



PAPER TO THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY QUALITY ISSUES FOR ORGANISATIONS CONTRACTED TO DELIVER THE PROPOSED ALL-AGE CAREERS SERVICE AND PROFESSIONAL CAREERS ADVISERS

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This paper is a joint presentation by Careers England (the trade association of employers specialising in publicly-funded careers services for young people and adults), and the Institute of Career Guidance (the largest professional body representing the career guidance profession in Europe).

1.2 It is written in response to requests from the Conservative Party to offer our collective advice on how the proposed all-age careers service might address matters concerning quality of service provision - should the Conservatives form the next Government in 2010.

1.3 In respect of the service for younger people, that is those within statutory learning (especially as it rises to 17 by 2013 and to 18 by 2015), we urge that the new service reinforces the 'partnership model' of institutions providing programmes of careers education for all learners which are supported by universal access to a specialist independent and external careers service. We are mindful of some concerns that an all-age service might be over-dominated by the needs of young people; hence our suggestions below seek to address these concerns directly so that the all-age service is enabled to become truly universal.

2. NATIONAL SPECIFICATION FOR THE NEW SERVICE

2.1 There would be significant advantages in a single Minister having designated responsibility for the new all-age service in order to provide clarity of policy focus and public accountability. The starting-point in his/her strategy to establish the all-age careers service has to be that an explicit national specification(s) for the service must be in place, and must be mandatory. The service must be independent of all learning providers and firmly rooted in the labour market, so that its advice and guidance services are fully informed by the labour market. Confusion exists already over the use of the terms "careers advice and guidance" compared with "information, advice and guidance". We suggest that the Conservatives should adopt the clearer term "careers advice and guidance" to describe the function of the new service.

2.2 The all-age specification must require every deliverer to fulfil the requirements of the relevant statutes in respect of careers education and guidance for young people¹. The

¹ These are the current statutory-duty frameworks affecting young people's services (in summary those 'wrapped up' in sections 68 & 69 of the Education & Skills Act of 2008) :

Careers education: All publicly-funded schools in England must provide a programme of careers education within a school curriculum policy. This duty covers years 7-11 (under Sections 43-45 of the 1997 Education Act). It is supported by the non-statutory framework for careers education covering ages 11-19. The Secretary of State has the power (under Section 45) to extend the duty to

specification must also require all new deliverers of the service to have in place effective arrangements to ensure the provision under the Adult Advancement & Careers Service (from 1.8.10), and the web-based and telephone careers advice services, are fully integrated into the new all-age service.

2.3 Such early arrangements by a new Government – to bring together and to build upon existing services for young people and for adults following the General Election – must be transparent, and must become subject to robust accreditation against national quality standards and inspection (see Sections 4 and 5 below).

2.4 In addition, we believe that the new all-age careers service is of such importance to the future economic and social health of the nation that an independent Advisory Board should be established to advise both Ministers and officials on the future policy framework, direction and performance of the new service. We suggest that such an Advisory Board would need to involve key stakeholders from the worlds of learning and employment - this would increase the accountability of the service to users and beneficiaries. This Board should ensure that there is an overall strategic framework for the all-age service, together with appropriate plans to meet the differing needs of young people within statutory learning and in transitions, as well as meeting the differing needs of adults.

2.5 The Conservatives should ensure that ‘embedded’ careers advice and guidance support in Further and Higher Education is appropriately located within its overall strategy for careers support for all ages. Whilst it may not be appropriate for such services directly to be deemed to be a part of the new all-age service, mechanisms must be established to require the new careers service providers to establish meaningful links with FE and HE embedded services in their area localities, and vice-versa. There would be, for example, many benefits if embedded services and the new all-age service providers collaborated on CPD programmes for advisers and for teachers/lecturers/work-based learning tutors.

2.6 Future representation on, or links with, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills also need to be addressed. We believe that the new Minister would need to ensure that the new all-age service, at strategic level, has direct involvement with the work of the Commission.

3. FUTURE BRANDING AND PROMOTION OF THE NEW SERVICE

3.1 The ever-increasing complexities of choice for young people and for adults - together with our affirmed belief that careers information, advice and guidance should be a continuously enriching activity that supports transition at all stages of life - demand that the new all-age service should be available to all, and that support is best delivered through a vehicle that has high brand recognition and continuity. We believe that the all-age service should include an integrated brand for the careers provision for young people and for adults, offering continuity of support, albeit with the flexibility for access points in differing

all publicly-funded 16-19 learning providers (schools, colleges and work-based learning providers). The Welsh Assembly has already used this power in this way. There are increasing calls (not least from the employer community), which we have fully endorsed, for the Secretary of State to do likewise in England, and the IAG STRATEGY launched by DCSF on 26.10.09 sets this as the ‘ambition’ of the current government (see footnote 7 below). The Conservatives are urged to accept the ‘ambition’ of the current Government and to make careers education statutory throughout all 11-18 learning.

Careers advice and guidance: The Secretary of State has a statutory duty to provide a ‘careers service’ in all parts of England (in Wales this duty is devolved to the Assembly) to all young people at the crucial stage of completing statutory schooling (currently to 16). This duty is covered by the 1973 Employment & Training Act (Section 8) as amended by the TURER Act of 1993. Currently the Secretary of State discharges this duty within his powers latterly from the Learning and Skills Act of 2000, through which Connexions was established, and now within Sections 68 & 69 of the 2008 Education & Skills Act.

“**Careers advisers**” are named on the face of the 1997 Act as those discharging the Secretary of State’s 1973 (amended) duty, and they have a statutory right of access to all publicly-funded schools.

perhaps age-related locations as best determined locally within the national over-arching framework.

3.2 A brand is a symbolic embodiment of all the information connected to a product or service. It serves to create associations and expectations around it. Brands today are seen as badges of authenticity, reliability and consistent performance; they reflect the value of the service and allow the consumer to “shop” with confidence.

3.3 Currently there is a plethora of brands for the ‘IAG’ services on offer to young people and adults – Connexions, JobCentre+, nextstep, and (what was formerly learndirect advice) the Careers Advice Service. Each service is promoted separately and aimed at different audiences. We believe that this can lead to confusion in the market place, with consumers unsure which organisation to access for advice and guidance, and with different levels of marketing activity diluting or skewing the message. This has been partly recognised in the proposals for the new AACS. We believe that the same principles apply to services for young people.

3.4 We are convinced that a powerful and integrated brand to attract both young people and adults to available careers services will encourage familiarisation from a young age and throughout their working lives, allowing them to access advice and guidance when it is most needed, and to make successful transitions from education and training to work, in and out of the labour market. It will also encourage the smooth transition from one access point of the all-age service to another – telephone, web-based or face-to-face services – through a single identifiable brand. We believe that the brand should include the word “careers”, since this term is universally understood, and widely used in conventional media and recruitment activities. It is also an inspirational term, encouraging development and social mobility, bringing together learning and work – both key concerns of the Leitch and Milburn Reports².

3.5 An integrated brand is, in our view, an essential prerequisite for the success of the proposed all-age service. Familiarity with the brand would serve not only to encourage customer recognition of the overall service, but also to increase recognition by stakeholders – employers, schools and colleges, unions, work-based learning providers – which would lead to greater appreciation of the way the new careers service can contribute to economic, education and social outcomes.

3.6 A single powerful brand could be promoted in a cost-effective way to different client groups, encouraging equality and diversity, and ensuring maximum accessibility. Whilst the brand would remain the same, promotion methods could be segmented according to the target client group –using, for example, television advertising for some age-groups and ‘texting’/‘twittering’ for others.

3.7 The branding and promotion should reinforce the influential role of the careers service, enabling people of all ages and cultures to make decisions about learning and work. It should convey the message of high quality, promise consistent performance, and create and sustain customer loyalty.

4. QUALITY STANDARDS

4.1 Quality standards are integral to the proposed all-age service. It is important to have a common understanding of what is meant by the term ‘quality standards’ and what standards are currently in place, before considering their place within the Conservatives’ strategy to establish the new service.

² Leitch: *Prosperity for all in the Global Economy-World Class Skills* (The Stationery Office, 2006) and Milburn: *Unleashing Aspiration: The final report of the panel on fair access to the professions* (Cabinet Office, 2009)

4.2 Quality standards are important for a number of reasons:

- to ensure that there is a common (good) standard across the country, particularly if there are different delivery and management structures in place;
- to provide a benchmark for organisations to develop and maintain a culture of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI);
- to inform customers, clients, and stakeholders of the standards they should expect to see in terms of service delivery;
- to provide a common framework for tendering, for 'Best Value' reviews, and for other mechanisms that may be used to procure services.

4.3 All of the above apply whatever the service offered and are compatible within an all-age careers service which we understand will be driven by a national model specification, with competitive tendering of area-wide contracts to deliver the service in a locality, and delivery by a range of public, private and voluntary & community sector providers.

4.4 There are currently different models in place including:

- existing locally-developed and valued "quality marks" for careers education and guidance for young people - we would support a means of enabling such existing standards being 'kite-marked' against a new national standard and accreditation award (see below, and further comments in Section 4.8 below);
- the current DCSF's Quality Standards for Young People's Information, Advice and Guidance, supported by the 'Principles' of impartial careers education;
- the well-established *matrix* quality standard for information, advice and guidance on learning and work (which, we understand DBIS has agreed to retain but to update for the AACCS);
- the National Youth Agency's Youth Services Quality Mark (YSQM) for young people.

4.5 In addition to these quality standards, there is the Common Inspection Framework³ that all **nextstep** providers are currently inspected against by OFSTED (see Section 5 below).

4.6 Within the context of a new all-age careers service, it is important to learn from and build upon these quality standards, without reinventing wheels. By making use of the existing standards that have been developed, tried and tested, it will be possible to establish essential and desirable components of a strategy to secure country-wide quality of the levels the nation demands and the population deserves. For the future, it may be necessary to differentiate between the standards required to deliver aspects of the all-age service for young people and those for adults. Work should be undertaken to produce an overall 'standards pack' for organisations contracted to deliver the new service for young people and for adults, plus any common aspects that would apply to the overall service (including managing transition). This should be drawn from the existing standards as far as possible. We suggest that organisations offering the full all-age service should be required to meet the full 'standards pack', while other organisations delivering only one aspect (under the structure we understand the Conservatives are proposing, this would probably be under a sub-contract to the 'prime contractor' for the all-age service in a locality) would use the relevant units.

4.7 The benefits of this approach would be to:

- identify common standards wherever possible, with differentiation only where it is really necessary;
- ensure maximum coherence across the age range;

³ Available from www.ofsted.gov.uk

- ensure that within the all-age service, where agreed sub-contracting occurs, services for young people and those for adults evolve at a similar pace;
- strengthen the focus on transitions from ‘young people’ to ‘adult’ support arrangements, albeit within one new all-age service.

4.8 For quality standards to be meaningful, however, they must include explicit demonstration of customer satisfaction with the advice and guidance offered, and they must be supported by a robust accreditation and inspection process. There are good accreditation models in place for the *matrix* Standard and YSQM, and these should be incorporated in measures to accredit organisational performance. Equally, it must be seen as a contractual requirement for services to be accredited against these standards. If retained, the DCSF’s Quality Standards for Young People’s IAG should be subject to more robust future arrangements for reviewing and setting the standards, together with independent accreditation procedures⁴ – without these, the value and impact of the standards will be diminished; with these, the standards have much to build upon.

4.9 Leadership and management are crucial in securing best quality in organisations delivering the new service, and whilst these aspects feature highly in the *matrix* accreditation procedures, and in the CIF, we would suggest that organisations contracted to deliver the new service (certainly those as potential ‘prime contractors’) should be required to meet the Investors in People Standard. This would also require evidence of investment in appropriate initial and continuous training and professional development for all levels of staff, from front line careers advisers to support staff, through to leaders and managers.

4.10 These arrangements should be supported by an external inspection process which focuses on the all-age careers service specifically - as is expanded upon in the following section.

5. INSPECTION

5.1 A robust system of inspection is essential in order to ensure that standards are maintained and to underpin and give credibility to the overall process. At present there is a new programme of OFSTED inspections for adult nextstep services, while the former programme of inspections for Connexions services has been subsumed into the overall Strategic Area Review process. Whilst accepting that inspections can be both time-consuming and stressful, they are an important part of the overall process. Without such a programme, specifically focusing on the new all-age service, it will be difficult to ensure that in all areas all aspects of the new service are being delivered to the same standard and that they are sufficiently resourced and prioritised. Inspection frameworks should link to the published national specifications and quality standards, and should provide an opportunity for quality improvement and development.

⁴ Learning from the *matrix* experience (where current providers of advice and guidance for learning and work must meet the standard to receive public funds – mostly in services for adults), we believe that no provider of careers advice and guidance for young people should be eligible for public funding from the Government unless it meets the required quality standards. This we believe means that there must be a national award. Only if a national award exists will parents/carers, WBL providers, employers, and further and higher education providers, each be able to have confidence that the careers service provider(s) in a particular area are delivering to the nationally required standard. As was stressed by the Leitch Report on the skills the nation requires, nothing else will be acceptable. As set out in section 4.4 above, we would support a means of enabling existing locally developed and recognised standards being ‘kite-marked’ against the new national standard and accreditation award. A key matter to be resolved will be the process of assessment against the DCSF IAG standards (including, importantly, by whom). We urge that the model of ‘*matrix*’ be followed here. This has the standards set out in clear and logical fashion, with 8 elements and 40 performance criteria, and published under a national guardian of the ‘*matrix*’ standard which acts as the Standard Setting Body (ENTO), which is also responsible for the Assessment and Accreditation of the standard and acts as the Accreditation Body. This arrangement results in a highly regarded award, supported by a team of independent and skilled advisers and assessors. In our view, a similar approach is essential for careers advice and guidance for young people. The new all-age careers service providers must all be required to meet appropriate national quality standards for services for young people and for adults.

5.2 Inspections should cover all aspects of the new service. It may also be appropriate to undertake, from time to time, ‘themed’ inspections, so that young people’s and adult services can be inspected separately. However, we would suggest that it would be more cost effective to undertake an all-age inspection in a locality (perhaps conducted by teams of inspectors with complementary expertise and backgrounds).

5.3 We believe that inspections of the new service should be distinct, and not subsumed into larger-scale inspections (for example of area-wide local authority provision); only in this way will it be assured that standards are achieved and maintained in a coherent way across the country. Of paramount importance will be to ensure that future quality of service delivery does not become patchy, inconsistent and a ‘postcode lottery’.

5.4 Inspection against the Common Inspection Framework should be designed to meet the requirements of the current sections 68 & 69 of the Education & Skills Act 2008 and to fulfil the requirements of the national specification (section 2 above) of the new all-age service.

5.5 We are convinced that robust and discrete inspections of the new service should focus upon ensuring that the service is transparently planned to meet the needs both of young people and of adults – so that neither age-group is advantaged nor disadvantaged - and delivered to the highest standards in every part of England. As such, it is essential that Inspectors must have sound experience and understanding of the nature of the service they are inspecting.

6. INITIAL TRAINING AND CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

6.1 We have had serious concerns about the current training of professional advisers who will deliver both the careers provision of Integrated Youth Support Services and the new AACS for adults. We fully support the recently agreed role for Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) to take career guidance into its ‘footprint’/remit. We would support LLUK taking the full all-age careers service for England into its footprint with all due speed – the division which sees career guidance professionals for young people in England sitting with CWDC should cease as soon as the all-age service is established.

6.2 We are pleased to be supporting the work of LLUK to review the workforce requirements for career guidance professionals in the future. We would urge the Conservatives also to ensure that the good work undertaken by CDWC on aspects of the integration of complementary support services for young people (as these impinge on the future all-age careers service) should not be lost.

6.3 Initial training programmes must be available through a range of routes, including full-time courses and work-based portfolio learning and accreditation. The ICG is the awarding body for the post graduate QCG (“Qualification in Career Guidance” Level 5) and it would support a review of the QCG learning outcomes to ensure these meet the needs of the new all-age service. The ICG would also wish to see a new qualifications and training framework for careers advisers which required achievement to this level in order to be fully qualified and competent to practice, placing the careers workforce in parity with other equivalent professional groups (such as teachers and NHS professionals). The ICG would also encourage the Conservatives to require all careers advisers to have membership of (i.e. registration with) a relevant professional body throughout their training and post qualification working life. Implicit within this requirement is that all careers advisers will continue to undertake and record a minimum number of hours of CPD per year as part of the requirement for them to continue to practice in a professional capacity. This approach is consistent with many other professionals and with the new requirements for teachers in FE/work-based learning. The professional body should be required to have in place a code of professional conduct and appropriate sanctions of its members, including the removal of

a licence to practice for its registered practitioners – offering protection to the users of the new all-age service, assuring them of access to appropriately qualified professional advisers.

6.4 Careers England’s members are employers who recruit careers advisers, and its members know that the content of advice and guidance qualifications is falling short of the requirements for professional competence; hence its members often need to supplement these skills through in-service CPD. Both the ICG and Careers England fully support the current LLUK-led reviews of the content of programmes to ensure they are fit for future purpose, equipping careers advisers with the skills to deliver first-rate support in a range of settings through a menu of delivery options.

6.5 The present supply of competent careers advisers is already at risk of failing to meet the numerical needs of current arrangements for Connexions, the former learndirect advice ‘Careers Advice Service’ and nextstep. Unless urgent steps are taken to build upon Level 3 trained staff numbers by increasing the availability of work-based Level 4 training, as well as increased full-time provision, we doubt that sufficient numbers of skilled careers advisers will be available to meet the demands of young people and adults in 2010/11, when the new AACs for adults is scheduled to be in place and when the changes to the statutory age of leaving learning will impact upon transitions. This is an urgent matter which a new Government will need to address.

6.6 As direct employers of careers advisers, Careers England’s members also know that this situation will be exacerbated unless future contracting arrangements for the new all-age service provide contract lengths which permit and encourage investment in training and CPD. This is an issue of national importance. We suggest that the national specification for the new service should require the ‘prime contractor’ in each area locality to demonstrate that it has appropriate plans in place to meet the workforce planning and development needs of the overall careers service provision in its locality in each year’s annual business plan. It is a national strategic requirement to ensure that arrangements everywhere in England enable investment in workforce development.

6.7 If the SSC arrangements for careers guidance in England do change to see LLUK as the sole SSC, Careers England would wish to bring its employer voice to assist their planning processes, and the ICG its professional expertise. We would also urge that LLUK should urgently take a strong lead in the future collection, collation and presentation of Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) by all SSCs; improvements in LMI are a prerequisite to successful delivery of informed careers advice and guidance support to all members of the public.

6.8 Whilst careers education for young people within statutory learning up to 18+ will be a part of the curriculum, and thus covered by the TDA (Training Development Agency for schools), it is ‘mission critical’ that teaching staff delivering careers education programmes have the specialist skills required to ensure that during statutory learning all young people acquire the skills for effective career planning. We continue to share the concerns of the Association for Careers Education and Guidance (ACEG), which in 2007 drew attention⁵ to the evident shortcomings in the quality of many CEG programmes as well as the training of teachers:

“Recent research shows that the quality of careers education in English schools is varied, but where it is good it has specialist support, and retention rates for students in post-16 programmes are high⁶.....One of the main reasons for the unsatisfactory quality of careers education in schools is the lack of trained staff responsible for managing and

⁵ Association for Careers Education and Guidance (2007), *Economic Wellbeing and Financial Capability at Key Stages 3 and 4: the Case for Separate Support for Delivering the Programmes of Study*.

⁶ Morris, M. (2004), *The Case for Careers Education and Guidance for 14-19 Year Olds*. Slough: NFER.

delivering it. This situation cannot be improved by providing training from non-specialists in these aspects of the curriculum”.

6.9 We warmly welcome the recent commitment from DCSF in its new IAG Strategy⁷ for young people to enhance the skills and competence of teachers to support all young people acquiring the skills for effective career planning. To support this further, the proposed national specification for the new service should include a role for the service in such CPD programmes in all localities. We conclude that, both for teachers providing careers education, and for advisers providing careers advice and guidance (for young people and for adults), it is imperative that within its overall strategy for the all-age careers service, the Conservative Party commits itself to ensure that important and urgent qualitative and quantitative improvements are made to the arrangements for both the initial training and future CPD provision of skilled career guidance specialists.

7. LINKS TO CAREERS EDUCATION

7.1 Across England the provision of quality careers education, coupled with careers advice and guidance for young people, has traditionally been based on a partnership between schools, colleges, work-based learning providers and an independent careers service.

7.2 This ‘partnership model’ has suffered erosion in many places under the current Government.

7.3 Under new arrangements for an all-age careers service, it will be essential to ensure that there is a statutory requirement for high quality provision of both careers education and careers guidance for all young people from Year 7 through to Year 13. This must include universal access to the independent specialist impartial careers advice and guidance provided by the new careers service, informed by the labour market. The recent DCSF Statutory Guidance on impartial careers education⁸ provides a firmer foundation for the future, which the new careers service can build upon.

7.4 We also recommend that the Conservatives should look carefully at how access to programmes of careers education, career development and career management (all aimed at developing the skills of individuals) may be extended to people of all ages. We warmly welcome that within its new IAG Strategy for young people, the present Government has signalled both its ‘ambition’ to make appropriate careers education statutory up to the age of leaving learning as it rises to 18, as well as establishing a Task Force on the Careers Profession and commissioning proposals on a ‘career blueprint’ model for primary, secondary, post 16 and adult learning (a concept derived from the Canadian and Australian Blueprint for career development models which originally were developed in the United States of America). We commend these ‘ambitions’ and models to the Conservative Party.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 Both the ICG and Careers England are ready to offer such help as may be sought by the Conservative Party to ensure that its plans are informed by our respective expertise, so that lessons may be learnt from experience and the proposed new all-age Careers Service for England may aspire to become and achieve ‘world class’ status.

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www.careersengland.org.uk and www.icg-uk.org

⁷ *Quality, Choice and Aspiration*, DCSF, October 2009

⁸ *Statutory Guidance: Impartial Careers Education*, DCSF, October 2009