

Careers England Policy Commentary 6

This is the sixth in a 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.

The Leitch Report

1. *Summary.* From a career guidance perspective, the key points in the Leitch Report¹ are:

- ‘Career’, linked to ‘aspiration’ and ‘progression’, is a prominent theme within the report.
- The report recommends a new universal careers service for adults in England.
- The service will integrate learndirect and nextstep, under the learndirect brand.
- It will also have strong links with Jobcentre Plus, including co-location and an integrated information system.
- It will lead a sustained national campaign to promote skills development, backed by outreach activities within communities.
- It will be available to all adults, who in particular will all be entitled to a free Skills Health Check.
- The contract with the service will be managed by the Department for Education and Skills.
- The funding will include output-related elements, related to participation in learning and to progression.
- The objective of sustained employment and progression will apply to the new careers service and also to all employment and skills services, including Jobcentre Plus.
- The importance of career guidance for young people is underlined, and it is suggested that the new service should learn from those elsewhere in the UK (all of which are all-age).
- The importance of other sources of careers advice, including private providers, is recognised.
- Major significance is attached to routing funding for learning through Learner Accounts, as part of moving towards a demand-led learning system.
- The Investors in People standard should be reviewed.

If the recommendations are implemented, the former structure of a careers service for young people and an IAG framework for adults will, ironically, have been replaced by an IAG framework for young people and a careers service for adults.

¹ Leitch Review of Skills (2006). *Prosperity for All in the Global Economy – World Class Skills*. London: The Stationery Office.

2. *Status of the report.* The review was commissioned in 2004 by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. It is an independent review, but the review team has been composed of officials from HM Treasury and DfES (with an advisory member from the Sector Skills Development Agency) (p.143). It offers a policy framework, not a detailed blueprint for implementation (p.141). The Government is asked to ‘consider these recommendations and decide the next steps of the journey’ (p.141).

3. In his Pre-Budget Report published the day after the Leitch Report, the Chancellor of the Exchequer indicated that ‘the Government welcomes the Leitch report and its analysis of the growing importance of skills in a modern economy’. He further stated that ‘the Government accepts the higher skills ambitions for 2020 set out in the Leitch Review’. He added: ‘The Government will consider how best to achieve the Leitch ambitions and implement its recommendations, alongside the level of resources it will allocate to them, as part of the 2007 CSR process.’²

4. So far as the recommendations related to IAG/career guidance are concerned, it seems likely that the Government’s detailed response will be included in the report of the current policy review of information, advice and guidance for adults. This is at present expected to be published around March.

5. *Prominence of ‘career’.* ‘Career’ is writ large within the document. The word ‘career(s)’ is used 150 times. ‘Aspiration’ and ‘progression’ are strong themes. There is criticism of the way in which current provision ‘fails to integrate advice on learning with careers advice’ (p. 109), provides skills advice ‘out of the context of building a career’ (p.129), and ‘focuses on getting a job rather than progression paths’ (p.129).

6. The core rationale is that:

‘For the UK to succeed in the new global economy, it must commit to world class skills. Achieving this will require new, shared action with the Government, employers and individuals all taking increased responsibility...’ (p.52).

In relation to individuals, the key is seen as being ‘raising their aspirations and awareness’, which includes ‘demanding more of their employers’ and ‘investing more in their own skills development’ (p.70).

7. *A new careers service for adults.* Within the context of its ‘recommendations to raise awareness and aspiration among adults across society’, the report states:

‘At the heart of these is a new universal careers service for England to give people the advice they need to progress in the modern labour market and adapt to change’ (p.109).

² HM Treasury (2006). *Investing in Britain’s Potential: Building Our Long-Term Future*, p.62. Cm 6984. London: The Stationery Office.

As part of the IAG policy review, there has recently been some trailing by civil servants of the possibility of a new 'Skills and Careers Service'. The inclusion of the word 'skills' was presumably designed partly to link the concept to the Leitch agenda, and partly to distinguish it from the old Careers Service. But Leitch uses the unqualified term 'careers service'.

8. The new service is to 'bring together current separate sources of advice and draw them out of their silos' (p.109). In particular, it will bring together learndirect and nextstep. In terms of branding, the report recommends that the service should 'operate under the already successful and well-known learndirect brand' (p.109). It notes that this brand 'is well established, with 82 per cent brand recognition' (p.107).³ The brand, of course, currently covers learning provision as well as impartial IAG provision; the potential tension between the two could be exacerbated with the enlargement of the latter.

9. The new service will also establish strong links with Jobcentre Plus. In particular, it 'must draw on Jobcentre Plus information and services, so that information on jobs, skills and training can be integrated' (p.109). In addition, as well as operating from other places 'in the community, colleges and other locations' (p.110), it should be 'co-located with Jobcentre Plus and other providers of employment support' (p.131). This should be 'in town and city centres' (p.110) and provide 'a high profile place to go to for job search facilities and employment and skills advice' (p.109). It should include close referral mechanisms between the two services, with Jobcentre Plus for example referring to the careers service benefit claimants who need skills diagnosis (p.131).

10. The service will 'be charged with raising aspiration and awareness of the importance and benefits of learning, particularly among those that have missed out in the past'. In particular, it will 'lead a sustained national campaign to promote skills development among groups that would not normally consider learning'. This national action 'must be backed by local action in communities'. The service will accordingly 'build on the many existing partnerships with local organisations, engaging the hardest to reach' (p.110). It should be proactive: 'reaching out rather than waiting for people to come' (p.109). One of its key roles is 'to energise individuals, building a culture of learning by raising awareness' (p. 25).

11. The service will, however, be available to all. This is indicated in the use of the word 'universal' in its title (see para.7 above). It is also reflected in the notion that one of the goals is to encourage individuals to invest in their own skills development (see para.6 above): since the report recognises that 'the Government should provide the bulk of funding for basic and Level 2 skills', with individuals and employers contributing 'at least 50 per cent' at Level 3 and 'the bulk of the costs' at Level 4 and above (p.59), this implicitly indicates that the service's attention should not be confined to low-skill groups. The service's universal remit is operationalised in particular through the notion that 'all

³ This contrasts with the finding from an LSDA survey that only 6 per cent of potential learners in the nextstep target-group had heard of nextstep. See Harrison, D., Walker, L. & Zwart, R. (2005). *Evaluating the Effectiveness of the New Approach to Marketing Information and Advice Services: Nextstep Marketing Strategy*. London: Learning and Skills Development Agency.

adults should be entitled to a free “Skills Health Check”⁴, which will ‘identify an individual’s skill needs and strengths’ (p.110).⁵

12. The service will be ‘directly responsible for raising participation in learning and so should be accountable to and managed by the DfES’ (p.109). ‘Managed’ here presumably means management of the Government contract with the new service. No mention is made of any relationship with the Learning and Skills Council (which receives limited mention within the report as a whole).

13. In terms of budget, the service ‘will retain the current learndirect budget and also subsume the nextstep budget’ (p.109). It seems likely, however, that the composite budget will need to be significantly increased, partly to deliver the Skills Health Check entitlement and to achieve effective locations for the service.

14. The report states that the service ‘will be rewarded for raising participation rather than through a block grant’ (p.109). Elsewhere, though, this is softened:

‘Rather than paid *solely* (my italics) through a block grant, local advice centres will be rewarded for raising participation, encouraging them to deliver a service that engages the hard-to-reach’ (p.110).

A subsequent part of the report states that the output-related funding element should be based not just on participation in learning but on measures relating to progression:

⁴ The concept of a Skills Health Check, with its medical analogy, embraces three different resonances. The first is *diagnostic*: that any major contact with the careers service should include a diagnostic stage, where needs can be clarified and appropriate services defined. The second is *regularity*: that individuals should be encouraged to make regular skills health checks. The third is *comprehensiveness*: that individuals should be encouraged from time to time to make an extensive review of their skills (as in a ‘full medical check-up’). The way the term is used within the report suggests that its main emphasis is on the third of these. In relation to benefit claimants, for example, the reference is to ‘a full Skills Health Check, wider than the basic skills screening’ (p.127).

⁵ The statement about this in the report comments that this recommendation builds ‘on the success of a similar approach in Sweden’ (p.110). Contacts in Sweden have however indicated that this approach is not widely recognised under this title in Sweden, and it seems likely that it refers to a local scheme visited by Lord Leitch. A more well-known national analogy is the *bilan de compétence* in France, though it seems unlikely that what is envisaged is as comprehensive as the *bilan* (which is a face-to-face process that takes between 9 and 24 hours, distributed over a month). Under a Law enacted in 1991, all employees in France are entitled once every five years to such an assessment. The scheme is funded through a compulsory levy on employers over a certain size, supplemented by the state at national, regional and local levels. Individuals who want an assessment can choose from a list of accredited providers. The system was initially designed for workers with low levels of skills, which resulted in a stigma being attached to it; in addition, workers were concerned that applying for an assessment might be seen by their employer as implying a lack of long-term commitment. Accordingly, take-up of the scheme has been lower than expected. See Bartlett, W., Rees, T. & Watts, A.G. (2000). *Adult Guidance Services and the Learning Society*. Bristol: Policy Press. Also Gendron, B. (2001). The role of counselling and guidance in promoting lifelong learning in France. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 6(1), 67-96.

‘... the new adult careers service should be rewarded partly on the basis of these outcomes and for helping people move into work’ (p.133).

Arguably some element of block grant will be required by the entitlement to a Skills Health Check.

15. An important issue which is not addressed in the report is whether the new careers service will be run as a single government service or will be managed through sub-contractual arrangements, as with the current nextstep provision. This is an issue of particular concern to Careers England members. It will no doubt be addressed as part of the IAG policy review.⁶

16. *An integrated objective for all employment and skills services.* The focus on progression (see para.14 above) is not to be confined to the new careers service. The report notes that ‘the current system for providing skills and employment advice is confusing and fragmented ... as a consequence, people do not know where to go for advice on how to get on in work, and are only offered support in organisational “silos”’ (p.129). In particular, ‘current skills and employment services have different aims’ (p.13). Thus, for example:

‘Welfare to Work focuses on people’s short-term prospects, but not long-term help. There are no effective links between someone moving into work from the New Deal and in work support, such as Train to Gain in England, that can help them stay in work and progress’ (p.51).

17. It is accordingly proposed that ‘the objectives of the employment and skills systems should be transformed into an integrated objective of sustainable employment and progression’. This ‘must be tangible and measurable’. Both DfES and the Department for Work and Pensions are to be required ‘to measure the contribution of each of its agencies to the sustainable employment and progression of their customers’ (p.132). Thus, for example, ‘Jobcentre Plus and others delivering Welfare to Work services ... should be rewarded for retention in work for at least a year’. Similarly, learning providers ‘should be required to track the job prospects and pay progression of a representative sample of those completing their courses, as some universities already do’ (and ‘this data should be published to enable people to make an informed choice about where to learn’) (p.133).

18. In places, the report talks about the new careers service as being part of ‘a new integrated employment and skills service’ (p.141). In reality, however, what is being proposed is not integration between the careers service and Jobcentre Plus, but co-operation (including integrated information) and co-location (see para.9 above), plus common objectives. At the same time, the report indicates that the issue of whether this is

⁶ It may however be relevant to note that Learndirect has operated its helpline in England through a long-term sub-contractual relationship with a supplier (Broadcasting Support Services). See Watts, A.G. & Dent, G. (2006). The ‘P’ word: productivity in the delivery of career guidance services. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 34(2), 177-189.

sufficient should be subject to review. It accordingly recommends that the proposed new employer-led Commission for Employment and Skills should ‘report in 2010 on whether more radical structural change is required to deliver an integrated service’ (p.123).

19. *Career guidance for young people.* The review’s terms of reference are confined to adults. It does however recognise ‘how vital effective education for young people is to the new ambition’ (p.4). It asserts that the ‘step change in aspirations must begin at school’ (p.104) and that ‘a culture of learning must encompass all age groups if it is to be sustained beyond 2020’ (p.106).

20. Linked directly to this, the report affirms that ‘effective careers advice in schools and colleges ... is needed to ensure young people are able to fully develop their talents’ (p.106). It quotes recent research⁷ as finding ‘that when students have access to effective careers guidance they tend to make more structured and informed decisions regarding their education’, and as concluding ‘that too few young people at age 14 are making the link between career guidance and their personal decisions’ (para.107).⁸

21. The report goes on to state that ‘services like Connexions and careers advisors in schools are essential to raising career and learning ambitions and ensuring young people can make informed decisions’ (p.110). It is intriguing that this statement locates careers advisors within schools rather than within Connexions: this may represent the drift of current Government thinking, or may simply be the result of loose drafting.

22. The report makes no direct comment on whether careers services should be all-age or not. It does however suggest that the new adult careers service in England should learn ‘from those elsewhere in the UK’ (p.22), all of which it elsewhere recognises as being ‘aimed at people of all ages’ (p.108).

23. *Other matters.* Three other issues are worth noting. First, the report recognises that in addition to the new careers service and the services offered by Jobcentre Plus, ‘a range of other sources of advice will remain important’. It refers in particular to services in colleges, private providers and the network of 15,000 Union Learning Representatives’ (p.110). The inclusion of private providers is of particular interest in relation to the notion of including referrals to such providers within the policy framework.⁹ There is no reference in the report to fee-charging for career guidance services, although this

⁷ Blenkinsop, S., McCrone, T., Wade, P. & Morris, M. (2006). *How Do Young People Make Choices at 14 and 16?* RR 773. London: Department for Education and Skills.

⁸ Some might read this as supporting the holistic model which underpins current youth IAG policy. This is not the case. The statement in the research report refers to the failure of many young people to make a clear link between their careers education and guidance programme and the personal decisions they needed to make about subjects for Key Stage 4.

⁹ See Watts, A.G., Hughes, D. & Wood, M. (2005). *A Market in Career? Evidence and Issues.* CeGS Occasional Paper. Derby: Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby.

possibility was mentioned in the Skills White Paper¹⁰ and is being considered by the IAG policy review.¹¹

24. Second, the report gives major significance to routing funding for individual learners through Learner Accounts. It is clear that the disfavour into which Individual Learning Accounts fell after the ‘allegations of serious potential fraud’ (p.111) has now ended. Alongside the routing of funding for employers through Train to Gain – which is declared ‘a clear success’ (pp.53, 93) – Learner Accounts are seen as a key mechanism for moving from a supply-led to a demand-led learning system (p.49). The report accordingly recommends that ‘all adult skills vocational funding in England, excepting that for adult community learning and services for those with learning difficulties and disabilities, be channelled through Train to Gain and Learner Accounts in England by 2010’ (p.111). This in principle adds significant weight to the role of the new careers service.¹²

25. Third, the report recommends that ‘the Government should, in consultation with the Commission [for Employment and Skills] and leading employers, review the remit of Investors in People, to consider how IiP UK and its products, including the Standard itself and the new “Profile” tool, should be reshaped to support delivery of the Review’s ambition’ (p.94). This could open up possibilities for including more attention to support for career development.¹³

26. *Conclusion.* The Leitch Report represents a major reaffirmation of the importance of career guidance to the skills agenda within England. In particular, it attaches great significance to the establishment of a new careers service for adults.

27. This represents a rich irony. Prior to the establishment of the Connexions Service in 2001, career guidance policy in England had comprised a Careers Service for young people and an information, advice and guidance (IAG) framework for adults. The IAG framework was criticised on the grounds that it did not provide an adequate service and that the acronym ‘IAG’ meant little to potential users. Following the *Youth Matters* Green Paper, Connexions (into which the Careers Service had been subsumed) is being

¹⁰ HM Government (2005). *Skills: Getting On in Business, Getting On at Work*, Part 2, p.43. Cm 6483. London: The Stationery Office.

¹¹ One of the ten ‘design principles’ that have emerged from the consultation stage of the review is that ‘there will be a cost for some services, with a clear indication as to when the cost may not apply (for specific groups)’.

¹² The recent Further Education White Paper in its section on Learner Accounts emphasised the role of ‘the new adult guidance service’ in offering ‘expert advice on choosing a provider, drawing up a learning plan, on career development and on financial support’. Department for Education and Skills (2006). *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances*, p.36. Cm 6768. London: The Stationery Office. See also Bosley, S., El-Sawad, A., Hughes, D., Jackson, C. & Watts, A.G. (2001). *Guidance and Individual Learning Accounts*. Derby: Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby.

¹³ In the Netherlands, the Investors in People programme includes encouragement for companies to use careers advisers to support their development review systems. See Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2004). *Career Guidance and Public Policy: Bridging the Gap*, p.67. Paris: OECD.

dismantled as a national service and replaced by an IAG framework.¹⁴ Now, if Leitch is to be implemented, we are to have a careers service for adults. So the pre-Connexions structure has been precisely reversed.

28. Meanwhile, concern about the erosion of careers services for young people continues to mount. Recently, the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee stated:

‘In general, the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) careers advice offered in schools appears not to be of sufficient quality, and the Connexions Service is not well adapted to the needs of high achieving students. The government has largely neglected careers advice in *Next Steps*, and this omission should be remedied at the earliest opportunity’.¹⁵

29. Recently, too, the Confederation of British Industry has argued the case for ‘a desperately-needed, new professional careers advisory service for all students and adults ... providing vital information, advice and guidance to young people and adults’.¹⁶ Reviews of the all-age services in Scotland¹⁷ and Wales¹⁸ have contrasted markedly with the largely negative findings of the end-to-end review of careers education and guidance in England¹⁹. Yet no review has taken place of the case for an all-age service in England: the terms of reference of the end-to-end review were taken to exclude it from consideration.

30. On 8 December 2006, at the first Annual Conference of Lifelong Learning UK, Alan Johnson (Secretary of State for Education and Skills) was asked what vision he had for an all-age careers guidance service to support seamless lifelong learning. He replied that Leitch had not decided whether England needs an all-age careers service, but that this was a debate that we needed to have.

31. The Leitch Report provides a major opportunity and challenge for DfES. It merits an enthusiastic welcome within its own terms of reference, along with urging the Department to apply its key principles to young people too.

11 December 2006

¹⁴ The remit of which is explicitly ‘not just careers and learning’. See Department for Education and Skills (2006). *Youth Matters: Next Steps*, p.22. London: DfES.

¹⁵ House of Lords Science and Technology Committee (2006). *Science Teaching in Schools*, pp.18-19. HL Paper 257. London: The Stationery Office.

¹⁶ CBI press release, 20 November 2006.

¹⁷ Watts, A.G. (2005). *Careers Scotland: Progress and Potential*. Glasgow: Careers Scotland.

¹⁸ Moulson, R. & Prail, S. (2004). *Careers Wales Review – Final Report*. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government.

¹⁹ Department for Education and Skills (2005). *End to End Review of Careers Education and Guidance*. London: DfES.

