

Careers England Policy Commentary 9

This is the ninth in a 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.

DCSF White Paper: The Children's Plan

1. *Summary:*

- National policy on the provision of information, advice and guidance (IAG) services is now based on outcomes, not inputs.
- This is likely to lead to increasing diversity of provision across areas.
- Impartiality is now seen as being secured not by schools students' access to a professional external service, but by 14-19 partnerships and by the content of careers education and information provision.
- Access to individual guidance appears to be largely linked to an extended role for tutors.
- While the role of specialists is recognised, it is as yet unclear which specialists are to be recognised, and whether these will include Careers Advisers or Personal Advisers.
- In the light of the above, the future of the partnership model as the national basis for the delivery of careers education and guidance in schools and colleges is in question.
- If further weakening of the partnership model is to be avoided, the role of the Careers Adviser needs to be reaffirmed within the forthcoming Children's Workforce Development Plan, and stronger use needs to be made of the powers of the Secretary of State to specify the services to be provided.

2. *Focus of the paper.* The White Paper¹ is issued by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). Its aim is to bring together education, health and other services for children and young people into a more integrated structure, linked to an extended role for schools.

3. *Definition of IAG.* The paper strongly affirms the importance of information, advice and guidance (IAG). This was emphasised by:

- The 14-19 Expert Group, which 'recommended a focus on supporting young people through transitions' and emphasised 'the need for sources of, and access to, IAG being seamless across the whole age range' (5.14).

¹ Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007). *The Children's Plan: Building Brighter Futures*. Cm 7280. London: Stationery Office.

- The Time to Talk consultation where one in four young people mentioned education services as their best experience of support, both academic and emotional (5.14)

The paper also refers to the importance of helping young people ‘to understand their options and to make informed decisions, especially as we increase the range of learning options available to young people’. It adds:

‘It will become even more important after we have raised the participation age as we know that learners who receive good quality IAG are less likely to drop out of learning or change course after they turn 16’ (5.15).

4. While IAG is thus placed mainly within the context of learning and of emotional support, the definition provided does explicitly encompass career development:

‘IAG is an umbrella term that covers a range of activities that help young people to become more self-reliant and better equipped to manage their own learning and personal and career development’ (5.16).

5. *Responsibility*. The main leadership responsibility for delivery of the Children’s Plan, and therefore of IAG within it, is seen as resting with local authorities. It is they who are viewed as ‘leading the system’:

‘Local authorities are uniquely placed to champion the needs of local communities, to take a strategic view across a range of services and to prioritise spending where it will have the biggest impact’ (Box 7.3).

6. At the same time, there is recognition that residual responsibility lies with central government:

‘Individual local authorities must build and sustain the effective partnership arrangements necessary to drive improvements in children’s outcomes. Where this is not happening, there is a clear role for central government to help ensure that they do’ (7.25).

In particular:

‘If a greater degree of consistent high quality is needed, we will examine whether Children’s Trust arrangements need to be strengthened, including by further legislation’ (7.23).

7. *Outcomes-focused approach*. The basis for surveillance is however to be not inputs but outcomes – in particular, ‘achieving measurable improvements in the lives of children across all five Every Child Matters outcomes’:

‘We will use the new national Indicator Set, the NHS Outcomes Framework, Local Area Agreements and Comprehensive Area Assessments to provide sharper accountability for progress. Where performance falls short we will intervene quickly and work to identify areas for improvement’ (7.20).

8. In relation to IAG, the outcomes-focused approach is strongly reflected in the recent *Good Practice Guide to Commissioning Connexions*.² In this Guide, local authorities are encouraged to:

‘Adopt an outcome focused approach, specifying the outcomes required for young people. This approach generally means having a short specification with relatively few prescriptive requirements, and inviting bidders to respond with their proposals about how the service will be delivered to achieve those outcomes (i.e. the service outputs). This will allow for innovation and creativity from bidders in planning their pattern of services.’

9. This outcomes-focused approach makes it likely that very different models will develop in different areas. It accordingly potentially risks further erosion of the principle (still prevalent elsewhere in the UK) of careers education and guidance for young people being based on a partnership between schools/colleges and an external service. This may remain the case in some areas, but not in others.

10. This risk is exacerbated by a clear shift in the basis for assuring the impartiality of career guidance provision. In the 1997 Education Act such impartiality was viewed as being assured by access to an external careers adviser based outside the institution.³ No direct reference is made to this in the Children’s Plan.⁴ Instead, impartiality is now seen as being assured by:

- 14-19 partnerships, which will be expected to take responsibility for inter-institutional agreements for the impartiality of IAG provision.
- The content of careers education programmes.

² <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/files/GoodPracticeGuideCommConnex.pdf>

³ This provision, embodied in section 44 of Part 7 of the 1997 Act, remains on the Statute Book: the Education and Skills Bill (see Annex to this Commentary) contains no provision to amend or repeal it. But the Act provides for the rights of Careers Advisers where they exist (as they did, in all areas, when the Act was passed): it does not mandate their existence. Similarly, the Employment and Training Act 1973 – which continues, as amended by the Trade Union and Employment Rights Act 1993, to provide the statutory basis for careers services for young people – requires the Secretary of State to provide such services, without specifying what they should comprise.

⁴ This does not mean that it is not seen as having a role to play. But its omission indicates that (a) it is no longer seen as the main means of assuring access to impartial advice, and (b) impartiality is no longer seen as the key rationale for an external service. It is significant in this respect to note that only 40% of young people in England now receive an individual (i.e. one-to-one) intervention with a Connexions Personal Adviser (data provided by DCSF, drawing from the National Client Caseload Information System). Since the budget for IAG is to be reduced in real-money terms over the next three years (even if local authorities use their full allocation, which they may not), this seems more likely to decrease further than to increase.

- Information provision, notably 14-19 area prospectuses.

While these are all welcome within their own terms, it is regrettable that they appear to be seen as potential substitutes for, rather than reinforcements of, access to external career guidance. Each of them will now be examined in turn.

11. *The key role of 14-19 partnerships.* The 14-19 partnerships are viewed as ‘one of the most significant reshaping of the education systems of recent years’ (7.11). They are given a key role in relation to IAG provision:

‘The partnership will provide the forum in which schools, colleges and other providers can agree how between them, they will ensure that all learners within their institutions... receive impartial advice and guidance, including the opportunity to understand the courses and other provision which is available at other institutions in their area... The 14-19 partnership is convened by the local authority and will include the local authority’s provider of Connexions services. Schools and colleges should agree through the partnership how the independent service they provide will be used to supplement what is available within the school – and can be used to inform and support the staff delivering guidance on careers and future learning opportunities’ (5.17).

This leaves open the nature of the ‘independent service’. In principle, it could be confined to a quality-assurance and support-services role rather than a service-delivery role.⁵

12. The Gateway process, supported by the new quality standards⁶, is seen as playing an important role in assuring the quality and impartiality of the IAG offered within the 14-19 partnerships and in addressing the deficiencies of current provision (‘at present, the quality of IAG falls short of what young people need’):

‘The 14-19 consortia that will be delivering Diplomas in 2008 have had to pass through a rigorous process in order to ensure they will deliver high quality, comprehensive and impartial information, advice and guidance. In future, there will be an annual report back from the Diploma Gateway process summarising the progress made in establishing effective provision’ (5.18).

13. It is important in this respect to note that the 14-19 partnerships still have patchy coverage across the country, that they are uneven in quality, that their future is highly dependent on the success of the new Diplomas (which is by no means assured), and that there remain significant tensions between the emphasis on partnership and the persistent policy adherence to league tables based on institutional performance.

⁵ As indicated by three Connexions Chief Executives in a recent NICEC survey. See Watts, A.G. & McGowan, A. (2006). *New Arrangements for Connexions/Careers Services for Young People in England*, pp.23-24. Reading: CfBT Education Trust.

⁶ Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007). *Quality Standards for Young People’s Information, Advice and Guidance*. London: DCSF.
http://www.cegnet.co.uk/files/CEGNET0001/ManagingCEG/QualityStandardsforIAG/quality_standards_young_people.pdf

14. *Careers education programmes.* The content of careers education programmes is also seen as important in assuring impartiality:

‘To drive up the quality of careers education in schools, the Education and Skills Bill will require schools to provide impartial information and advice on learning and careers options. We will help schools by developing guidance for the new personal, social, health and economic curriculum’ (5.20).

This aspect of the Bill is discussed further in para.A7 of the Annex to this Commentary.

15. *Area prospectuses.* Finally, impartiality is seen as being secured by information provision (also mentioned in the Bill – see para.A7), and particularly by area prospectuses:

‘Another important source of information for young people about learning opportunities is 14-19 area prospectuses. These allow young people, supported by their parents or a trusted adult, to make informed choices about where and how they would like to undertake their learning’ (5.21).

16. *The role of tutors.* In terms of access to individual guidance, a central position is given to the role of tutors. A key feature of the Children’s Plan is ‘personal support for every pupil’:

‘The Teaching and Learning in 2020 Review Group recommended that all secondary school pupils should have at least one person in school who knows them in the round – a personal tutor – both about their academic progress across all subjects, and their personal development – in the same way that a primary school teacher would for children in his or her class.

‘To support our Children’s Plan vision, we want every secondary school pupil to have access to a single member of staff to play this role. The personal tutor will be familiar with each pupil’s progress across all of their subject areas, agree learning targets across the curriculum, help children make subject choices, support them through transitions between stages of learning, and identify children’s barriers to success beyond the classroom. The personal tutor will also have a key role in communicating with parents to report on their child’s progress and discuss the support they need at home and at school’ (3.74-3.75).

17. The tutor is also viewed explicitly as having a role in relation to career development:

‘They will work with young people to identify their long-term aspirations and guide them on the best choice of subjects at age 14 and 16. As we roll out personal tutors, we will test how they can help young people to find out more

about activities available through extended schools and to look to future education, training and careers choices' (5.19).

18. This emphasis on the role of tutors is somewhat ironic. When Connexions was set up, it was pointed out that, for students in schools and colleges, the job description attached by the Social Exclusion Unit's *Bridging the Gap* report to the role of the Personal Tutor – 'to provide a single point of contact for each young person and ensure that someone has an overview of each person's ambitions and needs' – was met more credibly by tutors than by Personal Advisers with caseloads of several hundred. But because the design of Connexions was based on a report addressing the needs of young people who had dropped out of school or college, virtually no attention was paid to pastoral-care structures within such institutions. Had it been, the model of delivery could have been based on tutors playing broadly similar roles to Personal Advisers for young people who had dropped out, with both groups referring individual young people to professional Careers Advisers where such specialist help was needed. Instead, however, the role of Careers Adviser was subsumed within the role of Personal Adviser, with resulting confusion and loss of professional identity.⁷

19. *The role of specialists.* It is significant to note in this respect that the Children's Plan at no point refers to professional Careers Advisers. Indeed, it does not refer to Personal Advisers either. The relevant statement is very general in nature:

'The 21st century school can only fulfil its potential if it can rely on other, often specialist, services for children being there when needed – including health (for example mental health and speech and language therapy), early years and childcare, behaviour, youth, and crime prevention services' (Box 7.1).

20. Certainly the report recognises the role of specialists:

'These services need to be delivered by skilled and motivated staff, who achieve excellence in their specialism and work to a shared ambition for the success of every child' (7.5).

'... we need to ensure that the children's workforce unites around a common purpose, language and identity, while keeping the strong and distinctive professional ethos of different practitioners in the workforce' (7.37).

21. It also, however, states that for the parents, children and young people using services, 'professional boundaries can appear arbitrary and frustrating' (7.1). At times, therefore, it talks about *integration* of services. But at other times, it talks about *co-location* – 'locating services under one roof in the places people visit frequently' – and about inter-professional *collaboration* based on teamwork – 'building capacity to work across professional boundaries' (7.1): both of which acknowledge the continuation of separate specialisms.

⁷ See Watts, A.G. (2001). Career guidance and social exclusion: a cautionary tale. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 29(2), 157-176.

22. This raises, though, the issue of *which* specialisms are to be recognised. The recent NICEC survey of Connexions services⁸ suggested that, in a careers/Connexions context, professional specialism could in principle be recognised at one or more of at least four ascending levels of specificity:

- Generic Youth Support Worker (presumably the goal of a fully integrated youth support service).
- Connexions Personal Adviser (PA) (the core professional role within Connexions).
- Careers Adviser (the core professional role within the former Careers Service, and sometimes maintained within Connexions under an alias like ‘Careers PA’ or ‘Universal PA’).
- Careers Adviser with particular expertise in, for example, higher education entry (as ‘older leaver specialist’ – a common specialist role within the former Careers Service), or in work with young people with special educational needs (SEN) or learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD).

The simple reference to ‘youth’ in the statement from the White Paper quoted in para.19 above could be read as leaning towards the first of these options. Alternatively, however, it could be read as leaving the door open to any of the others.⁹

23. In principle, it would seem open to each local authority to adopt its own position on these matters. On the other hand, they seem likely to be significantly influenced by the forthcoming Children’s Workforce Development Plan, to be published in early 2008, which will ‘set out in more detail our vision of integrated working, identifying the key workforce roles and our expectations of them’ (7.39). It is to be published alongside a National Professional Development Framework for Leaders and Managers of Children’s Services, which will ‘provide a basis for the professional development of leaders across all Children’s Trust Partners’ (7.46).

24. Linked to this, the role of the Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC) is strongly reaffirmed and indeed extended:

‘We will explore the scope for bringing within the remit of the Children’s Workforce Development Council some groups that are currently supported by other sector skills councils to reinforce the concept of a single workforce’ (7.36).

The relationship of CWDC to Lifelong Learning UK (which has the remit for career guidance of adults in England, and for all-age career guidance elsewhere in the UK) is likely to be crucial in this respect. Without such a relationship:

⁸ Watts, A.G. & McGowan, A. (2006). *New Arrangements for Connexions/Careers Services for Young People in England*, p.14. Reading: CfBT Education Trust.

⁹ The Explanatory Notes to the Education and Skills Bill (see Annex) refer to the Secretary of State’s powers under the Bill to ‘specify standards’ relating to, ‘for example, the minimum qualifications of Connexions personal advisers’ (para.59).

- The capability of Lifelong Learning UK to develop a strong professional structure for career guidance across the UK is likely to be severely impaired (the youth sector in England is much the largest guidance sector in the UK).
- There is less likelihood that CWDC will attend to the distinctive professionalism of Career Advisers.

25. *An all-age approach.* The White Paper does not refer explicitly to the need for an all-age strategy acknowledged by Ministers.¹⁰ It does however mention the need for ‘coherence’, and announces a forthcoming statement on this:

‘We will set out our plans for improving links between services for young people and for adults in early 2008’ (5.22).

26. In relation to some of the issues that might comprise an all-age strategy – e.g. branding and quality standards – current policies seem likely to constrain severely the level of strategic integration that might be possible. Initial training and continuing professional development, however, represent one of the few important issues on which significant progress *could* be made. Much hangs on whether such progress *is* made.

27. *Other matters.* Three other matters mentioned in the paper are worth noting. The first is the focus on taster experiences and peer advice:

‘Young people particularly value support and advice from other young people and opportunities to experience the options available to them – including “taster” provision, which enables young people to experience the sorts of activity they would do on different learning programmes. We will expect these forms of guidance – peer advice and mentoring, and opportunities for tasters and other “experiential learning” to be available to young people across the country’ (5.16).

While welcome within their own terms, there are grounds for anxiety about whether these are seen as substitutes for individual career guidance rather than as complements to it.

28. The second is an announcement about careers education in primary schools:

‘We will... fund a project to explore the impact of early career interventions at Key Stage 2 in extending horizons and raising aspirations’ (5.20)

This is in line with the emphasis on early intervention elsewhere in the Children’s Plan.

29. Third, career guidance receives a specific mention in relation to encouraging more young people to develop higher-level science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills:

¹⁰ See Careers England (2007). *Career Guidance Services: Prerequisites for a Coherent All-Age Strategy for England*, especially paras.1.5-1.6. London: Careers England.

‘We are investing in a range of measures to encourage more young people to continue to study STEM subjects beyond 16, including a major communications and careers guidance campaign. This will help raise awareness of the range of career opportunities to which studying STEM subjects can lead’ (5.56).

While the reference to career guidance here is welcome, and there are certainly contributions it can make, there are also tensions between impartial guidance and marketing of particular opportunities. The looseness of the reference here is of some concern, especially in the light of the general treatment of career guidance within the paper.

30. *Conclusion.* The position of career guidance services for young people following the White Paper appears to be at a crossroads. It seems that current policies permit local authorities to maintain careers education and guidance provision broadly on the model delivered under Connexions, or to move in one of two very different alternative directions:

- Towards a strengthened partnership model, with all school students having access to a professional Careers Adviser based outside the school (as is the case elsewhere in the UK).
- Towards a totally school-based service-delivery model, with very limited support from an external service. The school-based service could range from one which includes access to a school-based professional careers adviser, to a structure under which – at the other extreme – all responsibility for individual guidance is allocated to untrained tutors.

It is important to note that even if a school-based model fully meets the requirements relating to impartiality reflected in the IAG quality standards, it is still likely to be subject to the further limitation of such a model noted in international studies: the tendency for links with the labour market to be weak, and for course choices to be viewed as educational rather than career choices, with little informed attention to their career implications.¹¹

31. The NICEC study¹² indicated that local authorities are moving in very different directions regarding the structure of their IAG services and related matters. It seems highly likely that this will produce a ‘postcode lottery’ in terms of the extent, nature and quality of the services which young people receive.

32. If the partnership model is not to be weakened further:

- The role of the Careers Adviser needs to be reaffirmed within the forthcoming Children’s Workforce Development Plan.

¹¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2004). *Career Guidance and Public Policy: Bridging the Gap*, pp.40-43. Paris: OECD.

¹² Watts, A.G. & McGowan, A. (2006). *New Arrangements for Connexions/Careers Services for Young People in England*. Reading: CfBT Education Trust.

- Relevant use needs to be made of the powers of the Secretary of State, under Clause 55(2) of the Bill, to ‘specify the services to be made available to young persons and relevant young adults’ (see Annex, para.A5).

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The views expressed are those of the author, and not necessarily those of Careers England

Annex: The Education and Skills Bill

A1. The main concern of the Education and Skills Bill (published on 29 November 2007) is to provide the legal basis for raising the age of leaving education (now defined more broadly as education and training) to 18 from 2015.

A2. The section of the Bill which is particularly relevant to Connexions/careers services is Part 2. This is entitled: 'Support for participation in education or training: young adults with learning difficulties and young people in England'. It includes sub-sections on 'Provision of support services' and on 'Careers education'. Five aspects of these sub-sections are particularly worth noting.

A3. First, the definition of 'support services' in the Bill is very restricted. The Bill states:

'A local authority in England must make available to young persons and relevant young adults for whom it is responsible such services as it considers appropriate to encourage, enable or assist the effective participation of those persons in education and training' (clause 54(1)).

Within the content of the Bill, this is explicable. But the lack of attention to progression as well as participation, and to career which encompasses work as well as education and training, means that the basis of the services mandated by the Bill is limited.

A4. Second, the Connexions service is abolished:

'Sections 114 to 121 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 (provision of support services for 13 to 19 year olds) cease to have effect' (clause 64).

This repeals the legal base for the establishment of the Connexions service by the Secretary of State. On the other hand, the Explanatory Notes indicates that:

'The services made available will continue to be known as Connexions services' (para.57).

In other words, Connexions is now a national brand, not a national service.

A5. Third, while the support services are to be provided by local education authorities, the Secretary of State has specified powers in relation to them. These include the powers of giving directions to:

- (a) 'specify the services to be made available to young persons and relevant young adults';
- (b) 'specify how services provided in the exercise of those functions are to be made available';

- (c) ‘specify standards which are to be met in the provision of such services’;
- (d) ‘impose requirements as to the keeping of records and the provision of information in connection with the provision of such services’ (clause 55(2)).

These powers are in principle quite extensive, and contrast with the limited outcomes-focused surveillance envisaged by current policy (see paras.7-8 of this Policy Commentary).

A6. Fourth, provision is made for the inspection of the services:

‘Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education, Children’s Services and Skills –

- (a) must, when requested to do so by the Secretary of State, inspect and report on the provision of services...., and
- (b) may undertake such other inspections of the provision of those services as Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector thinks fit’ (clause 60(1)).

The Explanatory Notes add:

‘Inspections may be general or in relation to specific matters; they may relate to a single provider or type of provider delivering Connexions services; they may relate to a specific geographic area; and they may cover the management of resources’ (para.65).

This in principle opens up the possibility of Ofsted playing a stronger role in the implementation of the new IAG quality standards¹³.

A7. Finally, the issue of impartiality is specifically addressed in the section of the Bill relating to careers education. This amends the relevant section of the Education Act 1997, which requires state secondary schools to provide all pupils with a programme of careers education and appropriate information. The Bill refers to information and advice given in the course of a careers education programme, and stipulates that:

‘Any such information must be presented in an impartial manner, and –

- (a) any such advice must be advice which the person giving it considers will promote the best interests of the pupils concerned, and
- (b) accordingly, in giving the advice, that person must not see to promote, contrary to the pupils’ best interests, the interests or aspirations of the school or of other persons or institutions’ (clause 66(2)).

Similarly, on provision of careers information, the Bill states that:

‘The materials, taken as a whole, must present the pupils with (so far as relevant to them) a full range of –

- (a) options available in respect of 16-18 education or training, and

¹³ Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007). *Quality Standards for Young People’s Information, Advice and Guidance Services*. London: DCSF.

(b) other options available to them (at any age) in terms of career opportunities, and must not unduly promote any particular options over any others' (clause 66(3)).

A8. It is also worth noting that the proposals in clause 66 do not include any requirements for 16-18 learning providers funded by the public purse (schools, colleges and work-based providers) to provide continuing careers education in the 16-18 phase.

A9. There are opportunities for Careers England to raise concerns on this and other matters as the Bill passes through Parliament.