

## Careers England Policy Commentary 13

*This is the thirteenth in an occasional 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 DCSF Strategy Document on IAG for Young People

1. The DCSF's new strategy document on IAG for young people<sup>1</sup> represents a major reaffirmation of the importance of career information, advice and guidance for young people, and of the need for current provision to be substantially strengthened. While it adheres to the Government's generic definition of IAG<sup>2</sup>, its clear focus is on IAG related to learning and work. The term 'career(s)' is used 130 times within the document.

2. **The context.** The document has clearly been written in response to the substantial criticisms that have been made in recent years of the erosion of careers education and guidance provision for young people in England (for three new examples of such criticisms, see Annex). In particular, the Secretary of State's foreword states that the strategy has been 'informed and influenced' by the recent Milburn Report on *Fair Access to the Professions*<sup>3</sup> and that its plans 'take forward the majority of the recommendations relevant to IAG' (p.5) (though cf. para.11 below). Linked to this, there are clear references to the role of IAG as 'a powerful driver of social mobility' (1.7). It is also evident that the strategy is closely linked to the raising of the participation age in learning to 18, which 'requires a step-change in the quality and consistency of IAG' (p.42).

3. **Key principles.** The six key principles of the strategy are defined (1.20) as being:

- 'Excellent, personalised and impartial careers information, advice and guidance in schools.'
- 'Support for parents to help them help their children to make the right decisions.'
- 'State-of-the-art on-line IAG resources, accessible 24/7 by young people and their parents, with links into one-to-one advice.'
- 'Lots of opportunities for young people to get a feel for different courses and careers, through taster sessions and high quality experiences – including both of HE and workplaces.'

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<sup>1</sup> Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009). *Quality, Choice and Aspiration*. London: DCSF. (<http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DCSF-00977-2009>).

<sup>2</sup> Department for Education and Skills (2005). *Youth Matters*. Cm 6629. London: Stationery Office. See Careers England Policy Commentary 4.

<sup>3</sup> Panel on Fair Access to the Professions (2009). *Unleashing Aspiration: the Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions*. London: Panel on Fair Access to the Professions.

- ‘Opportunities to build a relationship with a respected, successful adult through mentoring or shadowing, especially important for disadvantaged young people who often underestimate their own abilities and how far these can take them.’
- ‘Access to specialist local help for vulnerable young people and those with additional needs.’

4. Other important features of the strategy which are especially worthy of note include:

- The emphasis on early intervention, including careers-related learning at Key Stage 2, on which some pilots are about to start (2.18).<sup>4</sup>
- Enshrining entitlements in formal Pupil and Parent Guarantees, enabling pupils and parents ‘to challenge providers if their services fall short of what they have a reasonable right to expect’ (1.22).
- The stated ‘ambition to extend the statutory duty on schools and colleges to deliver careers education to young people up to the age of 18’ (1.21).<sup>5</sup>
- The announcement of a Task Group on the Careers Profession (see para.15 below).

5. **The role of local authorities.** The Secretary of State’s foreword states that the strategy ‘places schools and parents at the centre of IAG’ (p.5). At the same time, the document views local authorities as ‘the local strategic leaders for the provision of IAG’ (6.1), responsible for ‘ensuring that the IAG on offer to all young people in their areas enables them to fulfil their potential’ (1.21). Statutory guidance and directions for local authorities are to be published in 2010 on the management of their IAG responsibilities (6.9).

6. The reaffirmation of the role of local authorities is however combined with a threat. The document states that ‘local services are now on notice to improve and if improvements are not forthcoming we will not hesitate to take further action’. It accordingly announces that it will ‘formally review the quality and effectiveness of local authorities’ delivery of IAG in 18 months to two years’ (6.36). It concludes:

‘If Connexions is not able to deliver demonstrable improvement against a range of indicators by then I [the Secretary of State] will take further action, including devolving budgets for careers guidance from local authorities to schools and other front line providers’ (6.36).

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<sup>4</sup> This excited much of the media coverage of the strategy. The title of the news story in the *Observer* (25.10.09), for example, was: ‘Ten-year-olds to receive careers advice’.

<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, the Statutory Guidance issued alongside the strategy presents this not as an ‘ambition’ but as a ‘decision of Ministers’. See Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009). *Statutory Guidance: Impartial Careers Education*, p.9. London: DCSF. The strategy document leaves it more open, indicating that consideration needs to be given to ‘how to ensure that contracts with private training providers and employers reflect the need for careers provision and how we could implement this major reform’ (2.5).

7. **The partnership model.** The capacity of local authorities to deliver their strategic role is thus inextricably linked within the document to the future of the partnership model in terms of service delivery. It is important to note that this need not be the case. In principle, if local authorities fail to deliver, Connexions could be reorganised on a sub-regional basis (as in its early years) or on a regional basis (the structure being adopted for the new advancement and careers service for adults). But these options are not mentioned.<sup>6</sup>

8. In broad terms, the document reaffirms the partnership model. It states that ‘forthcoming resources for schools will include a “Model Partnership Agreement for schools and Connexions services”, developed with local authorities and schools and based on current good practice’ (2.16).<sup>7</sup> It also reaffirms the role of local authorities through Connexions in supporting schools and colleges ‘as they seek to raise the quality of their careers related provision’ (2.11).<sup>8</sup>

9. The report does however acknowledge the criticisms of the quality of the IAG provision delivered through Connexions that were made in particular by the Milburn Report. It modifies this by noting that ‘there is also some authoritative evidence from Ofsted that presents a more encouraging picture’ (6.34). But it recognises that ‘it seems likely ... that the quality of IAG delivered through Connexions varies quite considerably across areas’ (6.34).

10. It is worth noting that the reference here is essentially to *quality* rather than *quantity*. The IAG Guarantee includes ‘one to one advice and support from a local specialist Connexions adviser when needed’ (p.15). It is also interesting to note that the proposals for Connexions Direct include creating ‘a more seamless experience by ... immediate call transfers from helplines to local advisers’ (5.5) – presumably, Connexions advisers. But no reference is made to the huge decline that has taken place in the proportion of school-leavers who have a one-to-one interview with a Connexions adviser<sup>9</sup>, or to any policy to reverse this decline.

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<sup>6</sup> Though reference is made to the need for local authorities to work together in sub-regional groups ‘to ensure provision is coherent and reflects the pattern of young people’s travel to learn pattern, rather than administrative boundaries’. The document also states that local authorities will ‘need to come together at a regional level to ensure that plans met the economic and skills needs of the region and deliver young people’s entitlements’ (6.6).

<sup>7</sup> The basic principles of the agreement are outlined in the Statutory Guidance. See Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009). *Statutory Guidance: Impartial Careers Education*, pp.40-41. London: DCSF.

<sup>8</sup> A recent NICEC survey found that in at least five local authorities did not provided curriculum support and INSET for careers education and guidance in schools and colleges. See McGowan, A., Watts, A.G. & Andrews, D. (2009). *Local Variations: a Follow-Up Study of New Arrangements for Connexions/ Careers/IAG Services for Young People in England*, pp.14-15. Reading: CfBT Education Trust.

<sup>9</sup> See Annex, para.A2. In addition, data provided by DCSF in January 2008, drawing from the National Client Caseload Information System, indicated that only 40% of school-leavers in England now received an individual (i.e. one-to-one) intervention with a Connexions Personal Adviser, in contrast to close-to-universal provision under the former Careers Service. See Watts, A.G. (2008). The partnership model for careers education and guidance: rise, decline – and fall? *Career Research and Development*, 20, 4-8. Figures released to me by DCSF recently indicate that the parallel figure for 2008/09 was 42%.

11. It is thus concerns about quality that lead to consideration of the Milburn proposal to devolve funding to schools. The document rejects this proposal for the time being, partly on the grounds that ‘structural change at this point in time could ... de-stabilise and potentially disrupt the efforts currently being made to integrate youth provision, just as these arrangements are starting to settle down in the areas that are leading the way’ (6.35). It also points out that ‘there is some evidence to suggest that the IAG offered by some schools is not impartial, or is simply dull and ineffective’, so that ‘transferring responsibility to schools does not ... offer a straightforward guarantee of improved quality’ (6.34). As noted in a recent paper prepared for Careers England<sup>10</sup>, international evidence indicates strongly that it would be likely to be a retrograde step. Nonetheless, the document places it firmly on the table as a future possibility.

12. These issues could assume particular significance if (as currently seems likely) there is a change of government in 2010. The Conservative Party has indicated its intention to establish an all-age service (see Careers England Policy Commentary 11), though the organisational structure of the proposed service is as yet unclear. Recently, David Willetts (Shadow Minister for Universities and Skills) has indicated the importance of sound IAG for young people that is ‘independent of schools’.<sup>11</sup>

13. **IAG delivery roles.** In terms of the delivery of IAG, the core front-line role is seen as being the Personal Tutor. This is in line with the Children’s Plan<sup>12</sup> (see Careers England Policy Commentary 9). The statement in the IAG Guarantee refers to young people’s entitlement to ‘support from a Personal Tutor who knows them well and who can help them to access specialist advice and ensure any learning needs or issues are quickly addressed’ (p.15). The tutor is seen as ‘holding the ring for individual young people’ (1.21) and also as being ‘the main point of contact between a parent and the school’ (3.18).

14. One of the sources of ‘specialist advice’ which tutors can help young people to access is Connexions Careers Advisers. These are specifically referred to in the Statutory Guidance, where it is pointed out that maintained schools and academies have statutory duties<sup>13</sup>:

- ‘to give “careers advisers” (i.e. Connexions Personal Advisers with careers guidance training) relevant information on pupils’;
- ‘to give “careers advisers” access to pupils and staff for the purpose of providing careers advice and guidance’.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Watts, A.G. (2009). *The Milburn Proposals for Funding Careers Services for Young People: a Note on Relevant International Evidence*. London: Careers England.

<sup>11</sup> At a CfBT Education Trust conference held in September 2009 to launch its report *Lessons from History: Increasing the Number of 16 and 17 Year Olds in Education and Training*.

<sup>12</sup> Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007). *The Children’s Plan: Building Brighter Futures*. Cm 7280. London: Stationery Office.

<sup>13</sup> Under the Education Act 1997.

<sup>14</sup> Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009). *Statutory Guidance: Impartial Careers Education*, p.10. London: DCSF.

15. The strategy strongly reaffirms the role of careers professionals. This is a significant development: hitherto there has been considerable ambiguity in government policy statements about whether the distinctive expertise of the Careers Adviser is still recognised in relation to IAG services for young people or whether career IAG is now to be definitively subsumed within more generic roles such as Personal Adviser or generic youth support worker.<sup>15</sup> The document states unequivocally that ‘we need to ensure that there are enough well-trained careers professionals to support young people to make the right choices’. It continues:

‘We are therefore establishing a Task Force on the Careers Profession to look at what might be done by employers, the profession and the Government to: attract well-qualified people from all backgrounds to the profession; retain and motivate effective careers professionals already in the workforce; and ensure that professional practice is of a high standard and that careers professionals receive the support they need to improve’ (2.13).

The Task Force will build upon the current CWDC/LLUK review of the skills requirements of careers specialists working with young people and adults, which is to provide the basis for the development of a new qualifications and training framework for careers advisers (6.19). The Task Force will report in summer 2010.

16. There is some ambiguity here about whether the Task Force will focus exclusively on professionally trained Careers Advisers, or will be extended further to include the role of Careers Co-ordinators. The diversification of career/IAG-related roles that are emerging within schools and colleges, some of them increasingly occupied by non-teachers<sup>16</sup>, makes this an issue of some importance, but it is not explored in the document. Instead, it points out that many Careers Co-ordinators receive inadequate training and support, and indicates that:

‘We will explore with groups of schools and HE institutions how we might develop new qualifications to meet the needs of careers co-ordinators so that they are more effective in leading the careers agenda within their schools’ (2.11).

17. In addition to these roles, reference is made to the importance of ensuring that within each school or college a member of the leadership team is appointed to have responsibility for IAG (2.3). The National College for School Leadership and Children’s Services is to ‘provide guidance and run regional events on effective practice to support successful leadership of IAG within schools’ (2.6).

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Careers England Policy Commentary 12, para.7. See also Watts, A.G. & McGowan, A. (2007). *New Arrangements for Connexions/Careers Services for Young People in England*, pp.14-15. Reading: CfBT Education Trust.

<sup>16</sup> A recent survey indicates that 26% of Careers Co-ordinators are now non-teachers, and that 7% are qualified Careers Advisers. See McCrone, T., Marshall, H., White, K., Reed, F., Morris, M., Andrews, D. & Barnes, A. (2009). *Careers Coordinators in Schools*, p.62. RR171. London: Department for Children, Schools and Families.

18. Such leadership is particularly important because all teachers will effectively be expected to be involved in delivering career IAG both as Personal Tutors and in their role as subject teachers. In relation to the latter, the notion is that ‘subject specialist teachers should be able to relate their subjects to future learning pathways and the world of work and give advice about progression in those subjects’ (2.8). Guidance and resources will be developed to support them in this respect (2.10). In addition, Initial Teacher Training (ITT) programmes should equip new teachers to understand, and be able to provide information and advice about, the full range of 14-19 learning pathways (2.14).

19. **Careers education.** On delivery of careers education, the document says relatively little apart from including in the IAG Guarantee an entitlement to ‘high quality programmes of careers education which help young people to plan and manage their own careers’ (p.15). Reference is made to the development of resource materials to make it easier for “non-expert” careers education teachers’ to play a part in such programmes (2.11).<sup>17</sup>

20. Considerable emphasis is however placed on ‘practical, hands-on experience of options’ (1.19). The document promises ‘a new vision for work experience’ including a review of the existing DCSF standard (4.23) and consultation on whether to make it a mandatory requirement (4.24). It also suggests that a single placement is not sufficient and that young people should have an opportunity to ‘experience at first hand a range of careers’ (4.1), post-16 as well as pre-16 (4.23, 4.24). But it stops short of specifying this within the IAG Guarantee, confining its experiential entitlement to ‘a programme of work related learning (in Years 10 and 11), giving young people direct insights into the world of work’ (p.15). On higher education, the stated ambition is that ‘every young person should have an experience of HE during their time at school’ (4.30), though again this is not written into the IAG Guarantee.

21. **Other use of community resources.** In addition, the document recommends a substantial expansion of mentoring. It is acknowledged that this is particularly important for disadvantaged young people (1.20), but the stated ambition is that ‘every young person should have access to a mentor’ (p.5). A number of initiatives are announced, including an on-line mentoring resource (4.6), £10m funding to support mentoring and related initiatives (4.8), and research into good practice (4.7).

22. To support employer engagement in relation to work experience, mentoring and other initiatives, an expert group of the new Education and Employers Taskforce is to review the role of employers in the delivery of the strategy and to identify best practice in employers supporting IAG (4.14). There is also encouragement for each school and college’s Governing Body to ‘have a lead Governor on IAG and employer engagement, preferably one from the business community’ (2.3).

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<sup>17</sup> The Statutory Guidance leans strongly towards specialist teachers of PSHE, including careers education. See Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009). *Statutory Guidance: Impartial Careers Education*, p.36. London: DCSF.

23. **Use of ICT.** Much emphasis is placed on ‘modernising’ IAG provision through extending the use of ICT, especially through Connexions Direct. This is linked to the recognition that ‘young people today want and expect to secure IAG from a range of sources beyond formal careers advice’, and want in particular to ‘access information on-line, and to make use of new interactive technologies’ (1.18).<sup>18</sup> Examples of proposed innovations include supporting the development of:

- On-line, virtual work tasters to give young people insight into career options, focused on the professions (5.5).
- On-line moderated chat rooms, to provide moderated discussion forums on relevant issues (5.9).
- Message boards where people can post views and seek opinions (5.9).
- Web-cam facilities for face-to-face discussions with an adviser (5.9).

24. **Involving young people.** ICT is an area where particular attention is to be given to involving young people to steer service design and delivery, through the existing on-line young people’s advisory panel (5.11). More generally, the document asserts that ‘involving young people in the design, delivery and review of IAG services helps to ensure that what is provided really meets their needs’. It states that ‘the good practice that is already going on in some localities needs to become common practice everywhere’ (6.16).

25. **All-age strategy.** The document repeats the Government’s resistance to the concept of an all-age service (as advocated by the Conservative Party – see para.12 above), but its commitment to an all-age strategy designed to produce ‘more joined-up services for young people and adults’ (p.46). In addition to the flexible arrangements for 18/19-year-olds already announced in the adult service prospectus<sup>19</sup>, it announces that the Government – ‘building on international experience’<sup>20</sup> – has ‘commissioned proposals on how we might adopt a “careers blueprint” model for primary, secondary, post-16 and adult learning in this country’, defining the sought outcomes from careers programmes, and thus encouraging ‘a shared understanding and stronger partnerships for lifelong learning’ (6.24).

26. This ‘blueprint’ could prove particularly useful in providing a lifelong conceptual framework for a future all-age service if there is a change of government. Intriguingly, reference is also made in the document to the potential synergy between adults seeking help for themselves and for their children (3.12), which is one of the rationales for an all-age service.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Reference is made here to the BYC/NYB/Young NYB survey (see Annex, para.A3).

<sup>19</sup> See Careers England Policy Commentary 12, para.7.

<sup>20</sup> The Canadian Blueprint for Lifework Designs was based on a model originally developed in the USA. It has subsequently been adapted for use in Australia, in the form of the Australian Blueprint for Career Development (ABCD).

<sup>21</sup> Careers England (2007). *An All-Age Strategy for Career Guidance Services in England*, para.11. London: Careers England.

27. **Accountability.** The document seeks to ensure accountability on the delivery of the strategy through a number of means, including:

- Introducing ‘clear routes of redress for parents where complaints about failures in delivering the Guarantees have not been properly addressed at the local level’ (2.19).
- Strengthening the focus on IAG in the newly revised Ofsted inspection schedule (2.19).
- Providing materials ‘to help schools canvass parents’ views effectively but in a simple and non-burdensome way, as part of their regular reviews of careers provision’ (3.16), and consulting on the inclusion of this information in the new School Report Card (2.19).

28. **Conclusions.** The document outlines a powerful agenda for change. It strongly reaffirms the importance of careers education and guidance, and of the distinctive expertise of careers professionals. It also seeks to harness a wider range of learning and support resources both inside and outside schools and colleges in support of young people’s career learning and career decisions. It supports the partnership model which has been widely regarded as one of the strengths of the UK’s career guidance system.

29. On the other hand, the strategy seems unlikely to make good the erosion of the partnership model that has taken place since the Labour Government came to power in 1997. There is an overt threat that the model might in a couple of years’ time be abandoned altogether.

30. There is a long and impressive list of further action points, some but not all of which have been mentioned in this Policy Commentary (including action on the extension of the statutory duty on careers education to 18, on which Careers England has lobbied strongly). There must however be concerns about whether the level of resources and the levers for accountability will be sufficient to induce the changes which the strategy outlines.

31. If there is to be a change of government in 2010, the strategy can be viewed as a late attempt to revive and re-energise an area of public provision for young people which the Labour Government has neglected. But better late than never.

Tony Watts  
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## Annex: Other Recent Relevant Reports

A1. Three pertinent documents have been published immediately preceding the publication of the strategy document.

A2. A report prepared for the Sutton Trust by the Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring at Durham University<sup>22</sup> provides time-series data from the YELLIS database (which in general has been found to present a reliable national picture on a wide range of variables). These indicate that between 1997 and 2008:

- The proportion of students in Years 10-11 who said they had had a formal Career Action Plan meeting with a careers adviser or teacher declined from 85% to 55%.
- The proportion who said they had learned ‘some’ or ‘a lot’ from careers advisers/teachers declined from 49% to 25%.

The report also showed a decline in a range of other indicators relating to provision of careers education and guidance in schools, including the extent of work experience and work visits; the only area where there had been an increase was university visits. In general, the data demonstrated a marked reduction in the impact of formal sources of information (e.g. careers advisers/teachers) and a move towards more dependence on informal sources (e.g. family and friends). The report noted that ‘disadvantaged students must be further disadvantaged by this’ (p.4).

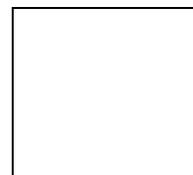
A3. A BYC/NCB/Young NYB report<sup>23</sup>, based on an online survey of over 500 young people aged 12-26, reaffirmed the influence of family and friends, and also of classroom teachers; and also indicated the growing influence of job and careers websites (which were rated second only to parents in terms of the extent of their influence). But when asked about formal careers advice received at school, college, university and through Connexions, 27% indicated that they had not yet used the formal services; of those who had, only 19.8% had found them ‘very helpful’; the remaining 80.2% had found them to be ‘a little bit’ or ‘not at all’ helpful.<sup>24</sup> The proportion who said they had found them ‘very helpful’ was low in all sectors: 17.8% for schools, 20.6% for Connexions, 21.4% for universities, and 24.5% for colleges. The report concluded that ‘shifting the location of services would not be money well spent’ and that ‘more investigation is required about how, when and from whom young people obtain advice, as well as into the implications for public investment and the design of careers advice and guidance’ (p.3).

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<sup>22</sup> Wiggins, A. & Coe, R. (2009). Careers guidance and participation in education – findings from the YELLIS database. London: Sutton Trust.

<sup>23</sup> British Youth Council, National Children’s Bureau & Young NYB (2009). *Young People’s Views on Finding Out about Jobs and Careers*. London: NCB.  
([http://www.byc.org.uk/asset\\_store/documents/careers\\_advice\\_and\\_guidance\\_final\\_151009.pdf](http://www.byc.org.uk/asset_store/documents/careers_advice_and_guidance_final_151009.pdf)).

<sup>24</sup> It is important to note, however, that the questionnaire only permitted these three options: there was no category between ‘very helpful’ and ‘a little bit helpful’. Also, inspection of the raw data reveals that the percentage responding ‘a little bit helpful’ was 52.1%, and the proportion responding ‘not at all helpful’ only 28.1%. In both of these respects, the way the data were reported was slanted to seem more critical of careers services than in fact they were.



A4. A recent report from the UK Commission for Employment and Skills<sup>25</sup> states that ‘every employer organisation and every trade union in the UK is now calling for a fundamental transformation of careers information advice and support’. It notes that ‘the quality, organisation and breadth of provision does vary significantly across the UK’, and that ‘employer groups are most critical of current provision in England’. While these statements cover adults as well as young people, the report recommends in particular that there should be ‘better links between external careers support and careers teachers in schools’, including ensuring that ‘every young person in secondary education has genuine opportunities to receive impartial and comprehensive careers advice as required’ (p.17).

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<sup>25</sup> UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2009). *Towards Ambition 2020: Skills, Jobs, Growth*. London: UKCES.