

Careers England Policy Commentary 10

This is the tenth in an occasional series of briefing notes on key policy documents related to the future of career guidance services in England.

The note has been prepared for Careers England by Professor Tony Watts.

Progress on the New Adult Advancement and Careers Service

1. *Introduction.* Since the White Paper on *Opportunity, Employment and Progression* (the subject of Policy Commentary 8, issued in December 2007), there have been two government papers which have added detail on policy development related to the new adult careers and advancement service:

- The White Paper on *Raising Expectations* issued jointly by DCSF and DIUS in March 2008.¹
- The Command Paper on *Work Skills* issued jointly by DWP and DIUS in June 2008.² A Command Paper is distinguished from a White Paper on the grounds that it does not require legislation.

2. *Raising Expectations.* The *Raising Expectations* White Paper included a major announcement on the management structure for the new service:

‘The Skills Funding Agency will manage the adult advancement and careers service, with a high profile Director responsible for ensuring the delivery against the vision set for it by Government’ (para.10.1).

3. The Skills Funding Agency (SFA) is to take over the main current roles of the Learning and Skills Council in the post-19 sector in 2010. It is to be ‘a focused, streamlined agency, close to Government and with an operational role’, and ‘will have national and regional presence’ (para.7.22). Its key role is ‘to ensure that public money is routed swiftly, efficiently and securely to accredited colleges and providers following the purchasing decisions of customers’ (para.7.23). Although it is viewed as ‘a funding body, not a funding and planning body’ (para.7.24), it will ‘manage the framework and the development of the FE service’ (para.7.24), and will also have responsibility not only for the advancement and careers service but also for the National Apprenticeship Service and the National Employer Service (which will service large employers).

4. Significantly, the SFA:

¹ Department for Children, Schools and Families & Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (2008). *Raising Expectations: Enabling the System to Deliver*. Cm 7348. London: Stationery Office.

² Department for Work and Pensions & Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (2008). *Work Skills*. Cm 7415. London: Stationery Office.

‘will be a Next Steps Agency, giving it a closer relationship to Government than now exists between DIUS and the LSC, more analogous to the DWP/Jobcentre Plus relationship, so as to minimise the need for sponsoring and oversight functions in DIUS, and get the tightest connection between policy and delivery’ (para.7.28).

Accordingly:

‘... the agency will have an operational remit, implementing the policy decisions made by Ministers. The overall strategic leadership role will rest with Ministers’ (para.7.32).

4. The title of the ‘adult advancement and careers service’ is still in lower case, so its final title is presumably not yet confirmed. It:

‘... will have a strong public brand and national and local footprint. One phone number, one website and one high street brand will unify the service’ (para.10.1).

Since however ‘the strategic and commissioning functions currently carried out by Ufi learndirect will be transferred to the funding agency’ (para.10.5), the brand will presumably need to be differentiated from the existing Learndirect brand. This will require a major marketing campaign, and strong transitional arrangements, if current levels of usage are to be maintained.

5. Many aspects of the detailed design of the service remain to be added:

‘The nature and design of the services to be commissioned and procured by the adult advancement and careers service are still to be determined and developed in consultation with key stakeholders’ (para.10.5).

6. A number of key features are however outlined:

- The service will be universal (aiming to ‘support those in work and looking to progress in their careers as well as people out of work looking to move into sustainable employment’) but will also ‘target intensive support on those who most need it’ (para.10.2).
- The service will be career-oriented: it will ‘need to ensure people are fully aware of the long-term as well as the short-term implications of their learning choices’ (para.10.4).
- The main focus will be to ‘drive progression in learning, work and careers’, but the broader ‘advancement’ agenda is still evident: it will ‘draw together a range of advice and support on jobs, skills, financial issues, childcare, housing and personal issues to address the broad needs of its customers’ (para.10.2).
- ‘Local delivery of information and advice will continue to be a vital part of the service’ (para.10.5).

- There will be ‘a more proactive approach to supporting clients through Skills Health Checks and the like’ (para.10.5).

7. There is also an intriguing reference to young people:

‘Young people, especially those with low skills, must have a coherent experience through the teenage years and into adulthood. Most young people until age 20 will continue to use Connexions, or alternative IAG arrangements for young people in future. But as part of the design of the new adult advancement and careers service, we will examine the option that 18 and 19 year olds using Jobcentre Plus would be referred to the adult service instead, unless there is an already established and well-functioning relationship between that person and Connexions’ (para.10.6).

This could open up some interesting options for the future.

8. Overall, the paper presents the new service as:

‘an essential part of reform of the employment and skills system into a demand led system, supporting the development of Skills Accounts’ (para.10.3).

9. *Work Skills*. In the *Work Skills* paper, on the other hand, the relationship with Skills Accounts is presented rather differently. Instead of the service supporting the Skills Accounts, the Skills Accounts are now the means of accessing the service. One of their functions is to:

‘... enable people to get careers advice, or take advantage of face-to-face and telephone careers guidance sessions where necessary’ (para.2.9).

Thus:

‘As well as allowing users to manage their personal account, the Skills Account website will act as a single portal to the full range of services available. This will include information about courses and providers, and the types of jobs available locally and nationally; and access to advice on careers, including the facility to book a face to face appointment with a careers adviser’ (para.2.11).

It is interesting to note that no reference is made here to any rationing of access to such careers advice.

10. The other functions of Skills Accounts include:

- to ‘tell people what financial support they will get and how they can use it to buy training from approved colleges and training providers’;
- to ‘provide a record of the skills they have and track the skills they gain’ (para.2.9).

The former will take the form of ‘a personalised “voucher”, representing the estimated value of the funding they can access’ (para.2.13); the latter suggests that the Skills Accounts will also house the results of the Skills Health Checks.

11. The Skills Accounts are to be trialled in the South East and East Midlands from autumn 2008. They will then be rolled out from autumn 2010 (para.2.10).

12. The same timetable is being adopted for the new advancement and careers service. The trials here will include ‘skills health checks and co-location between careers advisers and Jobcentre Plus advisers’. These ‘will initially be tested in the West Midlands, expanding to other regions through 2008-09’ (para.2.33). Other trials will include ‘new ways of joining up the services that provide help and advice to individuals’: ‘exploring ways in which an individual can access advice on skills however they first connect with our services, and for whatever reason, be that for help with housing, childcare or employment’ (para.2.34).

13. The paper also confirms that the intention is for skills health checks, and their outcomes, to be mandatory for some:

‘From autumn 2008 we will begin to test requiring jobseekers to attend a full skills health check where the screening has identified a need. Where a need for training is identified, attendance at an appropriate course will also be required’ (para.2.45).

Indeed, steps are to be taken to extend the groups to which this will apply:

‘Over the summer, we will consult on taking the legislative powers needed to make addressing skill needs a condition of benefit receipt for those on inactive benefits, where skills needs are a significant barrier to finding employment. This will include lone parents claiming Income Support and those individuals starting a claim for Employment and Support Allowance’ (para.2.46).

14. *Next steps.* An initial stage in the consultation process outlined in para.5 above was managed through a consultation event organised for DIUS by CRAC/NICEC and held at the University of Warwick on 11-12 June 2008.³ The next step is to be a prospectus for the new service, to be issued in the autumn.⁴ Once it is published, a further Careers England Policy Commentary will be issued.

³ For the report of this event, see:

<http://www.iagreview.org.uk/keydocs/DIUS%20AACS%20WORKSHOP%201%20FULL%20REPORT%20FINAL.pdf>

⁴ This will set out in detail ‘the vision for AACS, its structure and key features and how it fits into the wider adult skills landscape’. Department for Children, Schools and Families & Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (2008). *Raising Expectations: Enabling the System to Deliver – Update and Next Steps*, p.22. London: DCSF & DIUS.

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4 August 2008

Published by the Careers England Board of Directors on 4 August 2008

