

**Career Guidance
Services for Adults
Within a Coherent All-Age Strategy
in England**

A discussion paper, June 2007

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Following the release of the Policy Paper¹ by Chris Humphries (Chair of Careers England) on 6th March 2007, and the subsequent Policy Paper from the Board of Careers England ("An all-age strategy for career guidance services in England")², this subsequent discussion paper outlines the position of Careers England in relation to the provision of information, advice and guidance (IAG) for adults in England.

1.2 Careers England continues to advocate for action to follow up the recommendations made in the two earlier papers above in respect of the provision of IAG services for all age groups (however commissioned and delivered within the national strategy called for). We believe that such services must be designed and delivered to meet the transitional and developmental needs of all as they move through the years of statutory education, further learning (via Further Education, Work-Based Learning and/or Higher Education) into work and subsequently through career change and on-going skills acquisition.

1.3 We believe that a **co-ordinated all-age national strategy** is the best way to provide a well recognised and consistent approach both to the vocational and learning needs of the population and to address the skills development needs of our country within the global economy as identified by Lord Leitch³ in his recent review of skills in the UK.

1.4 We are heartened by the responses of Ministers in DfES and DWP to our Policy Paper on all-age strategy, which has seen Ministers in both Departments respond in May 2007 saying:

*"I read Careers England's Paper with interest and am supportive of the proposal that we should develop a more coherent careers guidance strategy. In particular, this could facilitate effective transitions and exchange of good practice between services for young people and adults."*⁴

1.5 Whilst Ministers⁵ are clearly "*unconvinced of the case for an all age careers service*", Officials in both Departments are charged by Ministers with "*looking into the implications of taking forward an all age strategy*"⁶. Careers England has welcomed these responses and confirmed its readiness to work closely with Officials in this next important stage. Careers England is also contributing to the Presidential Working Group of the ICG recently convened to prepare a career guidance sector-wide response to the Leitch report.

1.6 This paper, therefore, offers the views of Careers England's membership who are directly involved in providing a range of IAG services for adults.

2. STRATEGY PREREQUISITES

2.1 The Leitch report emphasised the need for universality in the way IAG is provided to adults, which we fully support.

¹ The case for an all-age strategy is the central theme of a personal paper by Chris Humphries CBE, Chairman of the Careers England Board of Directors. Humphries, C. (2007). *The Economic and Social Health of the Nation: the Leitch Report and the Distinctive Contribution of Specialist Career Guidance Providers*. London: Careers England.

² *An all-age strategy for career guidance services in England*. (2007) London. Careers England

³ Leitch Review of Skills (2006). *Prosperity for All in the Global Economy – World Class Skills*. London: Stationery Office.

⁴ These words are included in letters to Careers England from Jim Murphy (Minister of State at DWP) on 16.5.07 and from Beverley Hughes (Minister of State at DfES) on 15.5.07 in response to Careers England's All Age Strategy Policy Paper (see note 2 above)

⁵ Ibid (also included in Ministers' written replies to Careers England) :see note 4

⁶ Ibid (also included in Ministers' written replies to Careers England) :see note 4

2.2 Whilst there are arguments that the ideal solution to the learning and vocational needs of all would be an all age universal service, we recognise that this is neither the only way nor the preference of current Ministers. We suggest that the prerequisites for an all-age strategy include:

- A national specification for the proposed new service for adults which would require that every deliverer in every locality must put in place effective transition arrangements with the new integrated youth support service (and vice-versa)
- Embedded IAG within further education needs to be included in the much needed coherent all age strategy
- A universal tracking system for all young people which at a minimum would retain contacts, via the new service for adults, for all young people up to the age of 25
- Quality standards for the services for young people and for adults which would be complementary and developmental
- Inspection arrangements for both services which would rigorously assess the effectiveness of transition arrangements, joint strategic planning and joint CPD of staff in both services
- Branding and promotion of the new services which would support and enable complementarity and continuity

2.3 We fully recognise that there will be resource implications of such an approach.

2.4 Whatever is to be the chosen way forward in England from 2008, there are certain key features for the provision of IAG to adults that we believe must be evidenced in any model developed for the future of information, advice and guidance in the 21st century.

2.5 As we await the publication of the IAG for Adults Review Report and of the Leitch Implementation Plan by the DfES (due later this Spring/early Summer), we believe that it is important to set out, in more detail, the current position of Careers England in respect of the distinctive contribution of IAG to the welfare of adults and to our nation.

3. ADULTS: The distinctive contribution of IAG to the welfare of adults and to our nation

3.1 Our starting point is that future services for adults must build upon solid foundations in respect of best-quality services for young people. All young people by the age of 18+ should, through effective careers education and guidance in the 13-19 phases of learning, gain the skills for effective career planning. One of these skills is to be able in adult life to access appropriate levels and forms of support to manage transitions and future career choices effectively; in effect, 'personal career management' support to make the best choices for their lives, their families and thus for the economy and society.

3.2 The proposed raising of the age of leaving learning to 18, in the recent Green Paper⁷, if implemented will mean that the focus of concern on those not engaged in education or employment (NEET) will also be raised to the 19+ age group. It will be essential that effective transition arrangements are in place in every locality between the new Integrated Youth Support services and both the new adult skills and careers service and JobCentre+. Embedded IAG within FE must be incorporated into such local/regional strategies, and those working within the new service for adults must have access to real time job vacancies through JobCentre+.

3.3 Effective and impartial IAG enables individuals to plan, to aspire and to achieve.

⁷ See Department for Education and Skills (2007). *Raising Expectations: Staying in Education and Training Post-16*. London: DfES. This March 2007 Green Paper proposes enforcement measures to ensure that all young people stay in education or training until 18 from the year 2013.

3.4 Beyond enabling individuals to become better informed on opportunities and options, IAG provides the opportunity to reflect and to self assess, to consider aspirations and to set goals, to plan how to achieve those goals in the light of expert knowledge, to be challenged and to be motivated and supported in reaching milestones.

3.5 IAG offers the opportunity to review the past, to identify skills and strengths, to plan futures and to assess these against real opportunities in the community. This underpins successful decision-making in relation to life planning, helps individuals to achieve, and in doing so makes a significant contribution to their own well-being and self fulfilment, as well as contributing positively to both the economy and the social fabric of the nation.

3.5 We regret that IAG support for adults too frequently at present is seen as a series of one-off interventions or as a single intervention in which all issues can be resolved. High-volume-driven information and advice contracts also mitigate against greater in-depth reviewing of circumstances, options and motivational guidance.

3.6 IAG should be a continuous process that happens at and in preparation for life-changing moments that may not always be pre-planned, especially in adult life.

3.6 Events in an individual's life have consequences, as much as does every choice an individual makes. Events are not limited to particular target groups; they can and do affect those with skills and qualifications from pre-level 1 to the highest in the land. Hence accessible IAG should be seen as a lifelong process that accompanies lifelong learning, enabling individuals to make sense of their circumstances, their learning and skills and to apply the outcomes of accessing IAG effectively for their own benefit and for that of the economy.

3.7 For the general public, we believe that IAG support should be seen in similar ways as pathways for offenders have developed through the offender learning journeys that now underpin the planning for offender progression, and the 'Skills Coaching' pilots (which have seen a strong emphasis upon diagnostics, support through the extended process, and recognised progression interviews). In these ways, IAG is crucial to achieving Lord Leitch's vision - which we share - for the acquisition of skills within the population by 2020.

3.8 Key elements of impartial and effective IAG for adults are:

- *Raising aspirations* - assessment and self awareness enable individuals to identify their strengths and weaknesses, to identify intrinsic and acquired skills and to understand their full potential. It is with this awareness that individuals can raise their eyes to the horizons and to overcome some of the concerns such as lacking in confidence and low self-esteem that are impediments to moving on successfully for too many people who might be termed as lower achievers.
- *Increasing awareness of labour market information and impact on local labour markets* - employers report skills shortages that vary enormously from region to region. 'Train to Gain' is increasingly important in meeting the skills development needs of those in employment and IAG has a significant role to play in identifying how those needs can best be met. Equally IAG has a significant role to play in moving those not engaged in employment back into the labour market - for example, through 'Skills Coaching' and 'Pathways to Work', both of which we strongly support. The IAG process is a crucial component in ensuring that the skills required by employers at a local, regional and national level are understood by job-seekers and potential job-changers so that the skills requirements of employers are satisfied. A local approach is particularly relevant for the large numbers of SMEs which provide the majority of opportunities and frequently operate at a very local level. A significant contribution to a better skilled and educated workforce, with an increase in those who are economically active, is a key contribution that IAG can make to the success of the nation.
- *Overcoming barriers to learning* - many adults face a multiplicity of barriers to progression including poor stereotypical images of learning, low self esteem, fear of phoning for information, difficulties with child care facilities, poor basic skills and skills for life, inadequate local travel to work public transport and lack of

awareness of funding opportunities. Effective and impartial providers of IAG can help individuals to address these issues and to plan realistic responses that will unblock pathways; the most effective IAG services also act as providers of feedback to those able to make significant decisions which affect access to opportunities, and will act as advocates on behalf of their IAG clients.

- *Taking account of individual and collective views* - Lord Leitch proposes a more demand-led approach to the provision of skills and to inform the planning for the provision of the learning to meet demand. In the same way, IAG service provision should be demand-led so that the recipients can inform local policy-making and planning. The public needs to be able to influence where, when and how IAG service provision is made and the attitudes of staff providing it
- *Promoting social and educational inclusion* - many adults experience periods of social and educational exclusion for reasons that may include: unemployment; ethnic background; age; health; caring responsibilities; finance; residence (e.g. rural area, postal address); and poor basic, employability or IT skills. More 'apparently privileged' groups of adults (e.g. recent graduates and unwillingly retired professionals) can also experience degrees of social, economic and educational exclusion. For example, significant numbers of unemployed and under-employed graduates may experience severe financial hardship and social isolation. This includes isolation at work for reasons such as unsympathetic management and work colleagues, and poor or non-existent training arrangements. Many older unemployed professionals can experience considerable social isolation and personal disorientation, compounded by cumulative financial difficulties and ageist attitudes when applying for work.
- *Extending equality of opportunity* - IAG services working with under-represented groups (in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, disability and/or learning difficulty) ensures that they are supported in identifying and obtaining suitable opportunities, and in making genuine and informed choices. Stereotyping will be challenged, racial issues confronted, and staff trained to be sensitive to notions of equality and diversity.
- *Building evidence-based practice* - although some guidance methods may be better suited to particular age groups, there are strong indications that a significant number are appreciated by young people and adults alike, although there may be differences in content and delivery methods. All age groups respond positively to: mentoring, short concentrated career management courses and work experience.

4. A MODEL FOR IAG FOR ADULTS IN THE FUTURE

4.1 Strategically planned: universal and built upon sound foundations.

4.1.1 The ever increasing complexities of choice for adults (as much as for young people), and our affirmed belief that IAG should be a continuous enriching activity that supports transition at all stages of life, demand that IAG is available to all and that it is best delivered through a vehicle that has high brand recognition and continuity.

4.1.2 This section of the paper concentrates upon adults, and reinforces the need to build services for adults which are within a coherent all age strategy. The current patchy coverage of strategic IAG issues by 'IAG Strategic Boards' - established either locally or regionally by the Learning and Skills Council - needs urgently to be reviewed and a better and more consistent approach implemented in each of the areas within which the new service for adults is established.

4.1.3 There is a significant cost to drop out rates at all levels of learning and those being experienced in Higher Education are as significant as those elsewhere. Combined with this, the poor uptake into mathematical sciences, combined sciences and other science-based subjects in HE, which may affect our nation's competitiveness in the future, all provide further evidence that IAG should be universally available (i.e. to the 'more able and relatively well qualified' as well as those experiencing significant barriers to their progression).

4.1.4 Similarly we must capitalize on the experience and skills of those who find themselves workless in their later years. They come to the job market with a wide range of expertise, and often with high levels of commitment, and yet they are a resource that all too frequently is poorly used, ignored or wasted.

4.2 Multifaceted

4.2.1 Client feedback consistently shows that one-to-one interventions reflecting the very nature (human interaction) of IAG are highly valued. Information can often be effectively provided by websites and through electronic media such as CDs and DVDs, but more opportunities must be established to combine informing with motivational advice and guidance.

4.2.2 Learndirect has provided invaluable services through its phone-based IAG services. These need to be supported with a national network of highly accessible and consistently branded high street access points across the whole of England. Local/regional providers of the new service for adults must have direct access to the National Learning Database of learndirect, including a facility to update/add to its contents (within appropriate quality assurance regimes).

4.2.3 The voluntary and community sector has made a significant contribution, through its own specialist support networks, to a wide range of client groups. The highly-regarded **matrix** award (through its quality standards and accreditation procedures) has both encouraged and enabled a greater variety of IAG providers to contribute to the foundations which exist today.

4.2.4 Too often the role and contribution of the private sector 'retail/paid for' career advice products and services is overlooked. The future coherent strategy must include these; they offer an important potential source of referral to and from the new publicly-funded service for adults, if included through quality accreditation such as **matrix**.

4.2.5 We must capitalize on these foundations, and the experience of providing diverse services through a range of separately planned and delivered provision, so that added value is maximized through effective utilization of all available resources that are planned strategically and delivered across England by the best providers in the public, private and the voluntary & community sectors. All IAG services should be accessible through a range of media and physical access points at local, regional and national levels.

4.3 Skills focused

4.3.1 Our future competitiveness as a nation will depend on how well we respond to the pressing skills agenda for action. It is crucial that we encourage people through IAG to increase their skill base, to be ready and prepared to change, to take on new learning and to be confident in their contribution to making their communities – and thus the nation – successful.

4.3.2 IAG must be rooted in the workforce needs of employers and in meeting their identified skill demands. Its unique position in interfacing with a wide range of clients will enable IAG service providers to support learning planning at all levels.

4.3.3 IAG Advisers must be able to manage and use labour market information effectively to address the needs of local labour markets and particularly of SMEs. Maintaining a local flavour to the provision of IAG will not only enable this to happen in a meaningful way but will also improve accessibility for clients and employers alike.

4.4 Flexible and differentiated

4.4.1 We know that resources are limited and therefore in proposing a universal service to adults we recognise that in some cases clients may need to bear some or all of the cost of provision. We fully support the proposals for a 'Skills Health Check' as an entitlement which is free to all, and we would argue that all those providing these Checks must be trained and skilled in not merely checking, but also in advising, guiding and motivating clients to plan actions – next moves. We also support there being a 'menu' of additional interventions that may be provided dependent on need and ability to pay.

4.4.2 We visualize that an initial consultation, incorporating the Skills Health Check, would lead to an agreed plan of action that would identify career goals and capitalize on the range of further inputs and interventions available. At this point referral to other services and support may be appropriate or to other sources of help such as phone-based services or web-based information resources (e.g. those provided through www.advice-resources and 'Ukonline').

4.4.3 We would expect that the 'menu' would include one-to-one interventions, assessments including personality and skills testing, personal development workshops including employability skills development opportunities, support and access to learning and employment information and access to work experience, learning and employment opportunities.

4.5 Quality

4.5.1 We envisage that IAG for adults would continue to be procured by Government and provided by a range of public, private and voluntary & community organisations under the umbrella of a nationally recognised brand that is effectively marketed to clients young and old.

4.5.2 Improved planning at a national, regional and local level will enable these organisations to work co-operatively and to provide complementary services so that better value for the public purse is secured, with duplication reduced and added value gained through incremental growth of capacity with every additional resource made available. Important decisions will be required at Ministerial levels on procurement arrangements, and we would urge that minimum expenditure is incurred on administration of procurement (with short lines of accountability) and maximum resources made available for quality assured delivery organisations which should be awarded contracts of sufficient length to encourage (indeed require) investment in staff development and service enhancements for the benefit of beneficiaries of the new services.

4.5.3 This approach will enable us to build on existing capacity, to strengthen links between providers and most importantly to ensure that a greater level of coherence is provided to the user than is evident today. In particular, co-location of IAG service provision with JobCentre+ should be considered (where appropriate, but not necessarily in all locations) so that the link between IAG and placing into employment can be strengthened and access to learning opportunities to address barriers to engagement in learning and employment can be addressed.

4.5.4 To maintain quality in provision, all those who provide IAG services should be required to be *matrix* accredited and staff delivering IAG should be accredited appropriately and to robust and professional standards. Whilst NVQs have been the benchmark to date we would encourage greater use (and recognition) also of alternative and additional qualification such as NOCN to ensure that the qualification framework is fit for purpose and appropriate to the activities in which staff are engaged.

4.5.5 Consistent with our view that IAG is a continuum rather than a one-off event, mentoring and coaching skill should be incorporated into the toolkit of the Adviser and CPD should be evident for all staff delivering future IAG services.

4.6 Impact

4.6.1 Impact measures must be put in place which will enable us to measure the overall contribution that IAG makes to economic success. In order to do this effectively we would advocate moves towards the establishment of a national database of IAG recipients so that tracking is more effective, progress can be monitored over meaningful periods of time, individuals can interact with their own records to update and maintain personal information and increased levels of information about individuals can be gathered to identify how and when IAG inputs have made a difference.

4.6.2 Accepting that a universal tracking system for all adults would be highly costly, we suggest that the first priority should be to establish universal 16-25 tracking (based upon the solid 16-18 foundations established under Connexions). In

this way the growing number of people 'lost' in the '*invisible twenties*'⁸ will be reduced. Steps need to be taken quickly to review how ULNs (unique learner numbers) might assist in this.

4.6.3 Improved information gathering will assist in a more methodical approach to gathering research evidence and to addressing some of the notoriously difficult issues around measuring impact.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 We believe that it is crucial that whatever changes come as a result of key drivers to IAG reform – the IAG Review, the Leitch report and its subsequent implementation plan, together with the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review – we build on the successes of IAG provision to date. We must capitalize on partnership working to provide a service that meets the needs of the public at large and other stakeholders, in particular those of employers.

5.2 This will require national strategic planning, not just of IAG services for adults but of those for young people too – together, not in isolation.

5.3 Strategy must be supported by implementation plans which bring focused application of resources to ensure that provision is complementary and comprehensive. For the overall IAG service on offer (what might be termed the 'Adult Offer' alongside the 'Youth Offer' in every locality) to be effective, it must maintain the human contact element within a multifaceted approach, where high quality locally-accessible IAG services complement those accessible by phone and the web.

5.4 As confirmed to Ministers at the DWP and DfES, our Members are now ready to play their part (alongside others in the sector⁹) in the next stages of finalizing the strategy, the principles of services to be provided, the more detailed design of activities (the overall 'menu'), and implementation plans (i.e. service specification, quality standards, commissioning, delivery and inspection). Comments on this discussion paper are most welcome:

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⁸ Social Exclusion Unit (2005). *Transitions: Young Adults with Complex Needs*, pp.8, 55. London: Stationery Office. The report suggests that this issue can be addressed by actively managing the transition from youth to adult services, in one of two ways: by establishing good working relationships between the youth service and the adult service; or by adopting more flexible arrangements which enable the service for young people to 'hold on to' to those young adults who need more support until they can benefit from services for adults (*ibid*, pp.88-89).

⁹ Careers England is pleased to be contributing to the Institute of Career Guidance's Presidential Working Group established in 2007 to formulate a coherent response to the Leitch report. This paper is a part of the process of formulating such a response, coming as it does from the Task Group set by Careers England to draw upon its Members experiences within current publicly-funded and commercial career advice and guidance products and services for adults in England.