

Personal Comments to the LEITCH REVIEW
"Skills in the UK: the long term challenge"

"THE CONTRIBUTION OF SPECIALIST CAREER GUIDANCE PROVIDERS"

From Chris Humphries, Chairman
Careers England Board of Directors
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1. Introduction

As Director General of City & Guilds I have already submitted a detailed paper ('Skills in a Global Economy', January 2006) to the Leitch review. This additional paper is offered from my role as the Chairman of the Board of Careers England. It sets out the crucial contribution of specialist career advice and guidance to the future economic and social success of the nation.

I wish to emphasise the following extracts from my earlier paper which directly underline the need for more and better resourced impartial career advice and guidance for all age groups in England:

- "Estimates by researchers and futurists suggest that each of us will have to re-skill or up-skill ourselves between 5 and 10 times during our lengthening working life, if we are to maximise our future employability. Both young people and mobile adults will therefore require access to reliable labour market information that properly identifies future employment opportunities, based upon sound data and projections, if they are to make informed choices and, as a nation, we are to minimise skills shortages" [page 12]
- "The core purpose of our tertiary education system, and particularly the further education system, should be on providing learning and skills for employment.....In fulfilling that core purpose, it is essential that the system is well informed on future employment needs and requirements. A successful market depends on informed demand, and the labour market is no different. Individuals need high quality information on labour market opportunities, change and development, in order to make informed choices; learning providers and funders need high quality labour market information in order to set priorities, allocate resources and shape provision" [page 14]

In my ten proposals on priorities to help the nation address future skills needs [set out on pages 16-22 of my paper], I wish to re-emphasise two of these from the perspective of the crucial contribution of specialist career advice and guidance providers:

- “3. Maximising youth success....employers claim that young people coming (successfully) through the academic system are less and less well prepared for the world of work, that their generic skills in communication, number and collaborative working are poor, and they have too little capacity to apply their learning to real world problems” [page 18]
- “7. Labour market information and guidance...Consumer and economic research confirms that one of the key factors in the successful operation of any market is informed demand. The labour market is no different – ensuring the availability of labour with the right skills at the right time is essential for its optimal operation, and this is fundamentally dependant upon choices made by young people and adults, and the availability of sufficient training places in the supply side.
- “...But to impact on the forward planning inside a college, or to be able to help a 17 or a 42 year old make an important learning or career choice, that data needs translating into very accessible information and communications available in their language , through their media and when they need it.
- “The UK needs a much more effective, well informed and professional careers information, advice and guidance service, supported by a national interactive website of diagnostic, information and advisory functions that makes such all-age support nationally available.
- “The technology to create such an Internet base system is now widely available and understoodThat system could then provide the key background information service to support locally-tailored and locally-based adult information advice and guidance services to offer additional guidance and counselling support where required” [page 20]

Having set the context, drawn from my perspective as Director General of the CGLI, I now wish to provide additional information on the distinctive and valuable role of specialist providers of career advice and guidance.

2. Career Advice and Guidance: Public Policy

The providers of career information, advice and guidance which form the membership of the trade association, “Careers England”, make important contributions to key outcomes for young people and adults. Promoting

achievement and economic well-being for all, irrespective of age, gender ethnicity and location will be crucial to ensure all citizens are enabled to maximise their talents and utilise these for their own, their families and the common good in 21st Century Britain.

Careers England's membership has extensive links with other national organisations (such as the Institute of Career Guidance, National Association of Connexions Partners, Association of Colleges, Association of Learning Providers and UCAS).

We have established close contact and meaningful dialogue with government departments and agencies (including LSC, DfES, DWP and learndirect).

Based upon our extensive experiences, my Board would wish the Leitch review to question why the very different approaches adopted in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales – where all-age specialist career advice and guidance services have been established – have not been mirrored in England. The increase in the voiced concerns from the CBI and other employer groups surely call for England to learn the lessons from the Celtic nations and to review the strategy of career advice and guidance service provision in England so that it is fit for purpose: enabling the nation to meet the longer term skills needs for the economic and social health of the UK.

In respect of young people, the already complete separation of support services in England for adults (aged 19+) from the horizontally structured young people's Connexions service, will potentially see increased problems of patchy coverage and post-code lottery of provision as the current 47 Connexions Services (established on boundaries coterminous with the LSC areas) go through a transition to form part of Children's Services in Local Authority Areas (under 'local area agreements') in 150 local authority areas in England as determined by "Youth Matters: next steps" (DfES 2006) by 2008.

In respect of adults, the DfES established a national Review of IAG (information, advice and guidance) support in England in 2005. It is due to report at the end of 2006. Already 10 'emerging design principles' for the future have been outlined by the IAG Review group within a DfES paper (2006). These are:

- 1. That a national, coherent and integrated career management/coaching service for adults should be available which promotes a positive, proactive approach to career management and coaching rather than a remedial one
- 2. The opportunity to make a choice about the nature, level, and type of services taken up should be central to the offer
- 3. There should be access to a standardised menu of specific activities, clearly stated and supported by a set of service standards and 'publicly-facing' quality assurance arrangements

- 4. Individuals should be encouraged to dip in and out of the menu of services at different times along a career pathway (with an outreach engagement strategy for harder-to-reach groups)
- 5. Some services will be available through self-managed activities and some supported/mediated interventions
- 6. There will be a cost for some services, with a clear indication as to when this cost may not apply (for specific groups)
- 7. A universal entitlement to an initial 'career health check' should be considered, with more specific supported entitlements for priority target groups, including those for whom guidance may be linked to benefits
- 8. There should be one public-facing brand and logo (with possible additional strap lines/service descriptors as appropriate)
- 9. A clear statement of service entitlement to users (stating where services are costed, and who is eligible for free services) should underpin the offer
- 10. Provided by an IAG workforce of competent professional, paraprofessional staff with trained volunteers, with a national, coherent career and CPD structure

I would support much of the thrust of these emerging principles, and would offer the following comments:

- Principle 1 requires acquisition of 'career management skills' by individuals, and this must begin at the statutory school stage.
- Principles 2 – 6 and 8 require assessment to be available to national quality standards (which principle 3 proposes).
- Principle 5 permits choice of service, or allocation of service, to be 'managed' by the public purse. I would suggest that lessons should be learnt from the experience in Scotland of deploying the three-level model of assessment of need: 'self-help', 'assisted' and 'in-depth'.
- Principle 8 is an essential component if the public is to be fully engaged, and evidence from Scotland and Wales supports this conclusively.
- Principle 10 will be the key to successful implementation and delivery of the service; capacity and competence are the two sides of this crucial coin.
- Principle 10 in the IAG Review for adults has highly important implications for those supporting 14-19 year olds too; all workers providing key elements of career advice and guidance must have knowledge of wider personal issues which materially impinge upon the choices people make, and they must as a pre-requisite not simply be competent but excellent in career advice and guidance skills to meet the labour market needs of the nation.

The separation of strategic direction – which uniquely in the UK sees England's career advice and guidance services for young people and for adults all too often

running not only in parallel but potentially in wasteful duplication, or even worse in isolation – as demonstrated by the above reinforces my view that an all-age review of career advice and guidance strategy is now both important and urgent.

An all-age strategy is essential. One option would be an all age service for England. Whichever future option is determined for implementation, the nation demands best value for the public purse in all publicly-funded services. The economic and social benefits which would accrue are critical for the overall success of the UK's future skills strategy. The economic role which individuals play is distinctively different from their personal or social role; their economic role is part of their public contribution to the nation's economic health.

Evidence from within the UK, and from across Europe and world-wide should urgently be assessed. Key sources to assist such a review would include:

- "Career Guidance and Public Policy: Bridging the Gap" (OECD, 2004)
- "Career Guidance: a Handbook for Policy Makers" (OECD, 2004)
- "Career guidance policies in 37 countries: contrasts and common themes" (International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance, 4(2-3),pp 105-122; 2004)

I wish to add some additional commentary to underline both the economic and social impact of specialist career advice and guidance services, and to emphasise their potential for greater impact. These are set out in the appendices to assist the Leitch review team to consider – as you determine the overall strategy to secure the skills the nation requires for future economic success and social health.

My Board is ready to provide any further information or evidence which may assist the Review team in its critical work.

Chris Humphries
Chairman
Board of Directors
Careers England
August 2006

Appendix 1 Social and economic impact

Career information, advice and guidance services secure key outcomes for individuals, communities and the economy. Properly resourced and managed, they can make a major impact with relevance to a range of key national policies including:

- raising levels of aspiration, achievement and involvement in education, training and employment
- tackling social exclusion and improving the life chances of young people and adults, especially those facing disadvantage
- improving the economic well-being of individuals and the prosperity of the country
- contributing to the raising of general levels of skills and the particular development of skills in national shortage areas
- promoting community engagement and social cohesion by the involvement of young people and adults in the planning, design, delivery and evaluation of services
- increasing motivation, through promoting engagement in purposeful activity and convincing young people and adults that opportunities exist and that by moving into education, employment or training they have a worthwhile stake in society
- participating in many wide-ranging partnerships and networks (at local, regional and national levels) supporting services for young people, adults and employers

Appendix 2

The distinctive contribution of specialist providers of career guidance services and of career guidance professionals

To assert the distinctive role of providers of careers guidance is not, as has from time to time – by some - been alleged or implied, in any way an indication of “silo thinking”. The statutory base for ‘careers service’ provision for young people is clear; it is a duty. The major question is how that duty is discharged and the effect it has upon the economic and social health of the nation.

Specialist career guidance service providers are the largest and most highly valued component within current Connexions services, either within direct delivery Connexions Partnerships, or as sub-contracted providers of Connexions services.

In respect of adults, they are also the managing agents in the majority of nextstep contract areas as well as major deliverers of publicly funded IAG for adults, and many have developed related products and services commercially.

As indicated in section 2 of my paper above, as Connexions goes through the transition up to 2008 when local area agreements will see such services commissioned through local plans for children's and young people's services, it will be crucial to ensure that quality assured specialist career guidance provision – informed by the needs of the labour market – is central to such plans in every local authority area. As the employers of specialist career guidance professionals, Careers England's members are committed to work to evolve the continuing discipline of career guidance in the context of integrated 14-19 youth support services, and contribute to the development of robust quality standards for all publicly funded IAG provision.

Specialist providers of career guidance have positively engaged with the generic aspects of the personal adviser role, and have provided a wide range of services within Connexions. They are also the most significant players, numerically, in the field of adult career guidance.

Planning for the future skills needs of the nation, a key issue will be IAG staff capacity and competence. Both Connexions and IAG for adults (through nextstep and other sources of public funding) have benefited from the previous stock of skills in the field. All indications are that clients, while approving of and valuing the generic personal adviser role in Connexions, expect and demand that those delivering career guidance services are properly equipped to fulfil the role to a high standard.

National evidence also shows that adults expect IAG service providers first and foremost to be professional, knowledgeable and friendly. Careers England will strongly seek to ensure that there is no erosion of specialist skills in career guidance. Economic and social results will be enhanced through not only the retention of such specific skills, knowledge and experience in career guidance, but their development.

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