

## Careers England Policy Commentary 2

*This is the second in a short series of briefing notes on key policy documents related to the future of career guidance services in England that are being issued by the Government in February-April 2005. The notes are being prepared for Careers England by Professor Tony Watts. They will culminate in an overall commentary covering the full set of documents.*

### White Paper on Skills

1. The White Paper *Skills: Getting On in Business, Getting On at Work* (Cm 6483) elaborates the Government's Skills Strategy, set out in an earlier White Paper published in 2003<sup>1</sup>. In particular, it seeks to extend the focus of skills policy beyond Level 2 qualifications, to include more attention to Level 3 and beyond. Alongside the recent 14-19 White Paper (see Policy Commentary 1), it is viewed as providing 'a comprehensive and coherent business plan' for delivering the Skills Strategy (part 1, page 4).
2. The paper contains a stronger section on information and guidance than might have been anticipated in the light of the recent IAG policy framework<sup>2</sup>. In particular:
  - It rehabilitates the word 'guidance', which was conspicuously absent from the IAG policy framework document (where the main terms used were 'information' and 'advice'). The term used most commonly in the White Paper is 'information and guidance', and explicitly embraces the notion of a 'conversation with a trained advisor' (see para.9 below).
  - Information and guidance is linked not only to skill development but also to career progression.
  - There is much less emphasis on rationing access to guidance services by qualification level, and greater stress on universal access.
  - There is a stated wish to achieve a significant scaling-up of the levels of usage of guidance services, with a stronger marketing approach, linked to Ufi's Learndirect and online services.
  - There is a recognition that, in order to expand the services, a combination of free and charged services is needed.
3. The paper is in three parts: an overview (part 1), a more detailed and technical explanation of the main components of the strategy (part 2), and a technical annex (part 3). The main details of the strategy for information and guidance services are outlined in part 1 paras.71-75, and elaborated in part 2 paras.163-173. A number of other references are scattered through the paper.

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<sup>1</sup> Department for Education and Skills (2003). *21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills - Realising Our Potential: Individuals, Employers, Nation*. London: The Stationery Office.

<sup>2</sup> Department for Education and Skills (2003). *Information, Advice and Guidance for Adults: the National Policy Framework and Action Plan*. London: DiES.

4. Within the overview in part 1, attention to information and guidance is housed within a section on adult learners, concerned with developing ‘a clearer, more supportive national framework within which adults can pursue their own aspirations’. As part of this:

‘information and guidance must be available for all adults who want it, to help them make sense of what is on offer, and the best way of linking skills, training and jobs’ (part 1 paras.51-52).

The relevant sub-section is headed: ‘Opportunities for all: helping individuals to help themselves’. This term is repeated in the title of the relevant chapter of part 2 (chapter 4). While the emphasis on the role of information and guidance in ‘moving from welfare to work’ and ‘moving out of the low-skill, low-pay trap’ remains strong (e.g. part 1 para.13), this is persistently set in the context of universal access.

5. Furthermore, information and guidance are clearly linked not only to skill development but also to career progression. Thus in the overarching framework for the White Paper, the information and guidance element is described as:

‘Better information and guidance for adults on career choices, skills requirements, and training options, to help people identify how they can achieve their ambitions to progress in their careers and gain a better quality of life’ (part 2 page 27).

6. On the existing information and guidance infrastructure, reference is made to the fact that:

‘The Ufi Learndirect helpline and website is now integrated with the local partnerships that offer face-to-face information and advice centres in each area, all managed through the LSC’ (part 1 para.73).

Other identified elements of the existing infrastructure include the Worktrain website, Ufi’s 1,500 learner centres, and the 6,000 UK online centres (ibid).

7. In this context, the key aim set out in the White Paper is:

‘... to achieve a step change in using this infrastructure so that we fully exploit its potential to help many more adults’ (part 1 para.74).

The ‘long-term ambition’ is:

‘... that everyone should be able to get help if and when they want it to take stock of where they are in their lives and their careers; to review where they would like to get to; and assess what steps they can take to get there’ (part 2 para.165).

8. It is recognised that some of this can be done through self-assessment or through use of informal sources and community groups. But:

‘... some of it demands high-quality, expert guidance, meeting each individual’s needs’ (part 2 para.165).

Such ‘personal, high-quality support’ should:

‘... be available face-to-face, on-line or by telephone, depending on the individual’s needs and preferences. This would involve a combination of free and charged services, well-marketed as the best source of impartial guidance which can help individuals, and linking independent guidance services with those provided by colleges, universities and training providers’ (part 1 para.74).

9. No specification is provided of where the dividing line would lie between free and charged services, in terms either of type of client or type of service. There is however a new, if crudely framed, statement of entitlement:

‘For the first time, any adult would be able to have one conversation with a trained advisor about local job opportunities, related skill requirement, access to training, and forms of financial support’ (part 1 para.74).

10. As a first step in this direction, two initiatives are mentioned:

- The new Skills Coaching service for low-skilled benefit claimants, as part of New Deal for Skills (see part 2 paras.171 and 183ff).
- Extending Ufi Learndirect’s call centre service, on a trial basis (starting in Spring 2006), to offer more intensive, personal guidance, particularly addressed to those aiming at Level 3 qualifications and those returning from career breaks (see part 2 para.172).

11. The emphasis placed, here and elsewhere, on the role of Ufi Learndirect’s service can be interpreted in two different ways:

- That the expansion of service *delivery* is to be chiefly through the call centre and web-based services rather than through face-to-face services.
- That Ufi Learndirect is viewed not only as a delivery vehicle in its own right but also as the primary means of *marketing* a much wider range of provision, including face-to-face services, and charged as well as free services.

12. In the section on marketing and promotion, the White Paper promises to:

‘... bring a new coherence to the way in which training and skills are promoted’ (part 2 para.295).

As part of this:

‘We will ... with LSC and Ufi Learndirect, develop a nationally-recognised brand for the reformed adult information and guidance service ...’ (part 2 para.295).

It is unclear whether this is to be based on reaffirming the existing ‘next steps’ branding or to involve some more substantial new initiative.

13. The notion of using Ufi Learndirect to market a much wider range of provision, if this is what is intended, raises the issue of how this wider range of provision is to be quality-assured. Reference is made to two quality-assurance mechanisms:

- ‘1,200 public and private sector organisations have achieved accreditation against the “matrix” standard for high-quality information and advice services’ (part 2 para.167).
- ‘The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) has completed a first review of information and advice services. From January 2006, regular inspections will provide a clearer picture of quality and good practice’ (part 2 para.167).

The paper attaches particular importance to the former, though somewhat confusingly (in the context of expansion of free and charged services) does so more in the context of ‘embedded’ services than of market-based provision:

‘We want to see the “matrix” standard, which sets out criteria for the quality of services provided by professional guidance staff, applied more widely, including to college careers guidance units’ (part 2 para.173).

14. The paper announces that a review is to be established to determine how best to achieve the ‘eventual goal’ of universal access. This is to be undertaken jointly by DfES, DWP, DTI, LSC, Ufi Learndirect, Jobcentre Plus and the SSDA, and is to develop a business plan by the end of September 2005. It:

‘... will identify which databases and information sources are most relevant to the intended guidance service, and how they are best linked; the number and type of staff that would be needed; the potential role of face-to-face guidance services, where they are best located, and how they are best managed; and the scope for charged as well as free services’ (part 2 para.170).

No prior commitment is given on funding:

‘The funding requirements would be pursued as part of the normal spending review process’ (part 2 para.170).

15. The focus of the White Paper is on adults. It does however state, in the context of barriers to economic and social mobility, that:

‘Better information and guidance to overcome those barriers is one of the cross-cutting themes of our reforms for young people and adults’ (part 1 para.72).

More specifically, it comments that:

‘These independent information and guidance services [for adults] need to link closely to careers guidance services for young people and adult students enrolled in schools, colleges and universities’ (part 2 para.173).

There is though no mention of Connexions, and no indication of whether the services for young people are to include independent as well as ‘embedded’ services. The main reference to young people is to the 14-19 White Paper:

‘The 14-19 White Paper sets out the Government’s proposals for the principles that will underlie the quality of advice for young people’ (part 2 para.166).

No reference is made to the Youth Green Paper, or to how the issues left open in the 14-19 White Paper (see Policy Commentary 1, paras.9-10) are to be resolved.

16. Finally, it is worth noting that the White Paper gives no encouragement to the feedback role of guidance: collecting information about learners’ unmet needs and feeding it back to learning providers<sup>3</sup>. The notions of ensuring ‘a much more demand-led approach to training, driven directly by customer needs’ (part 1 para.23), and of establishing brokerage arrangements for this purpose, are discussed exclusively in terms of employer needs (see especially part 2 chapter 1). No linkages seem to be envisaged between these brokerage arrangements and information/guidance services for individuals, other than some limited sharing of information about skills and jobs (part 2 para.174).

17. Although the report is a White Paper, the Government welcomes further comments and views. A form is provided (part 2 pages 81-82). The closing date is Friday 24 June.

30.3.05

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<sup>3</sup> See Hawthorn, R. & Watts, A.G. (2004). Guidance workers as learning brokers. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 6(3), 4-14.