



**PATRICK WATSON, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF MONTROSE PUBLIC AFFAIRS CONSULTANTS,
REVIEWS CAREERS ENGLAND'S TEN YEAR HISTORY**

CAREERS ENGLAND

“10 years in support of people’s aspirations and informed choices”

Careers England is celebrating its tenth anniversary, and has just published a review of its ten year history¹. This commentary highlights some of the key elements in the full review.

Established in April 2003, with 16 founding members, it is the Trade Association representing mainly employer organisations across England, providing a range of careers information, advice and guidance services. Their products and services serve to *‘encourage and support the career aspirations, and increase the life chances, of young people and adults in learning and work’*.

Although the majority of its membership comprises corporate employer organisations, Careers England, because of the nature of the sector that it serves, also includes a growing number of small/self-employed providers as Affiliates, and others with an interest in its activities as Associates. It currently has 36 Full Corporate Members, 12 Affiliates and 15 Associates.

Careers England is a company limited by guarantee. Its members appoint the Board of Directors, who are non-executives and whose role is to provide strategic direction in the planning, execution and review of the company’s affairs. The Articles currently provide for a maximum of 13 Directors. Chairman of the Board is currently Steve Stewart OBE, and the Executive Director is Paul Chubb. In 2012-13 Careers England’s turnover grew to its highest ever level, based solely on revenues from subscribing members, with the size of its membership now at a record level.

Careers England exists to *‘foster, support and encourage the promotion of the economic, social and educational benefits from the products and services which its Members provide – for individuals, for communities, for the wider employer/business world and for the economy of the country.’*

The provision of Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) has been subject to regular change over the last twenty years, with centrally driven Government policies, resulting in structural changes. The 16 founding Full Members of Careers England in 2003 – were ‘careers companies’ seeking a form of association following the full implementation of the Connexions Service in April of that year (the introduction of Connexions was phased – starting in 2001 and completing its introduction in 2003).

November 2007 marked a significant point for Careers England when its first ‘Connexions Company’ became a Full Member, followed in 2008 by three further ‘Connexions Companies’ joining the

¹ MAKING A POSITIVE IMPACT: The First Ten Years of Careers England’s History 1st April 2003 - 31st March 2013 (5th edition) published September 2013 - available on the Careers England website <http://www.careersengland.org.uk/index.php?page=history>

association as Full Members. By April 2009 the number of Full Members had risen once more to 16, of whom only 5 were founding Members – 9 of the 16 were registered as current or former ‘Connexions companies’.

Careers England has had to adapt quickly to a fast changing environment, shifting political agendas and priorities. Its growing appeal, as a trade association, is because it has been able to demonstrate its relevance, constancy and effectiveness to a *‘wide church’* of organisations. Many had been appointed by arms of Government (local and national) to deliver publicly-funded career guidance services - both for young people (principally under Connexions) and for adults; the latter under the then-styled Nextstep service with a range of other contracted services, funded by the EU, the late Learning & Skills Council, and by the Department for Work & Pensions.

In 2005-6 Careers England established two Task Groups: one to cover the 13-19 age range of beneficiaries of the services of its Members; the other to cover work with Adults. These two Task Groups have held regular meetings often with senior government officials. These meetings have not only enhanced the knowledge of Task Group members on latest policy developments in policy, but have also acted as a significant conduit ensuring that officials are made fully aware of the views of Group members as policy is being shaped.

In its 2009-10 business plan saw the establishment of the third Task Group, focused on Quality in service provision. The Board invited this Quality Task Group to commission fresh research to gather evidence on the positive impact of services provided by Members on the careers of young people and adults, and upon social mobility – that report was published by CE in the summer of 2010 (and was widely welcomed by Government and by the “careers service sector”). During 2011-12 the Careers England Quality Task Group established a project team to facilitate the ‘kite mark’ work on England’s CEIAG Quality Awards, culminating in the formation of the Quality in Careers Standard, under a Quality in Careers Consortium with Careers England hosting all QiCS materials on a new dedicated section on the CE website.

A fourth Task Group on Workforce Issues was established in 2010. These four Task Groups, involving a significant numbers of Members representatives, are a major strength in the association’s growing portfolio of activity and constitute a pool of knowledge and expertise to help ensure not only that members interests are served, but also help to shape environment in which they work.

Given the importance attached to evidence-led policy and practice, and the need to articulate an authoritative informed voice for its members and the sector, Careers England has commissioned and published an authoritative series of independent policy commentaries - on key policy developments related to the future of all-age career guidance services in England. Since 2005 the Board has published 22 Policy Commentaries, with significant inputs from one of the leading international experts on CEIAG, Professor Tony Watts, OBE.

During 2013-14, in addition to continuing to publish detailed Policy Commentaries, an occasional series of shorter Policy Briefing Notes has been introduced covering current topical issues along with the long- established regular media and public affairs monitoring service exclusively available to CE’s Full Members.

Using high quality research, robust direct advocacy, the work of the Task Groups and through collaborative partnerships, Careers England has been successful in directly influencing and helping to shape some aspects of public policy, always ensuring that members’ views are taken into account in the formulation and implementation of policy. Clearly, though, Careers England’s members believe that there remains much that is unsatisfactory about national policy for careers guidance provision, with significant challenges to be addressed.

It is evident that Careers England has become a recognised and informed, collective, authoritative professional voice for the sector. It is now the 'go to organisation' on CEIAG, realising its vision 'to be recognised as the informed corporate voice of the career guidance industry in England'.

The challenges though remain significant - not least to ensure that sound evidence of 'what works' informs both policy and practice in CEIAG. Careers England has been supportive of, and its members provide much of the backbone for, the National Careers Service (principally in provision for adults) established in 2012. The Education Act 2011, however, which has made schools directly responsible for "securing access to independent careers guidance" for their students, a policy shift not backed by empirical evidence in support, has undermined the bold, optimistic vision, articulated by the then Minister John Hayes in Belfast in November 2010 at the ICG Annual Conference of creating a 'world class all-age careers service for England'.

Careers England's submission to the House of Commons Education Select Committee 2012 review of careers guidance in schools highlighted concerns about the lack of robust quality assurance of careers guidance policies and practices amongst too many schools, and a far too laissez-faire approach by Government to measures of accountability for how schools are discharging their duty.

Careers England has made it clear on behalf of its members that CEIAG provision will be most effective in schools under these new arrangements only when three things coexist in a school:

- *The school's overall internally-provided careers education and guidance programme is quality assured against one of the dedicated Quality Awards available, which itself should meet the Quality in Careers Standard national validation - and the programme should be co-ordinated by a careers educator who adheres to professional standards as determined by the Career Development Institute (CDI).*
- *The school secures independent impartial information, advice and guidance from a matrix accredited organisation/sole-trading careers adviser.*
- *The externally secured provider of careers guidance employs professional careers advisers who are occupationally competent to professional standards – as determined by the CDI."*

Looking ahead, Careers England will continue to support all efforts to ensure that professional careers services are available to all age groups, and its concerns about deficiencies in provision for young people mean that it is committed to work towards a future in which all young people have easy access to independent, professional, face to face, high quality careers advice and guidance to ensure that they are can make informed choices.

Careers England website www.careersengland.org.uk

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Patrick Watson

Montrose Public Affairs Consultants Ltd
blog: <http://montrose42.wordpress.com>