression routes available locally through visits by staff from schools, colleges, universities and training providers, or through taster sessions at these institutions. Individual interviews with careers guidance advisers and links with employers also helped them to develop ideas for careers; these, in turn, often motivated them to achieve. Destination data from these schools, including those with a sixth form, showed that their students progressed to a broad range of post-16 provision.
14. The schools that provided effective careers guidance had made it a strategic priority. They had a clear vision for how information and advice on careers would support their students' overall development. The governing body, often through a designated governor, had responsibility for overseeing the quality of the careers guidance that was offered. More specifically, these schools were prepared to invest in helping their students recognise the importance of thinking early on about possible career pathways. These schools' investments in careers guidance included:

- new internal appointments that gave members of staff full-time or part-time responsibility for coordinating the overall provision of careers guidance
- the commissioning of external careers advisers to increase or maintain their previous service of individual interviews and to enable the school to control the quality of the service provided
- ring-fenced budgets to allow all their students to attend external careers guidance events, including college, university or workplace 'tasters'
- the provision of follow-up interviews for individual students, where required, and funding to make sure that careers guidance professionals were available over the summer holidays.

15. The 11 to 16 foundation school in the following case study had given careers guidance a high priority for many years and had been ready to take full responsibility for provision from September 2012.

The school regards careers education and guidance as a fundamental part of its role.

- Careers education and guidance was the direct responsibility of the deputy headteacher, who ensured the school worked consciously and deliberately to raise its profile.
- The governing body supported the investment of resources in careers guidance against clear strategic priorities and the development plan.
- The school secured continued access to independent guidance at the level it had been accustomed to by purchasing time from the local authority provider, using the same careers advisers who had been known to provide their students with a very good service.
- The school placed considerable emphasis on making the students aware of a wide range of post-16 options and providers.
- Most members of staff were involved in providing careers guidance in some form. They received frequent training and updates from the external provider, from representatives of all the local colleges and from some employers.
- The school also made good use of a simple checklist drawn up and provided by the local authority to assist schools in preparing for the new duties. Completing it confirmed for the school that only a few minor changes were required for aspects of provision that it had judged to be only 'partially in place'.

The students interviewed had found the careers-related activities very informative. Those in Year 11 were pleased that they had been given good opportunities to consider a wide range of options and providers before making decisions. They had also been successfully encouraged to think about possible career pathways since Year 7.

16. Many of the Year 11 students interviewed who had received good provision felt that their schools had helped them directly to make decisions about their careers and had motivated them to work hard and achieve. Conversely, many students in the schools with weaker provision had had little information or guidance about how to start taking responsibility for the careers that lay ahead of them.
17. Inspectors found that about three quarters of the schools visited had not identified a comprehensive strategy or purpose for careers guidance. A strategic overview and coordination were lacking; provision often comprised activities that had been in place for some time and had not been evaluated or reviewed. The focus was primarily on supporting Year 8 and Year 9 students to select GCSE subjects and those in Year 11 to choose their post-16 options. What was absent was a view of careers guidance as an important means of helping young people relate learning in school to their future development and job prospects.
18. The schools that had not given a strategic priority to careers guidance tended to focus it on their vulnerable students. While working with these students is important, the work was often at the expense of providing careers guidance for all students. In these schools, the proportion of individual interviews by an external careers guidance professional had fallen considerably – by up to 75%. Planning tended to be short-term, often relying on the short-term funding that was still available from local authorities. When these schools were visited, many did not have clear plans about how they would continue and extend their provision after September 2013 when, as they had been told by their local authority, it was likely that the funding would diminish further.
19. Although the statutory duty does not stipulate that all students should attend an individual interview, the most important requirement is that all students have access to independent and impartial advice. Only about one in six of the schools visited offered individual career guidance interviews by a qualified external adviser to all their students in Years 9, 10 and 11. A quarter of the schools did not use qualified external advisers at all. The other schools used a mixture of internal and external advisers and tended to prioritise Year 11 students for interviews with external staff.
20. However, individual sessions by external advisers varied in quality and very few schools had adequate procedures for monitoring the quality of the service they commissioned from external organisations. The sessions inspectors observed varied from a thorough exploration of students' ideas and options to little more than a cursory discussion of their options, with signposting to websites and prospectuses.
21. Most of the schools felt that their careers guidance would be 'impartial' if it was provided externally. However, very few of the schools promoted the full range of progression routes that were available. Too frequently, vocational training

was seen by teachers, the students and their parents as 'non-academic'. Too few students had sufficient opportunity to gain potentially stimulating and inspiring information and ideas about a wide range of career pathways directly from employers.

## Careers guidance in practice

22. Not enough schools offered a sufficient variety of careers guidance activities to all their students in Years 9, 10 and 11.
23. Overwhelmingly, the schools focused on a range of careers-related activities that included assemblies, tutorials, enterprise projects, and visits to and from colleges, universities and employers. However, in about three quarters of the schools, especially where no member of staff had an adequate management responsibility for the activities, they were often poorly coordinated. Their quality was not evaluated sufficiently to check their usefulness, and participation in the different activities was not monitored adequately. For example, one school filled the 50 places for a visit to an external careers fair on a 'first come, first served' basis instead of using a clear selection process that prioritised the students who were likely to benefit the most.

## Group careers-related activities in the best schools

24. Only a very small number of large-group or whole-class activities observed by inspectors met the needs of all the students effectively. In these better lessons, the teachers used first-hand, industry-related knowledge to inspire the students and open their minds to the vast range of career opportunities related to a specific aspect of science or law. The better tutorial lessons, assemblies or career lessons developed the students' career management skills effectively by helping them to take the lead in exploring the implications of working in different industries. In the examples below, activities or eye-catching displays often prompted new ideas about careers. Students were motivated to explore them further with their teachers and careers advisers.

### Examples of effective large-group or whole-class careers guidance activities

- A series of action-packed lessons motivated the students to gain a sound understanding of the mismatch between the availability and popularity of different jobs.
- Particularly good use of a career-related website helped students to understand the many options for studying specific subjects or vocational areas.
- A very effective English lesson with a careers focus helped students to consider a wider range of careers than they had first thought about and provided a very good opportunity for the students to reflect on the

world of work. Speaking and listening tasks, undertaken in the style of the job they were allocated, such as graphic designer, advertiser, radio scriptwriter and estate agent, helped the students to think about how skills can be applied to different jobs.

- A science programme for Year 9 students provided a good link to specific science careers, relating the subject to real work and making the GCSE skills relevant. Stimulating interactive tasks engaged the students very effectively.
- Two of the schools visited successfully promoted a wide range of career pathways in different curriculum subjects by displaying well-designed posters, photographs and flowcharts throughout the school.

25. The weaker provision seen generally relied too much on teachers providing activities when they had insufficient training or up-to-date information. Such sessions often failed to motivate students. For example, a Year 10 assembly to launch work experience was too didactic and provided no opportunities for the students to participate. Tutorial sessions lasting 15 to 20 minutes were often slow to start and the teachers did not have enough time to engage the students in potentially interesting activities related to identifying possible career pathways.
26. Too often, in the weaker tutorial group sessions that inspectors saw, teachers relied too much on an arbitrary selection of videos or discussion topics on different career pathways. The occupations chosen were not linked sufficiently to previous work on careers or the students' preferences. In one such session, very few students completed the uninspiring workbooks with any enthusiasm or meaningful reflection.
27. The use of careers-related websites received very mixed feedback from the students interviewed. While many students felt that the different websites provided an excellent starting point to generate ideas, only a few of them said that they did not need further support to explore the suggested options for careers. When students were left to use the websites on their own, there were no clear systems or support to help them add suggestions to their individual careers action plans or to check that the suggestions were not unrealistic.

## **Individual careers guidance interviews**

28. Inspectors observed 42 individual careers guidance interviews by external careers advisers and internal members of staff, including senior leaders. They also reviewed 249 student action plans, most of which had been completed following individual careers guidance interviews.
29. Nearly all the students interviewed told inspectors that they had high expectations for the individual interviews with a professional careers adviser. Discussions with students who had participated in such interviews and

inspectors' observations revealed that, in the good provision, the students valued the individual approach and the time the adviser gave to the session, as in the following example.

The professional, external careers adviser had researched each student's background information before the interview so the students felt they were known to him. Skilled questioning and relevant advice helped the students to define their plans and understand precisely what they needed to do next.

Some students said that as a result of the interviews they had changed the course or provider they were pursuing and they felt excited about their new plans. All the students interviewed were confident in finding the route that was appropriate for them. They also felt the follow-up research suggested for them was bespoke and helped them to consolidate their plans. They were also pleased that they could arrange a follow-up interview with the adviser, if one were needed.

30. 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 key characteristics that defined a good interview included:
- thorough pre-interview preparation to gain an understanding of the students' previous work on careers guidance, their performance in school and any relevant personal circumstances
  - the adviser's very effective interpersonal skills that built students' confidence in the process and encouraged them to explore their thoughts, reflect on their ideas and take in the information, advice and guidance
  - each careers adviser's extensive knowledge of the local provision and their easy access to up-to-date information on the local labour markets, local business developments and local skills shortages or trends that had been identified
  - the breadth and relevance of the information the careers adviser provided to ensure that it was unbiased and that it was truly in the interest of each student
  - flexibility in the time allocated to the interviews, ensuring that the discussions could be extended slightly if necessary, so that the adviser and student had enough time to agree on the plan of action
  - the provision of a confidential interview room, with access to the internet and other relevant information on further/higher education and training
  - very clear records of the discussions that the students could use and refer to when talking to other people about their plans, or when carrying out further activities related to career guidance.



31. About a quarter of the individual careers guidance interviews that were seen were not fully effective. These included sessions led by external qualified careers professionals. Weak interviews generally provided a narrow range of information and focused too much on giving a list of websites or providing college or university prospectuses. They did not provide the students with the individual direction they needed to develop the skills for managing their careers independently. The students interviewed were disappointed when their individual careers guidance interviews, including those carried out by qualified external advisers, were not specific enough to help them to explore their ideas further or generate new ideas that would motivate them.
32. The recording of individual careers guidance interviews was generally weak. Only a few external or internal careers advisers kept clear records. Many of the weaker action plans or records of the individual interviews reviewed were sketchy and lacked specific information about what follow-up actions had been agreed. After a few interviews that inspectors observed, the students received simply a piece of paper printed with website addresses and a contact number. When questioned by the inspector, the students were not sure how to get hold of the notes taken during the interview. Conversely, some advisers recorded the interview almost verbatim; this provided so much detail that the students found it difficult to identify or remember the main points.

### **Careers guidance for vulnerable young people**

33. Too few of the schools visited worked well enough with local authorities to target career guidance for students who had special educational needs, those who were disabled or those at risk of not entering education, employment or training (NEET).
34. At the better schools, staff collaborated well with their local authorities to support students who were deemed to be at risk of dropping out of education or training. Successful approaches included programmes of individual support from external careers advisers or from professional counsellors who worked closely with the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO), support staff and parents/carers. Most of the more vulnerable students in Year 11 that inspectors spoke to at these schools had clear plans for their next step post-16 and corresponding support plans, where relevant. The schools frequently made good arrangements for the careers adviser or a member of staff to accompany the most vulnerable students to their interviews for employment or further education.
35. This focus on supporting these young people to progress to education, training or employment at the age of 16 was sometimes at the expense of providing them with good-quality careers guidance for their future. For example, in one school, the students interviewed who had been identified as at risk of being NEET were concerned that they had poor-quality careers lessons. They felt excluded during the visits from employers because they saw the visits as

focused on the most able students. This attitude was not atypical among many of the vulnerable students inspectors interviewed in the other schools. A report on enterprise in colleges identified that while the support provided for these vulnerable students in colleges helped them achieve their current courses, very few of them were given an opportunity to identify and tap into their potential.<sup>4</sup>

36. In contrast, inspectors identified a few examples where students who had been identified as at risk of becoming NEET spoke enthusiastically about their plans for the future after leaving school. This planning was often built up over three years through personal development lessons, tasters at colleges and work experience that had helped to build their confidence, their employability and their personal development skills. These students were optimistic and seemed well equipped for their next steps in education, employment or training.
37. This case study from an 11 to 16 school provides a typical example of small group work for vulnerable students that had a demonstrable impact.

A small group of 11 boys in Year 11 was identified when the students were in Year 10 as at risk of not securing employment, education or training when they left at the end of Year 11. The school arranged for them to spend one hour a week with their head of year. They worked on improving skills to support them in their future careers, such as being able to talk confidently to others and improve how well they could work in a team.

They worked together on a gardening project in the school grounds. They were able to reflect on improvements in their ability to work hard and productively within a team. They also had interviews with a skilled careers adviser who supported them in finding out about careers which suited their skills and interests.

In Year 11, all except two of them had places on appropriate courses or apprenticeships and were confident about their career choices. The two students who had not yet secured places were pleased that they still have opportunities to discuss the different types of courses with the careers adviser and the head of year. Records showed that the attendance and behaviour of all the boys had improved in school. All were making better progress and they were on track to achieve the qualifications they needed for their next step.

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<sup>4</sup> *Promoting enterprise in vocational courses for 16–19-year-old students in colleges* (120020), Ofsted, 2012; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120020](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120020).

## Working with employers and providers of FE and skills

38. When the inspectors explored the students' plans for their careers in the focus group sessions, it was clear that a very wide range of influences had sparked their ideas. The overwhelming influence was their family and friends. It became very clear as the survey progressed that very few students had sufficient exposure to the wide range of career pathways that are available. Too few of the students had had sufficient opportunities to encounter a wide range of potentially stimulating and inspiring information and ideas about career pathways directly from employers. Very few of them were aware of current developments locally and nationally in the subjects that they were thinking of studying at A level and beyond. The many students that had chosen traditional careers such as doctor, lawyer, teacher, farmer, banker or chef assumed that these roles would always be available. Similarly, very few students felt that they had been made aware of local and national business developments or local or national skill shortages.
39. Links with employers were the weakest aspect of career guidance in the 60 schools visited. About two thirds of the schools reported that they had cut down on their work experience provision for their students in Years 10 and 11, for budgetary reasons and because of the recommendation in the Wolf report.<sup>5</sup>
40. Just as the students had high expectations for their individual careers guidance interview, typically they also had high expectations for work experience or taster activities at work. However, work experience received a very mixed press from the students interviewed. Positive views referred to the usefulness of getting to know a work routine and benefits of developing confidence and employability skills through being in a very different environment. However, not enough students felt that they had the opportunity to explore their career options through work experience.
41. Inspectors found that sourcing work placements was the biggest barrier to schools arranging them for their students. The reasons the schools gave included high competition for placements from other schools and colleges at the same time of the year. However, the schools that were successful in arranging work experience for their students had made careers guidance, including links with employers, a high priority and had invested additional staff time and other resources in it.

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<sup>5</sup> *Review of vocational education: the Wolf report* (DFE-00031-2011), DfE/BIS, 2011; [www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-vocational-education-the-wolf-report](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-vocational-education-the-wolf-report).

### **Universal entitlement to work experience**

In one of the schools visited where careers guidance had a high priority, the students had a universal entitlement to work experience. Sourcing and applying for their own placements were part of each student's overall tasks. The school presented these as well-managed learning processes that successfully developed the students' independence and resilience. The students felt that this gave them very good opportunities to think about their future careers and the types of work environments that they might encounter.

42. A short period of work experience is only one way of developing students' understanding of the world of work and exposing them to a vast array of careers and jobs available today. The DfE's statutory guidance referred to providing 'other careers activities for young people':

Schools should consider a range of wider careers activities such as engagement with local employers and work-based education and training providers to offer all young people insights into the world of work, and with local colleges and universities for first-hand experience of further and higher education. Schools are free to determine the most appropriate forms of engagement but might consider mentoring, workplace visits, work experience, work shadowing, enterprise clubs, employer talks and links with local higher education institutions.

43. Inspectors found a few examples of good practice in promoting careers through links with employers; these need to be disseminated and built on further. The most successful examples were developed in partnership with other schools, through links with large employers or employer networks, or through the work of individual curriculum teachers who had direct links with the relevant industry. Examples included the following.

- A careers guidance provider's designated employer engagement group linked successfully with five local schools and a local skills centre to promote careers in a very rural area.
- Visits from employers to schools and visits to their places of work for a high proportion of students included industries, businesses and sectors directly linked to students' ideas for careers, including more unusual ones, such as football referees.
- Links with large businesses or organisations, such as the NHS, large motor vehicle companies or a local airport enabled the students to broaden their views as they began to understand the full range of individual jobs these organisations offered: one student told an inspector that he hadn't realised that hospitals needed electrical engineers.

- An academy made very effective use of the business partners associated with its sponsors, with careful targeting of some of the activities to specific groups of students, such as: a meeting with a top woman chief executive for four female students; a visit to RBS arranged for selected Year 8 mathematics students; visits by a heart surgeon to science groups; a presentation by British Airways staff to Year 10 media students.
44. The school in the following case study used its links with employers effectively to collect up-to-date local labour market information to raise its students' awareness of the range of jobs available locally.

#### **Using local labour market information**

Guidance lessons in Year 9 make explicit use of analysis of the local labour market. Consequently, Year 9 students are developing more realistic and well-informed choices about future careers. For example, they looked at the mismatch between the number of available places and the top 10 most popular jobs. They concluded that the likelihood of obtaining these jobs was more limited than for others. They then used local information from employers to identify which sectors had the most vacancies in their town. This encouraged them to look more closely at sectors they had not previously considered. Their final task was to produce an action plan for others based on student profiles provided by the teacher. By the end of the lesson, students had a better understanding of the local labour market and had started to look beyond their initial impressions towards careers they had not considered previously.

45. Most of the schools visited, especially those with sixth forms, were generally poor at promoting vocational training and, in particular, apprenticeships. According to the data 55 of these schools provided, only half of them had had students who had progressed to apprenticeships in 2011/12. The proportion of the Year 11 cohort entering an apprenticeship in these schools was very low.
46. Many senior staff and careers guidance professionals interviewed were not well-informed about apprenticeships. Nearly all the students interviewed had a very narrow view of apprenticeships; the most common idea was that 'you had to choose just one job and stay in it for the rest of your career'. An owner of a successful hairdressing salon who was interviewed by inspectors was frustrated that she had been unable to recruit an apprentice for two years running and was told by the local schools that the students preferred to study hairdressing at the local college. In particular, the students did not receive sufficient information about the higher-level training that apprenticeships can lead to. Currently, over 41 frameworks exist at levels 6 and 7; many of these can lead to membership of professional bodies such as the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors.

47. A small number of the schools visited were particularly successful in promoting apprenticeships. One of the academies employed nine apprentices, all former students, who were working in web design or catering, or as teaching assistants. They received training from the school's personnel as well as the local FE college. A few schools had worked successfully with some large local employers who were keen to recruit apprentices from them.

## **The National Careers Service**

48. One of the main aims of the National Careers Service is to support young people in making decisions about their careers and the DfE guidance stipulates that the service comprises a single website and youth telephone helpline number to which schools might wish to direct pupils. However, these services were not promoted effectively in nearly all the schools visited. A very high proportion of school staff, including those responsible for careers guidance, did not have a good understanding of the full range of facilities the National Careers Service offered schools and students. However, nearly all the students interviewed who had used the website told inspectors that it offered nothing different from the other careers guidance-related sites that they had used on recommendation from their schools, careers guidance, or friends and families. A large majority of those who had used it had generally felt that it was mostly for older students and adults.
49. Promotion of the youth telephone service was very weak. Only seven schools had promoted this facility to all their pupils in Years 9, 10 and 11; four had done so just to their pupils in Year 11.
50. In the parental survey, only 142 (8%) of the 1,703 parents/carers that responded to a question about the National Careers Service telephone service had heard of it. Six of the 10 parents/carers that had used the service felt it had been useful in providing their children with information and advice. A slightly higher proportion (14%) had heard of the service's online facility. Of the 82 parents/carers of children that had used the website, most views were positive (90%). However, a few of these parents commented that the website would be even more useful if it indicated employment opportunities in specific career pathways.

## **Users' views**

### **The views of students**

51. Inspectors interviewed about 1,082 students, mostly in focus groups. Students in Year 9 mainly discussed the support they received in selecting their options for Key Stage 4; those in Year 11 focused mostly on the careers guidance since Year 9, including work experience, aimed at helping them formulate career plans and plans for post-16 education and training. Inspectors also interviewed

students who had special educational needs or who were disabled, as well as those identified as at risk of dropping out of education.

### **Students' views – what works**

52. When students spoke positively about the careers guidance they had received at school, they were generally enthusiastic about the opportunities they had had to talk individually about their ideas with professional careers advisers and employers, university or FE college staff. They frequently commented that work experience, work tasters and interviews with employers sparked off ideas, as did visits to FE or sixth form colleges. A typical view was that careers guidance worked well when there were opportunities to follow up ideas. The examples the students gave of successful careers guidance included, in order of frequency:

- initial and follow-up individual interviews with a professional careers adviser
- targeted online activities to explore some of the ideas presented in assemblies
- a system for recording their ideas and subsequent research
- a programme of visits from employers and colleges – not just one-off visits
- a well-stocked careers library, especially for those who felt ill at ease using websites
- careers guidance as part of the curriculum, especially when the teacher had a good understanding of job opportunities (especially popular in mathematics and science).

53. A heartfelt wish expressed frequently by the students in focus groups was for reassurance that careers guidance would be part of all their education and training through the rest of their time at school, and then at college or university – and even when they progressed to a job.

### **Students' views – what could be improved**

54. When asked what they thought could be improved about the careers guidance they had received to date, the many students who felt that there was room for improvement typically cited the need for better-organised provision. One group commented: 'We need guidance on how to make the most of the career guidance.'

55. Nearly all the focus groups found the workbooks with collections of careers-related quizzes or word searches generally unhelpful, along with the tutorial sessions that tended to rely on PowerPoint slides. The most common response was that the students would like more careers guidance activities, in whatever form, to be carried out by individuals such as specialists, teachers, employers, university or college staff who could provide them with the detailed information

they needed for ideas about future careers. They felt that the weaker activities provided information that was far too general or that was readily available in brochures on or the website. The list of improvements they would like to see included, in order of frequency:

- more information on the full range of courses run by FE colleges and other providers, since not everyone wants to do A levels and go to university
- a higher profile given to vocational training and apprenticeships to help them make an informed choice
- visits, presentations or social media pages from former students – one, two, five or even 10 years after they had left the school
- more purposeful work experience and opportunities to find out about careers from employers
- better links between subjects and careers
- better guidance on using the websites.

## The views of parents/carers

56. Each of the 60 schools in the survey was asked to invite parents/carers of their students in Years 9, 10 and 11 to take part in an online survey. Just over 1,700 parents/carers responded. The survey asked them for their views on the quality of careers guidance provided by their children's school since September 2012 and its impact on helping the children make decisions about their futures. At least one parent/carer responded on behalf of every school. Just over 70% of all respondents said they hoped their child would follow academic study. Although not all the respondents replied to all the questions, a similar number of people, about 1,650, responded to the questions relevant to the main findings below, unless stated otherwise.

- Almost two thirds of the parents/carers thought that their child's school had helped him or her make informed decisions about pre-16 options for Key Stage 4; 20% thought that this was definitely not the case.
- Only 40% thought that the school had helped their child make informed decisions about their post-16 options; 30% had negative views about this aspect of careers guidance.
- The parents/carers thought that one-to-one interviews and work experience were the most useful careers guidance activities.
- Just over half of the 135 parents with a child who had special educational needs and/or was disabled felt their child was getting good careers guidance from the school.



## Monitoring and evaluating the impact of careers guidance

57. The evaluation of the careers guidance provision was not fully effective in a large majority of the schools visited. Too many of the schools that used external organisations to provide information and advice on careers to their students did not have adequate systems to monitor the quality of the service. For example, their students' views were often sought by generic questionnaires on their satisfaction with their provision in PSHE, without enough specific emphasis on careers guidance. Similarly, the quality assurance of careers lessons and information on careers provided in tutorials, careers lessons or assemblies was not thorough enough.
58. Around a quarter of the schools that had made careers guidance a strategic priority had also generally evaluated effectively the impact of this provision on supporting their students' decision-making. Nearly all these schools had adopted a flexible approach. They provided a good range of activities on careers to match different levels of support to the different stages students were at in terms of making choices.
59. Successful quality-assurance approaches included:
- including the careers provision in the quality-assurance and self-evaluation regime applied to all other aspects of the school's work
  - observations of the external careers guidance interviews by a senior member of staff
  - collecting students' views regularly through a range of mechanisms – in careers lessons or tutor group sessions, informally from individuals, via the school council, through a survey and in discussions linked to work experience
  - seeking parents' views at consultation evenings and through surveys
  - fortnightly meetings between the headteacher and the careers guidance team to monitor progress against the targets in the careers guidance development plan
  - routine and thorough monitoring of destinations data, frequently in collaboration with the local authority, with particular reference to those who do not enter employment, education or training.
60. One school also analysed feedback provided to students by employers at mock interview events and from work experience, using the information to guide both activities and further work with individual students, and to see if there were common areas that needed to be addressed universally through the careers programme.

61. The DfE statutory guidance for schools stated:

...where schools deem face-to-face careers guidance to be appropriate for their pupils, it can be provided by qualified careers professionals. The Skills Funding Agency will require providers of the National Careers Service to be accredited to the revised version of the matrix Standard by April 2013. The existence of this national quality standard will assist schools in making well-informed decisions about which providers to work with.

About three quarters of the 40 schools that were using external professional careers advisers to provide individual careers guidance to at least some of their students were aware that the external organisations had or were working towards the revised matrix standards. About a quarter of the 60 schools in the survey had achieved or were working towards an external quality award for careers guidance. Although the achievement of an award generally correlated with good-quality careers provision from the relevant individuals or organisation, this was not always the case.

62. Local authorities are responsible for tracking young people's participation post-16 and providing data to the DfE. These data, along with data from other sources, are used to produce the destination measures published by the DfE. However, the DfE is clear that it is the responsibility of schools to access the data for their own institution. Nearly all the schools visited had data on their students' destinations at the end of Year 11. However, about half of these schools did not analyse these data in sufficient depth. While the schools generally focused well on using data to assess and reduce the number of those who are NEET, not enough schools analysed sufficiently the destinations of different groups of their students, such as those who attracted the Pupil Premium, those eligible for free school meals or those from minority ethnic groups.
63. Information on students' destinations is not the only measure of the impact of careers guidance: countless factors can influence a student's progression route at the end of Year 11. However, analysis of the breadth of destinations across a year group can provide at least some indication of the extent to which the students received information on the full range of opportunities. Students' views on the quality of the careers guidance they receive can support the evaluation of the impact of this service. For example, a school with a sixth form successfully prioritised careers guidance activities for all its students to help them make informed decisions. The students provided very positive feedback on the range of provision they received. At the end of the year 2011/12, 47% of its 202 students progressed to its sixth form, 36% to FE colleges, 14% to apprenticeships and 3% to other destinations, including employment.
64. Moving from one school to another at the age of 16 is just the first step. Ensuring that the decision is the right one and that it leads to further positive education, training and employment is as significant. The government is taking

steps to ensure that schools and other providers will have robust data to track their students' short-term and medium-term destinations. Schools and colleges will need to use these data to ensure that young people are given the information and support they need as they progress to post-16 education, training and employment. Similarly, they will need to use these data to check that curriculum pathways are responding to local needs, including skills shortages.

## Notes

Between December 2012 and April 2013, Her Majesty's Inspectors carried out one-day visits to 60 secondary schools: nine academy sponsored schools, all with a sixth form; 27 academy converters, 18 with a sixth form; 24 maintained schools, eight with a sixth form. Twenty-three of the schools had been judged to be outstanding for their overall effectiveness at their last inspection; 29 were judged to be good and eight were judged to be satisfactory.<sup>6</sup> The schools were based in inner cities, provincial towns and rural settings across Ofsted's eight regions.

During the visits, inspectors interviewed: 270 school senior managers; 43 governors; 256 school teaching staff and support staff, including careers guidance specialists; and 68 external careers guidance specialists. They interviewed eight stakeholders, including employers and FE college managers. They held discussions with 1,082 students, mostly in focus groups of between five and 10 students. They observed 42 individual guidance interviews and 30 group careers guidance-related activities. Inspectors reviewed 249 careers action plans, as well as other documents including strategic plans, development action plans and schedules of careers guidance activities.

Fifty-five schools provided completed forms on destination data; some forms were either incomplete or inaccurate.

Parents/carers whose children were in Years 9, 10 and 11 at these schools were invited to take part in an online survey about careers guidance; a total of 1,706 parents/carers responded.

## Further information

### Publications by Ofsted

*Not yet good enough – personal, social, health and economic education in schools: personal, social and health education in English schools in 2012* (130065), Ofsted, 2013; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130065](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130065).

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<sup>6</sup> 'Satisfactory' was the term used in the inspection framework in place at the time these schools were inspected.

*Promoting enterprise in vocational courses for 16–19-year-old students in colleges* (120020), Ofsted, 2012; [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120020](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/120020).

## **Other publications**

*Review of vocational education: the Wolf report* (DFE-00031-2011), DfE/BIS, 2011; [www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-vocational-education-the-wolf-report](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-vocational-education-the-wolf-report).

*Securing independent careers guidance: a practical guide for schools* (DFE-00080-2013), DfE, 2012; <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/s/securing%20independent%20careers%20guidance%20a%20practical%20guide%20for%20schools.pdf>.

*The duty to secure independent and impartial careers guidance for young people in schools*, DfE, 2013; [www.education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/statutory/g00205755/statutory-careers-guidance-for-young-people](http://www.education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/statutory/g00205755/statutory-careers-guidance-for-young-people).

## Annex: Schools visited

School	Local authority
Alde Valley School	Suffolk
Appleton Academy	Bradford
Archbishop Ilsley Catholic School	Birmingham
Bishop Wordsworth's Grammar School	Wiltshire
Bitterne Park School	Southampton
Bydales School – A Specialist Technology College	Redcar and Cleveland
Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School and Language College	Coventry
Christopher Whitehead Language College	Worcestershire
Clacton Coastal Academy	Essex
Dane Court Grammar School	Kent
Debenham High School	Suffolk
Dunraven School	Lambeth
Esher CofE High School	Surrey
Failsworth School	Oldham
Farnborough School Technology College	Nottingham
Ferndown Upper School	Dorset
Flegg High School	Norfolk
Harrytown Catholic High School	Stockport
Heaton Manor School	Newcastle upon Tyne
Heckmondwike Grammar School	Kirklees
Hillview School for Girls	Kent
Joseph Whitaker School	Nottinghamshire
Judgemeadow Community College	Leicester
Kingsway Park High School	Rochdale
Macmillan Academy	Middlesbrough
Manchester Health Academy	Manchester
Manningtree High School	Essex
Manor Church of England Academy Trust	York
Matthew Moss High School	Rochdale
Millthorpe School	York

Ninestiles School, an Academy	Birmingham
North Walsham High School	Norfolk
Northfield School and Sports College	Stockton-on-Tees
Outwood Academy Adwick	Doncaster
Parkstone Grammar School	Poole
Queensmead School	Hillingdon
Sacred Heart High School	Hammersmith and Fulham
Sandbach High School and Sixth Form College	Cheshire East
South Wilts Grammar School for Girls	Wiltshire
St Ambrose College	Trafford
St Martin in the Fields High School for Girls	Lambeth
St Mary's Church of England High School (VA)	Hertfordshire
Staindrop School An Academy	Durham
Stopsley High School	Luton
Sunnydale Community College for Maths and Computing	Durham
Swanwick Hall School	Derbyshire
The Bushey Academy	Hertfordshire
The Charles Dickens School	Kent
The County High School Leftwich	Cheshire West and Chester
The Crest Boys' Academy	Brent
The Elizabethan Academy	Nottinghamshire
The Harefield Academy	Hillingdon
The King's School Specialising in Mathematics and Computing*	Wakefield
The Winston Churchill School A Specialist Sports College	Surrey
Tile Hill Wood School and Language College	Coventry
Tudor Grange Academy Worcester	Worcestershire
Uppingham Community College	Rutland
Weald of Kent Grammar School	Kent
Wellington School	Trafford
West Hill School	Tameside

\* The provider has closed, merged or converted to an academy since the time of the visit.