

Careers England Policy Commentary 21

This is the twenty-first in an occasional series of briefing notes on key policy documents related to the future of career guidance services in England. The policy commentary has been prepared for Careers England by Dr Tristram Hooley (Reader in Career Development and Head of the International Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby); the views expressed are those of the writer. A number of minor changes have been made to this revised version for the sake of clarity and accuracy following comments received from the Chair of the NCC on initial publication.

National Careers Council, *An Aspirational Nation: Creating a culture change in careers provision: June 2013*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/creating-a-culture-change-in-careers-provision-an-aspirational-nation>

1. **Background.** The National Careers Council (NCC) released its report *An Aspirational Nation: Creating a culture change in careers provision* on the 5th June 2013. The NCC was established as an independent council to advise the Government by John Hayes MP whilst he was Skills Minister. It was tasked to produce an annual report and to provide advice to Government on strategy for the National Careers Service (NCS) and allied career support services.¹ The NCC is chaired by Dr. Deirdre Hughes and includes a mix of prominent individuals drawn from the careers field and related bodies (CBI, Open University, Workers Education Authority, Education & Employers Taskforce and the Association of School and College Leaders). Members were appointed to the NCC as individuals rather than as representatives of their various organisations.

1.1 The establishment of the NCC was widely seen as an important affirmation of Government support for careers work. The fact that the Council was maintained following the replacement of John Hayes by Matthew Hancock as the responsible minister could also have been seen as representing continuing Government commitment to the area during a period when the Government has received considerable critical scrutiny of its careers policy.² A key question will be whether the NCC continues to be maintained in the future and its role developed following the issuing of its first report.

1.2 The NCC report is an important and welcome contribution to the policy discourse in this area and has been seen as particularly timely because it follows on from the House of Commons Education Select Committee Inquiry into Career Guidance³ and precedes the forthcoming Ofsted thematic review of careers guidance in schools.⁴ Taken together these three reports might be regarded as a critical summary of the Government's policy in this area so far.

¹ The National Careers Council was announced in Department for Business Innovation & Skills (2012). *National Careers Service: The Right Advice at the Right Time*. London: BIS.

² See Careers England Policy Commentary 15B for a summary of the Coalition Government's policy on careers.

³ House of Commons Education Committee (2013). *Careers guidance for young people: The impact of the new duty on schools*. London: House of Commons.

⁴ Information about the ongoing Ofsted thematic review can be accessed at Ofsted (2013). Careers guidance - commissioned survey. Available from <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/careers-guidance-commissioned-survey> [Accessed 10th June 2013].

1.3 During the preparation of the NCC report, two members of the Council (Professor Tony Watts and Heather Jackson) resigned.⁵ The resigning members cited a number of concerns with both the process by which the report had been constructed and the content of a short paper prepared for a meeting with the Minister. Since this paper remains unpublished, it will not be discussed in this Policy Commentary. However, the resigning members have also issued a statement subsequent to the publication of the report which raises some similar issues to those raised in this commentary,⁶ and thus are relevant to refer to here.

2. **Summary.** The NCC report draws on a review of published evidence and submissions that have been made directly to the Council. It argues that in an ever more complex labour market the importance of career development continues to increase. The report takes a lifelong approach to career development, rather than focusing exclusively on young people or adults, and argues that the provision of career support can contribute to the achievement of many of the Government's broader economic aims by supporting the alignment of skills supply with the needs of business. It also argues that career development has an important role to play in the achievement of social mobility. The report sees new technologies and the development of new forms of public/private partnership (which it describes as "a movement for change") as essential to delivering the impacts that the NCC hopes can result from the development of "high-performing career development and labour market policies and practices" (p.3).

2.1 The NCC report sets out seven recommendations supported by 36 actions (described as 'practical steps'). The seven recommendations are as follows.

- I. A culture change is needed in careers provision for young people and adults in order to address the mismatch of skills shortages and high unemployment.
- II. The development of the National Careers Service should be assisted by the creation of an Employer-led Advisory Board comprising senior representatives from employers, education and the career development profession to help guide its work and ensure it delivers value for money and meets the needs of young people, adults and employers.
- III. The National Careers Service should significantly expand its work with schools, young people and parents.
- IV. Employers should encourage their employees to volunteer to go into schools and colleges to give students insights into different careers, enthuse them about the world of work and provide access to active experience of work, in particular to help address mismatches in young people's career aspiration.
- V. The National Careers Service should launch a new initiative to bring together a range of organisations to explore and highlight the importance of 'character' and 'resilience' in a successful working life and identify realistic and effective options for addressing this issue.
- VI. The National Careers Service should develop and extend its on-line services and bring together key partners in order to consolidate other on-line careers information and tools, enabling trusted information to become more accessible for young people, parents, carers and adults seeking on-line support to their career development activities and plans.

⁵ Jackson, H and Watts, A.G., Resignation Statement. 3rd May 2013.

⁶ Jackson, H and Watts, A.G., *National Careers Council Report ('An Aspirational Nation')*: a Response. 5th June 2013.

VII. In order to bring about the culture change needed in careers provision for young people and adults, we need to create a movement which include employers, education and career development professionals. To implement the recommendations and practical steps Government also needs to play its role in supporting this movement and ensure these recommendations and the practical steps in this report are implemented.

2.2 The report suggests that the National Careers Service should remain at the heart of the Government's career development policy. It argues that the launch of the NCS has been a success, that the organisation has built capacity and expertise that can be used more effectively and strategically in the future and that the Government should establish a "national career development strategy" to ensure this. The purpose of such a strategy would be to set out key priorities and to co-ordinate a variety of partners' and stakeholders' contributions to achieving these objectives. The report also makes the argument that NCS service provision for adults should "continue at a comparable level" and that NCS funding should remain centralised rather than being devolved to the Local Enterprise Partnerships as is suggested in Lord Heseltine's recent report.⁷

2.3 An important theme in the NCC report is the role that employers can play in the delivery of career development. It argues that the NCS must develop stronger links with employers at both local and national level (see recommendations 2 and 4 above). These links with employers are largely conceived as leveraging employer input into the skills system and into schools; however, there is also some consideration of how the NCS could work with employers and other stakeholders to support the career development of the current workforce.

2.4 Another important theme in the report is the changing role that it describes for career development professionals. It positions career development professionals in a broad context, emphasising their expertise and skills in facilitation, consultancy, capacity building and brokerage rather than their advisory or counselling skills:

"No longer are they what some of us may recall from our own school days – 'the oracle' – perhaps going to look inside a filing cabinet and pronouncing what career might suit best. That style of careers advice stopped long ago to be replaced by a more professionalised workforce spanning public, private and voluntary/ community sectors, supporting a process rather than a single event." (p.19)

The report is also supportive of the CDI register of qualified careers professionals and makes the argument that the NCS should be publicising this register to its clients.

2.5 The support for professional standards is backed up by broader support for a range of quality standards for service delivery. The report specifically mentions the Matrix Standard and the Quality in Careers Standard⁸ and suggests that engagement with these standards should be encouraged; although as it also specifies that they should remain voluntary, it is not clear what form this

⁷ See Careers England *Policy Commentary 19*.

⁸ Though it muddles their respective roles (stating simply in para.2.27 that Matrix is an organisational standard and QiCS is concerned with service standards, rather than making it clear that the former is the required standard for all NCS providers and QiCS is the national validation of the various Careers Education, Information, Advice & Guidance Quality Awards for CEIAG provision in schools & colleges). This failure to be more explicit about the function and added value of Matrix and QiCS is a missed opportunity in the NCC report.

encouragement should take or who should do the encouraging. The report also lack clarity in what it sees these existing standards as assuring/validating. Alongside these existing standards, the report discusses the possibility of updating the Investors in People (IIP) kite mark, although this is not framed as a specific recommendation to the UK Commission for Employment and Skills which has the oversight of the IIP award.

2.6 The report emphasises the importance of career development in schools and colleges. It is argued that the lack of a link between school/college-based delivery and the NCS is a major barrier to the achievement of high-quality career guidance for young people. The report accordingly endorses the recommendation of the Education Select Committee Inquiry that the remit of the NCS should be expanded to build capacity in schools and provide brokerage between schools and employers:

“The National Careers Service should play a vital role working with schools and colleges to strengthen young people’s and parents’ awareness of career opportunities and the various routes to these.”
(p.22)

2.7 The report does not include proposals for how “high-quality career guidance” can be assured nor does it contain any details on how this expanded remit should be resourced or implemented. This is in marked contrast to the Education Select Committee report which explicitly calls for enhanced quality assurance mechanisms and an increase in funding alongside making more detailed recommendations about how Government statutory guidance to schools should be developed.⁹ However, a further suggestion is made by the NCC that higher education providers should use their Ofpa agreements to share some of the expertise and resources that exist within higher education careers services with schools and colleges.

2.8 The report notes and expresses concern about the lack of entitlement to face-to-face career support for young people aged 16 and 17. It suggests that this is addressed in future contracting arrangements for the NCS.

2.9 The report is enthusiastic about the potential of online delivery of career and labour market information and resources.¹⁰ It suggests that the NCS (in partnership with other bodies) should exemplify good practice in relation to the development and use of online resources. There is also some suggestion that the NCS might play a quality-assurance role with respect to wider online information and resources, though the practicalities of this quality-assurance role are not fully explored. It locates this as part of the Government’s broader Open Data initiative¹¹ and suggests that the NCS should play a role in making existing labour market data available in forms that are useful to individual career builders. The report notes the alignment that exists between this aspiration and the current UKCES LMI for All project.¹² In addition, the report floats a number of other ideas relating to online career support, for example suggesting that the NCS should segment its online offer for

⁹ See Careers England *Policy Commentary 18*.

¹⁰ Although it makes a factual error in the statement that a recent e-guidance symposium held in Australia was “the world’s first e-guidance symposium” (para.2.25) as this ignores the many previous conferences and symposia on this topic.

¹¹ H M Government (2012). *Open Data White Paper: Unleashing the Potential*. London: Cabinet Office

¹² UKCES (2013). *LMI for All UK*. Wath-Upon-Deerne: Commission for Employment & Skills.

different audiences or experiment with Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)¹³ as a useful way to deliver career information. However, the report also recognises that technology is not a panacea and that it needs to be balanced by appropriate access to face-to-face career support.

2.10 The report raises some concerns about the proposed transition to “payment by results” contracts for the NCS. It counsels the need for “further consideration and dialogue” (p.30) on this matter.

2.11 While most of the report is concerned with the shape of service delivery and the nature of partnerships required to support an effective career development system, it also contains a section which discusses the kind of career management skills that people need in order to be effective in the current labour market. In particular, the report highlights three main areas in this respect: (1) digital career literacy; (2) what it describes as ‘character’ (career resilience and adaptability, confidence, work ethic); and (3) enterprise skills and entrepreneurship. It is argued that a framework of career management skills should underpin service design and delivery in the NCS.

3. **Press release.** Alongside the main report, the NCC also issued a press release¹⁴. In this document the NCC recommendations are framed in different and more assertive language than in the main report, as follows:

- The National Careers Service should significantly expand its work with schools, young people and parents.
- Face-to-face careers guidance should be available to all pupils from age 12 (year 8).
- All students should have a planned progression route upon leaving school.
- The Government’s new traineeship programme and the 16-19 study programmes should include impartial careers guidance.
- Employers should work more with primary schools to help young children start to experience the world of work.
- The National Careers Service should become the online portal for careers information and advice from a range of key partners, to provide a one-stop-shop for information and tools.
- An employer-led advisory board should be created to guide the work of the National Careers Service and ensure it delivers value for money while meeting the needs of young people.
- Employers should be encouraged to volunteer their employees to go into schools and colleges to give students insights into different careers.
- Government should play its role in supporting employers, education and career development professionals to bring about a new movement in careers provision.

The press notice provides a sharper call for actions, and as such is a welcome summary of the changes which the NCC is calling for.

4. **Commentary.** The NCC report is a significant addition to the current policy debate. It makes a number of important points and sets out an aspiration to develop a more strategic approach to

¹³ MOOCs provide a structured learning pathway through online content. In some cases this will be supplemented by some one-to-many online support and peer discussion often using a social media tool like Twitter. MOOCs have been used by some higher education providers for a mix of marketing and outreach purposes, but there would have to be some new thinking to consider how they could be best applied to the delivery of career support.

¹⁴ National Careers Council, Press Notice: Culture change urgently needed in careers provision to help address mismatch between unemployment and skills shortage. 5th June 2013.

career development in England. The case for career development is strongly made and is particularly set within the context of the skills agenda, suggesting that its primary audience is with the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills. In particular, there are a number of policy recommendations for Government to consider, notably:

- the call for the creation of a national career development strategy to guide and connect the activities of the NCS to other key stakeholders in the area;
- the argument that funding for the NCS should be retained and that it should not be channelled through LEPS;
- the suggestion that the remit of the NCS is extended to include a capacity building and brokerage role with schools and colleges;
- the argument that face-to-face guidance should be available to all pupils from Year 8;
- the suggestion that the NCS becomes the champion for the UKCES LMI for All project;
- the call to extend the entitlement to face-to-face career guidance to 16 and 17 year olds;
- the highlighting of concerns about the proposed “payment by results” approach to contracting the NCS; and
- the argument on the importance of a career management skills framework for the NCS.

4.1 The central idea in the NCC is report is that of achieving a “culture change” in careers provision.

“This report calls for a major culture change in the careers provision for young people and adults in order to help address the mismatch of skills shortages and, in particular high youth unemployment.”
(p.4)

The concept of “culture change” seems to be carefully chosen; suggesting that what is required is largely a matter of a change in the way in which career services are thought about rather than any change in their resourcing. Consequently the report can be addressed not only to Government but to a wider audience:

“Such a culture change can only be brought about by a willingness and determination of all key players including: the Government, employers, educationists, career development professionals and parents/carers.” (p.12)

4.2 Such a vision echoes some of the thinking that has been set out by the Prime Minister under the label of the “Big Society”.¹⁵ The “Big Society” idea suggests that public policy should not be solely reliant on Government action or funding but should rather seek to leverage the actions of other actors for societal benefit. The NCC’s report seeks to raise a banner around which such culture change could be mobilised. However, the actions of two of the groups that it names (educationalists and career professionals) are highly influenced by Government resourcing and regulation (where the report makes few recommendations). Of the other two groups, the report has relatively little to say about parents/carers beyond suggesting in recommendations 3 and 6 that the NCS should take them into account – without saying more about how or about how such work might be resourced. The report has far more to say about employers, who it positions as critical to supporting career development. However, it does not recommend any new incentives for either group to act in ways

¹⁵ David Cameron (2011). PM’s speech on Big Society. Available from <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-on-big-society> [Accessed 9th June 2013].

that are novel or more likely to engage with the issue of career development. So while the report calls on the Government to “support the growth of this movement [for culture change in career development]”, it is not clear how this support might be enacted.

4.3 It is also important to note a number of surprising and/or significant omissions from the report and to subject to scrutiny the NCC’s recommendations to explore whether their ambition exceeds the leverage possessed by the Council.

5. Significant issues requiring further discussion and actions. Given the report’s aspiration to advise the Government on pertinent issues related to the future of career development in England, there are some significant issues which the report does not fully address. Without further ‘inside information’ it is not possible to be sure about why these were either omitted or not fully addressed by the report, though Jackson and Watts’ resignation statement suggests that these omissions were intentional.

5.1 In particular there is no discussion about:

- The impact of the recent loss of the Connexions service or any challenge made regarding the decision to locate responsibility for career guidance with schools (despite the latter being explicitly criticised as “regrettable” by the Education Select Committee).¹⁶
- The impact of the loss of the statutory basis for careers education and work-related learning. This is particularly surprising given the strong endorsement of employer involvement in education that emerges from the report.
- What level of resourcing would be required to implement the proposed extension of the remit of the NCS to cover schools, or even any explicit statement that an increase in resourcing would be required. Nor is any statement made about which Government department’s budget any additional resources should be drawn from.
- The nature or scale of a new approach to marketing the NCS (to ensure it is no longer a “well-kept secret”, beyond endorsing the use of “social networking”
- The appropriate level of integration between the different programmes/services provided by the NCS, the Work Programme and JobCentre Plus. A recent commentary by the Careers Sector Stakeholders Alliance (CSSA) argued that the policy of co-location of the NCS with JCP might be undermining the universal aims of the service.¹⁷

5.2 Whilst the report strongly endorses the importance of appropriately trained and qualified careers professionals, it stops short of recommending that either the NCS or schools and colleges should be required to take this professional status into account when hiring people/contracting with suppliers to deliver careers services. This leaves the NCS in the disingenuous position of promoting the Career Development Institute Register whilst only using it for half of its own qualified staff.¹⁸

¹⁶ House of Commons Education Committee (2013). *Careers guidance for young people: The impact of the new duty on schools*. London: House of Commons.

¹⁷ Careers Sector Stakeholders Alliance (2012). *National Careers Service: Strategic Options for Building a World Class Service*.

¹⁸ The Government’s recent response to the Education Select Committee’s report stated that the NCS should move towards 50% of its advisers registered with the Career Development institute and qualified to level 6.

Neither does the report recommend that schools should be required to use professionally qualified careers staff, which is a particularly surprising omission (see 2.6/2.7 above re: ‘high-quality career guidance’)

5.3 There are also questions to be asked about the viability of some of the recommendations that are made about the NCS. While these are desirable, it seems unlikely that the NCS would be able to achieve the necessary leverage to bring about the kind of “culture change in careers provision” that the NCC envisages without active Government support. The following critical commentary on each of the recommendations demonstrates the scale of the NCC’s ambition for the NCS and wider career support services:

Recommendation	Who needs to act?	Commentary
<p>I. A culture change is needed in careers provision for young people and adults in order to address the mismatch of skills shortages and high unemployment.</p>	<p>“This will involve a wide range of people and organisations including the Government, employers, schools, colleges, universities, service users and parents, career professionals, teachers, private providers and non-for-profit organisations. The list is extensive and all have a distinctive contribution to make.”</p>	<p>While this recommendation is desirable, it is difficult to see how it can be operationalised in practice without some substantial reframing of Government policy and a structure of incentives for all of the stakeholders listed.</p>
<p>II. The development of the National Careers Service should be assisted by the creation of an Employer-led Advisory Board comprising senior representatives from employers, education and the career development profession to help guide its work and ensure it delivers value for money and meets the needs of young people, adults and employers.</p>	<p>This would require action from the Government, probably through the Skills Funding Agency (SFA).</p> <p>Support would also have to be gathered from relevant stakeholders.</p>	<p>This recommendation is achievable should Government decide to implement it. However, more clarity is needed to show how the remit of the proposed Advisory Board might differ from that of the NCC itself – and if the Advisory Board were to be established, what if any would its relationship with the Council be?</p>

However, it is not clear as to what role the unqualified 50% will be performing or how this upskilling will be operationalised. The NCC report does not address these issues.

<p>III. The National Careers Service should significantly expand its work with schools, young people and parents.</p>	<p>Government, through the SFA's contracting processes.</p> <p>Careers companies contracted within the NCS.</p> <p>Schools.</p>	<p>This recommendation is achievable through a reconfiguration by the Government of the contracting and funding arrangements by which the NCS is managed. However, without an increase in funding (arguably from DfE) this would be likely to have a detrimental impact on the resourcing available to deliver services for adults.</p>
<p>IV. Employers should encourage their employees to volunteer to go into schools and colleges to give students insights into different careers, enthuse them about the world of work and provide access to active experience of work, in particular to help address mismatches in young people's career aspiration.</p>	<p>Employers</p> <p>Intermediary bodies, e.g. the Education and Employers Taskforce.</p>	<p>There are already a number of organisations operating in this area: it is difficult to see how this recommendation makes it more likely that such activity will grow, without some new resourcing (from Government) for either marketing the concept or providing tangible incentives to employers.</p>
<p>V. The National Careers Service should launch a new initiative to bring together a range of organisations to explore and highlight the importance of 'character' and 'resilience' in a successful working life and identify realistic and effective options for addressing this issue.</p>	<p>NCS</p>	<p>In essence this recommendation suggests that there is a need for a new career management skills framework.</p> <p>The NCS would need Government encouragement, and resourcing to make this an achievable aim which the NCS might find would support the development of its services.</p> <p>However, it is worth noting that there are already a number of career management frameworks in existence, notably the LSIS Blueprint¹⁹ for Careers which includes many of the attributes highlighted in the report. It may therefore be more useful to start with these</p>

¹⁹ LSIS (2013). Careers Blueprint. Available from <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/1332> [Accessed 5th June 2013].

		than to develop a new framework.
VI. The National Careers Service should develop and extend its on-line services and bring together key partners in order to consolidate other on-line careers information and tools, enabling trusted information to become more accessible for young people, parents, carers and adults seeking on-line support to their career development activities and plans.	NCS Other online providers	This is an ambitious and intriguing recommendation. It suggests that the Government should enable the NCS to become a more energetic developer of online content and that the NCS could also play a role in quality-assuring and recommending other online resources. This aspiration raises considerable practical and policy concerns about the appropriate role of a state-funded agency within a vibrant online market. ²⁰
VII. In order to bring about the culture change needed in careers provision for young people and adults, we need to create a movement which include employers, education and career development professionals. To implement the recommendations and practical steps Government also needs to play its role in supporting this movement and ensure these recommendations and the practical steps in this report are implemented.	Employers Education and career development professionals Government	This recommendation is essentially a restatement of recommendation 1, and would benefit from further clarity as to how Government might lead and/or support the actions required to bring about such a culture change.

5.4 The above table describes the challenges that will be faced in seeking to implement the NCC's recommendations. While some of the recommendations could be refined through further work there seems (from this report) to be a reticence by the NCC to challenge Government to increase

²⁰ Some of these issues are discussed and a policy framework proposed in Hooley, T., Hutchinson, J. and Watts, A.G. (2010). *Enhancing Choice? The Role of Technology in the Career Support Market*. London: UKCES.

funding, reconfigure incentives or tighten the legislative framework. The report tries to compensate for this lack of Government action through repeated calls to what it might be possible to describe as the “Big Society” (in this case defined as employers, education providers, careers professionals and parents/carers).

5.5 A major unanswered question is this: was the NCC instructed by the Government to ensure that recommendations remained within the current budgetary and legislative framework? If so, this may explain why the report’s strong defence of career development is not fully backed up with recommendations which call on Government to take specific actions and to resource them appropriately.

6. Conclusion.

6.1 The NCC report is an important document. It helpfully raises some major issues in relation to career support in England. Much of the narrative and many of the recommendations raise important concerns about the functioning of England’s current career development system.

6.2 However, the report stops short of making calls for decisive action by the Government (e.g. changes in funding or legislation), resulting in recommendations that are likely to be difficult to implement.

6.3 It is possible to speculate about the latitude that the NCC had in challenging Government policy. It may well be that, in this its first report, the NCC is attempting to push the Government as far as seems politically possible within current constraints. Policy making is inevitably the art of the possible, and it may be that the NCC report should be viewed as a compromise, but nonetheless one that has managed to raise some important and significant concerns.

6.4 Without decisive actions led or strongly backed by the Government, however, the major question remains as to whether the “culture change” the NCC calls for can be achieved. Only time will tell.

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The policy commentary has been prepared for Careers England by Dr Tristram Hooley (Reader in Career Development and Head of the International Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby); the views expressed are those of the writer.

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