

Policy Review . Youth Matters



Careers England Policy Commentary 4

This is the fourth in a short series of briefing notes on key policy documents related to the future of career guidance services in England. The notes are being prepared for Careers England by Professor Tony Watts.

The 'Youth Matters' Green Paper

1. Coverage. The much-delayed Green Paper on Youth Matters addresses a variety of issues, including:

- Providing a wider range of activities for young people ('things to do and places to go').
- Extending opportunities for young people to volunteer and become involved in their communities ('making a contribution').
- Enhancing information, advice and guidance ('supporting choices').
- Reforming targeted support for young people who have serious problems or get into trouble ('personalised intensive support').

Issues related to career guidance are covered mainly in Chapter 5 (pp.44-54), which focuses on the third of these issues ('supporting choices'), and in the discussion of implementation issues in Chapter 7 (pp.62-72).

2. Summary. From a career guidance perspective, the key messages of the document are:

- Career guidance is subsumed within a generic concept of 'information, advice and guidance' (IAG), which covers choices relating not only to learning and work but also to leisure, health, relationships, smoking, alcohol and drugs.
- A clear distinction is drawn between 'universal IAG' and 'targeted support'.
- The primary responsibility for 'universal IAG' is allocated, via local authorities, to schools and colleges, in collaboration with children's trusts.
- There is encouragement for schools and colleges to agree local arrangements on a collaborative basis; but they will reserve the right to make their own arrangements, subject to meeting quality standards.
- Schools/colleges and children's trusts can, if they wish, buy in services from Connexions or other providers.
- Local Authorities are encouraged to retain the Connexions brand.
- Consideration is to be given to new arrangements for assuring the quality and impartiality of IAG through quality standards.
- All the new arrangements are to be in place by 2008.

3. A generic concept. Career guidance is subsumed within a generic concept of 'information, advice and guidance', which covers choices relating not only to learning and work but also to leisure, health, relationships, smoking, alcohol and drugs. The only reference to 'careers education' is within a similarly holistic reference to:

'... personal development learning, delivered through the curriculum, covering careers education, personal, social and health education (PSHE), citizenship, work-related learning, financial capability, fitness and health living ...' (p.46).

4. The terms 'career guidance' and 'careers adviser' are not used in the paper. There is however a recognition that:

'... all young people should have access to ... information and guidance on jobs, skills and the labour market, with impartial advice for all young people on the full range of vocational and non-vocational options' (p.46).

More specifically, among the examples given within a possible 'core offer' are, at age 13-14, 'support from tutors and/or guidance professionals in making choices on what to study post-14 and on future career possibilities', and also 'an assessment of needs, and a personal session with an adviser if they or their parents want or need it' (p.46).

5. The nature of these 'guidance professionals' and 'advisers' is not specified. In general, the paper claims that:

'Our proposals value and build on the specialist skills of professionals currently working with young people but involve developing them to meet new challenges' (p.71).

There is emphasis, following the recommendation in Every Child Matters, on a common core of skills and knowledge for everyone working with children and young people. On the other hand, it is recognised that:

'Young people are often confused about the roles and responsibilities of different professionals. We will aim to create greater coherence by establishing very clearly the skills and competences that people in the workforce have in common – and those that make them distinct' (p.72).

It is not clear whether this differentiation will be applied to careers advisers, or not.

6. Devolution to schools and colleges. From a career guidance perspective, the most important element of the paper is its announcement that the Government plans to 'devolve responsibility for commissioning IAG, and the funding that goes with it, from the Connexions Service to Local Authorities, working through children's trusts, schools and colleges' (p.47). In this respect, it adopts a clear distinction between:

- 'Universal IAG'.
- 'Direct targeted support' ('providing tailored and integrated support and IAG to young people with additional needs' and 'tackling teenage pregnancy, substance misuse, NEETs and crime').

The commissioning responsibility in the case of the latter is to lie with children's trusts; in the case of the former, it is to lie with schools and colleges, in collaboration with children's trusts (see pp.63-64).

7. One of the main aims of devolving funding to schools and colleges is to link the IAG service with the school curriculum (see para.3 above) and with pastoral care (p.46). Related to this are two further considerations:

- That 'young people prefer to seek advice from people who know them, their circumstances and their strengths and weaknesses' (p.45).
- To 'encourage institutions teaching 11-16 year olds to take responsibility for young people's future progression and success after the end of compulsory education' (p.48).

The devolved arrangements are to include the organisation of work experience (p.49).

8. There is encouragement for schools and colleges to make arrangements on a collaborative basis, either with children's trusts or through 'collaboratives like Education Improvement Partnerships' (p.47). However, such cluster arrangements are not mandatory. In particular:

'... where schools and colleges believe existing provision is poor, they would have the right to commission services directly and withdraw from arrangements brokered by the children's trust' (p.47).

The caveat is that such schools and colleges would have to 'consult with young people' and to meet 'new standards of quality and impartiality'; if their provision failed to meet these standards, the devolved funding could be withdrawn by the children's trusts (p.47).

9. Connexions. There is recognition that 'the service most affected by these reforms is Connexions' (p.10). Provision is made for schools and colleges, if they wish, to buy in services from outside:

'Under any arrangement, children's trusts or schools and colleges could decide to buy in services from Connexions or other external private or voluntary and community sector providers' (p.47).

This is linked to the general principle of:

'... involving a wide range of organisations from the voluntary, community and private sectors in order to increase choice and secure the best outcomes' (p.5).

More specifically, the paper declares as one of its aims in devolving funding:

'... that high-performing Connexions services are preserved' (p.47).

In addition, there is support for the Connexions brand:

'We know that young people value the Connexions brand and associate it with knowledgeable staff, trusted advice and a service that responds to their needs. We will therefore encourage Local Authorities to retain the Connexions brand and would welcome views on the range of services it might cover' (p.68).

10. On the other hand, it is clear that the paper envisages some staff 'moving from their existing employer to being employed directly by a school or college'. The extent of such moves will 'depend on the nature of local collaborative arrangements and whether some schools and colleges are commissioning or providing services directly' (pp.70-71).

11. Impartiality and quality. There are repeated references to the need for impartiality in the provision of IAG. The assurance of such impartiality, and of quality more generally, is to be managed through new quality arrangements. These are to take two main forms:

- Progression measures. These are linked to the notion of all schools with 11-16-year-olds taking responsibility for the further progression of their pupils (see para.7 above). Options being considered include 'a measure based on the qualifications that year 11 pupils from each school go on to achieve by age 19 and a measure based on the progress made by all young people on school rolls at 14'. These measures 'will encourage schools to help young people make the right decisions about future learning options and careers' (p.48).
- Quality standards. Consultation will take place on 'how we might build on existing standards for careers education and guidance (including the careers education and guidance framework and the Matrix standards for adult guidance) to provide standards against which Ofsted could inspect' (p.48).

12. Other services. The local children's trust will be responsible for ensuring that:

'... those young people in work-based learning or employment, those who are not in any form of education, employment or training and those who choose to seek advice in a different setting, have access to a similar range of opportunities as those in schools or colleges' (p.49).

Furthermore, provision is made for all young people to have access to:

'... confidential and impartial advice and support available through national helplines, online advisers and drop-in facilities' (p.46; see also pp.50-51).

This will include a local learning prospectus, covering 'the learning, training and employment with training options available in the local area', to be produced by Learning and Skills Councils and Local Authorities, through the children's trust (p.50). Provision is also made for enhanced support for parents (pp.53-54).

13. Transitional arrangements. The new arrangements are to be in place by 2008. But:

'to ensure a smooth transition, there will need to be a phased approach from 2006. During this time, responsibility and funding for universal IAG services will transfer progressively from the Connexions Service to Local Authorities on the understanding that local collaborative arrangements will be in place by 2008' (p.48).

This process 'should take full account of the views of young people and parents' (p.48).

14. Commentary. Traditionally, career guidance for young people in England has been based on a partnership between schools/colleges and external careers services. The external services have provided assurance of:

- Access to impartial career guidance.
- Closer and more extensive links with the labour market and with employers than schools/colleges are likely to have.
- A degree of entitlement (standards of provision can more readily be enforced with the external than with the internal provision).

15. This partnership model has been eroded under Connexions. If the proposals in the Green Paper are implemented, then England will effectively have abandoned this model, replacing it with a school/college-based model of career guidance service delivery. Certainly there is encouragement for schools and colleges to plan their services in clusters; certainly, too, there will be continued possibilities for schools and colleges to buy in careers services from outside. But the Green Paper places ultimate service-purchasing powers in the hands of schools and colleges, and permits them if they so wish to provide all their services internally.

16. This means that assurances of quality in general and of impartiality in particular rest with the robustness of the proposed quality arrangements outlined in para.11 above. The test case is the extensively documented tendency of schools with 16-18 provision to favour this provision over alternative learning routes in the guidance they provide pre-16.¹ It seems difficult to see how the proposed progression measures will significantly counter this tendency. Similarly, the proposed quality measures will only do so if they are strong and clear-cut, and robustly enforced. There are likely to be tensions between this requirement and the Government's New Relationship with Schools, designed to restrict impositions on school autonomy.

¹ See e.g. Foskett, N., Dyke, M. & Maringe, F. (2004). *The Influence of the School in the Decision to Participate in Learning Post-16*. RR538. London: Department for Education and Skills.

17. Alongside abandonment of the partnership model, the implementation of the proposals in the paper will also signify the end, for the foreseeable future, of hopes that England might move towards an all-age guidance service, as in the rest of the UK. Indeed, no reference at all is made in the paper to links with information, advice and guidance services for adults. This contrasts with the Skills White Paper, which identified 'better information and guidance' as 'one of the cross-cutting themes of our reforms for young people and adults', and commented that information and guidance services for adults needed 'to link closely to careers guidance services [sic] for young people and adult students enrolled in schools, colleges and universities'.² Since Connexions Services are responsible for managing 'next steps' adult guidance contracts in many areas, the new devolved arrangements could seriously undermine current adult guidance provision.
18. The end-to-end review. The report of the end-to-end review of careers education and guidance in schools, colleges, work-based learning providers and Connexions has been published, as promised, alongside the Green Paper.³ This is reviewed separately in Policy Commentary 5. The Commentary concludes that the diagnostic judgements in the review are sound, but that the chosen prescription – to seek to improve CEG by driving up the quality and relevance of careers education in schools, rather than by improving its partnership with Connexions – is much more questionable, and indeed is contradicted by arguments and evidence cited within the review itself. The Commentary also notes that the option of moving towards a partnership with an all-age career guidance service, as in Scotland and Wales, is not rejected by the review: it is not even considered. Insofar as the end-to-end review has influenced the Green Paper, these limitations – which stem largely from its restrictive terms of reference – need to be borne in mind.
19. Conclusion. In considering responses to the Green Paper from a career guidance perspective, there would seem to be three broad options:
- To argue for an all-age career guidance service.
 - To argue for the retention of Connexions, but strengthening its universal career guidance provision.
 - To accept the devolution of funding to schools and colleges, in association with children's trusts, but to insist upon strong quality standards and other measures to assure quality in general and impartiality in particular.
- The relative desirability of these different options may need to be balanced against the perceived feasibility of persuading the Government to adopt them.
20. Consultation. The consultation period on the Green Paper runs until 4 November 2005.

² Department for Education and Skills (2005). *Skills: Getting On in Business, Getting On at Work* (Cm 6483), part 1 para.72; part 2, para.173. London: Stationery Office.

³ Department for Education and Skills (2005). *Report of the End to End Review of Careers Education and Guidance*. London: DfES. See <http://dev.cegnet.co.uk/resource/content/files/704.doc>