

Careers England Policy Commentary 12

This is the twelfth 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 Adult Advancement and Careers Service Prospectus

1. *Shaping the Future* is the title of the prospectus for the new adult advancement and careers service.¹ The prospectus was launched on 29 October, with a speech by John Denham.² It builds upon the White Paper on *Opportunity, Employment and Progression* issued in December 2007³, on the White Paper on *Raising Expectations* issued jointly by DCSF and DIUS in March 2008⁴, and on the Command Paper on *Work Skills* issued jointly by DWP and DIUS in June 2008.⁵ The first of these three papers was covered in Policy Commentary 8; the second and third in Policy Commentary 10.

2. The prospectus is closely in line with the service as outlined in the earlier papers. John Denham's 'advancement' concept (broadening the range of the service but targeting its main audience)⁶ receives more attention than the Leitch universal careers service concept⁷ (at several points in the document, 'the advancement service' is used as shorthand for 'the adult advancement and careers service').

3. The document does however add some significant flesh to the bones, in five main respects.

4. First, it is clear that what has hitherto been the Learndirect Advice service is to go through two major rebranding exercises. The document reports that it has already been

¹ Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (2008). *Shaping the Future – a new adult advancement and careers service for England*. London: DIUS. See http://dius.ecgroup.net/files/133-08-SK_on.pdf

² http://www.dius.gov.uk/speeches/denham_AACS_301008.html

³ Department for Work and Pensions and Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (2007). *Opportunity, Employment and Progression: Making Skills Work*. Cm 7288. London: Stationery Office.

⁴ Department for Children, Schools and Families & Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (2008). *Raising Expectations: Enabling the System to Deliver*. Cm 7348. London: Stationery Office.

⁵ Department for Work and Pensions & Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (2008). *Work Skills*. Cm 7415. London: Stationery Office.

⁶ In his speech at the launch, he reminded the audience that the concept was his (cf. Annex to Policy Commentary 8).

⁷ As noted in Policy Commentary 8 (para.14), the universal nature of the new service was essential to the Leitch Report's vision of the service being at the heart of its 'recommendations to raise awareness and aspiration among adults across society', including 'investing more in their own skills development'. Since Leitch recognised that 'the Government should provide the bulk of funding for basic and Level 2 skills', with individuals and employers contributing 'at least 50 per cent' at Level 3 and 'the bulk of the costs' at Level 4 and above, this clearly indicated that the service's attention should be focused on high-skill as well as low-skill groups. Leitch Review of Skills (2006). *Prosperity for All in the Global Economy – World Class Skills*, pp.59, 70, 109. London: The Stationery Office.

brought into the Learning and Skills Council, where it has become the Careers Advice Service (the web platform is to be moved on to the Directgov platform ‘as soon as is practicable’) (p.9). But in December brand research is to be commissioned to develop a new national identity for the service as a whole (p.17), to be phased in during 2009/10 (p.12). There must be some anxiety about the feasibility of maintaining the impressively high user volumes achieved by Learndirect Advice⁸ during not one but two brand changes, particularly when the aim is not only to maintain but to increase these volumes (p.12). Of course, if ‘Careers Advice Service’ is chosen as the final identity for the service, this problem will be significantly reduced, along with substantial savings in rebranding costs.

5. Second, more details are given of the ten pilots (now termed ‘prototypes’). All focus mainly on establishing local networking and partnership arrangements. Some are local-authority-led; some are voluntary-sector-led. Several mention specifically the role of ‘advancement advisers’, who will be ‘embedded in communities’ and will ‘act as outreach points and sources of advice on wider barriers to learning and work’ (p.9). These will presumably be distinguished from the ‘careers professionals’ mentioned elsewhere in the document (p.12). No information is provided on how the prototypes are to be evaluated.

6. Third, plans are announced to develop ‘a new workforce development strategy for professionals in the new service’, which also be ‘taking account of arrangements to develop the young people’s advice workforce’. This will comprise reviewing ‘the qualifications framework and continuous professional development arrangements for careers advisers’, and will be completed by July 2009, with its recommendations to be ‘taken forward during 2009/10’. It will be carried out alongside a review of the Matrix standard and the development of ‘a set of common service standards for organisations providing advice on careers and skills to apply across the new service’ (p.12).

7. Fourth, these plans are placed in the context of the government’s policy ‘to continue to develop distinct advice services for young people and adults, but within an all-age strategy agreed with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)’ (p.14). In addition to a common qualifications framework, this includes ‘service protocols with young people’s information, advice and guidance services (Connexions) to ensure that young people get the support they need during their transition to adulthood’ (p.7), plus flexibility for some 18-year-olds and all 19-year-olds to use the adult service⁹ (p.14). There is also a reference to the new service’s customer relationship management system

⁸ Around a million calls a year over the last few years, now supplemented by around 11 million web sessions. These volumes are clearly related to the level of investment (one-third of total turnover) in the marketing campaigns run on prime-time television and elsewhere. As a result of these campaigns, the level of brand recognition has been over 80%. In New Zealand, the marketing budget as a proportion of total turnover has been a little over one-fifth of the Learndirect level, the level of brand recognition has only been around 30%, and the level of usage of the helpline has been under a quarter of that for Learndirect. See Watts, A.G. & Dent, G. (2008). The evolution of a national distance guidance service: trends and challenges. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 36(4), 455-465.

⁹ Whereas the *Raising Expectations* White Paper (see footnote 4 above) confined this to 18 and 19-year-olds using Jobcentre Plus, the prospectus extends this to all 19-year-olds.

having ‘appropriate links to the Client Caseload Information System (CCIS) used by Connexions’ (p.6). So far as the qualifications framework is concerned, the document plays (in cricket parlance) a dead bat regarding the future role of careers advisers in relation to young people in England:

‘A flexible workforce with transferable and appropriate qualifications will be important in developing links between the two services. DCSF and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) will ensure that the review of the qualifications framework for careers advisers includes an assessment of whether there are elements of the careers advice skillset that are discrete to the youth sector. It will then make recommendations which draw out the differences between the needs of the youth sector in England and the combined careers offer in other parts of the UK’ (p.14).

8. Fifth, a national stakeholder group is to be set up for the new service by December 2008 (on which Careers England will be represented). It will meet quarterly, with a secretariat provided by DIUS. Its roles will be ‘to ensure the development process is informed by professional expertise and the experience from the full range of trials (including Skills Accounts and the integration of employment and skills services), to inform commissioning of any necessary research and to keep everyone in the sector informed as we develop the service’ (p.16).

9. A crucial issue remains the nature of the universal offer, and its relationship to targeted services. The document notes that the reshaping of the NextStep services (prior to their integration into the new service) has included ‘increasing their scope to deliver to new customer groups and provide a more flexible customer journey’:

‘All adults can access face to face information, signposting and referral activities, including group sessions and drop in workshops. There is a more differentiated and personalised service for priority groups, which includes action planning, ongoing support for individuals and follow up contact targeted on those most disadvantaged in the labour market’ (p.9).

The priority groups here are mainly the low-skilled and the unemployed, plus older people, offenders and ex-offenders, those from ethnic-minority backgrounds, and those with learning difficulties or disabilities.¹⁰ The statement in relation to the new service is however framed more broadly:

‘The advancement service will provide a universal offer – for all those in and out of work – and will also provide targeted support focusing on those with specific barriers to getting into and on in work: those seeking to return to work, for whom childcare is a barrier; those experiencing challenges, such as sudden redundancy; those who have worked hard for many years who are seeking to progress in their current job, or change career, but who lack the confidence or means to do so; or

¹⁰ Learning and Skills Council (2008). *Careers Information and Advice Service 1 August 2008 – 31 July 2010: Prime Contractor Delivery Manual*. Coventry: LSC.

those at key transition points, such as reaching adulthood or retirement' (p.5).

An important question is which of these models will prevail as the service is rolled out.

10. Another important issue on which there is little further information is the location of core face-to-face services. Some of the prototypes will test co-location of NextStep services with Jobcentre Plus (p.11). While the role of public libraries is mentioned in passing (p.7), there is no mention of co-location in libraries.

11. On funding, there is a hint of a possible willingness to consider increases beyond the promised £50m a year:

‘An additional £50m will be available from 2010-11 to fund increased capacity across the whole service and we will keep capacity under review in the meantime, particularly in view of the current economic downturn’ (p.12).

12. The timetable indicates that the Invitation to Tender for services for 2010/11-2012/13 will be issued in autumn 2009, and the contracts awarded in February 2010. The new service will become operational in August 2010 (p.17).

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