

## Meeting Notes

# Notes from Meeting with Simon Hughes, Government Advocate for Access to Education

2nd March 2011

### Attendees:

Keith Herrmann (Convener, UK CSSF), Sir Martin Harris (OFFA and Chair UK CSSF), Dame Ruth Silver (Chair, Careers Profession Task Force), Steve Higginbotham (Careers Profession Alliance; President, ICG), Brian Lightman (General Secretary, ASCL), Denise Bertuchi (UNISON)

Simon was accompanied by Denise Shaw (Lib Democrats communication adviser) and colleague Ashley.

### 1. Opening remarks:

- 1.1. Sir Martin began by contextualising the debate about careers services for young people in England with regard to improving access for young people to further and higher education opportunities. This often meant that the educational advice given by teachers about subject choices inevitably were also career choices. Therefore it was important for young people making such choices to also have access to independent and professional career guidance.
- 1.2. Currently much of these services are provided by the Connexions service. However, uncertainty in many local authorities about the future of these services, severe budget cuts and the lack of specifically allocated funding for careers services has seen many Local Authorities making large-scale redundancies of careers advisers. This situation has severe consequences for the new all-age careers service being developed by BIS and the DfE – there may well not be the required skills base in place to launch the new service if the current funding uncertainties and redundancies continue. Hence it is crucial that a transition plan be developed in partnership with stakeholders and implemented with speed.
- 1.3. Sir Martin then asked colleagues around the table to share their perspectives with Simon...

### 2. Addressing service design and resource issues

- 2.1. Given the current loss of jobs and expertise due to cuts in Connexions services, the Careers Profession Alliance (which includes ICG) is concerned about the future availability of face-to-face careers advice (provided by professional careers advisers) to contribute to the new all-age careers service that is currently being designed and developed. There are severe consequences for the provision of quality careers services to young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- 2.2. Good practice internationally highlights the importance of face-to-face careers support for young people. They are often faced with an array of crucial decisions about their futures, about subject choices and their links with career choices, and about different pathways to further and higher education. The daunting costs of these opportunities also make these decisions all the more difficult, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Without the necessary social capital, support from informed parents and access to expert guidance, many disaffected and disadvantaged young people will be worse off if the current trajectory of developments continues.

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- 2.3. Schools recognise and value the support provided by online tools alongside professional advisers and high quality work experience with employers. There is a concern that some schools will think that online careers services will satisfy their statutory duty. With the current cuts to school budgets, they may think this is an appropriate solution. However, a balanced approach is crucial.
- 2.4. Questions must be asked about the responsibility on schools to collect data in the future about student destinations and outcomes. With the Connexions service gone, how will they do this? How will they do this when career guidance is no longer integrated through a single service provider? Who will interrogate and aggregate the data provided by a range of independent careers advisers? What will the role of the all-age service be in this respect? The existing regional infrastructures between schools/colleges/employers/universities and other careers/Connexions partnerships will be lost due to the volume and pace of centre closures.

### 3. Improving the quality of provision

- 3.1. The Careers Profession Task Force chaired by Dame Ruth Silver made several recommendations related to improving the standards and qualifications for professional careers advisers. It also urged the numerous associations of professional careers advisers to develop a 'single voice' for the sector. Significant progress has been achieved on this front with the establishment of the Careers Profession Alliance.
- 3.2. The uncertainty of funding is having a dramatic impact on the careers workforce, and clarity on this matter is urgently required. Until the new legislation is passed, local authorities still have a statutory duty to provide and fund these services.
- 3.3. Ruth is meeting the Minister, John Hayes, to provide an update on progress since the publication of the Task Force report and also to hear from the Minister regarding progress made by his two departments regarding implementing the report's recommendations.

#### Action

- Ruth indicated she was happy to take any messages from Simon Hughes to her meeting with the Minister on 28th March 2011.

### 4. The importance of careers education and guidance in schools

- 4.1. Schools are facing a "triple whammy" of circumstance and uncertainty – first about budgets, second about EMAs (and to some extent the fall-out from increased university tuition fees), and third about curriculum change. To put it rather simply: there will be no provision if schools don't have the funding for career IAG. Despite the current uncertainties, the Education Bill recognises the role of independent and impartial careers advisers in schools. Yet this is not being supported by the allocation of resources, either to schools or to the new all-age careers service.
- 4.2. The starting point for any policy discussion about career education and guidance should be the recognition that provision of guidance in schools about subject choices, careers education and careers choices are all part of a 'package of guidance services'. This is not adequately reflected in the current funding arrangements or in the Education Bill. This situation is exacerbated by the lack of a transition plan for the provision of services currently provided by Connexions. The possible outcomes are not encouraging: more disaffected pupils, less social mobility and less access to opportunities of further and higher education.
- 4.3. The Association of Schools and College Leaders (ASCL) is having encouraging discussions with the CBI and the Employers Education Task Force about the role of employers in helping schools with careers education, career guidance and employability skills.





## Action

- Simon Hughes was urged to speak positively to the Education Secretary about the importance of career education and guidance as well as the role schools have in enhancing the employability of young people through work experience and a wide variety of other careers education activities to learn about themselves and about the world of work.

## 5. Local areas losing professional careers advisers

- 5.1. Research by Unison shows that the Connexions service in many local authorities is being closed down, as there is no continuity in the funding arrangements and no transition plan for the new service; this despite a current notional allocation of about £200 million.
- 5.2. The consequences are dire, both for professional career advisers losing their jobs, but also for young people in Years 9, 10 and 11 in schools who will be losing out on careers advice – estimates show that up to 2 million young people in schools could be adversely affected by the current situation.

## Action

- Unison and partners to share with DfE/BIS the transition plan they have developed, so that DfE/BIS can draw on their expertise to implement a transition plan as soon as possible.

## 6. 90 days to act

- 6.1. UKCSSF members estimate that we have about 90 days to save the careers service. Urgent action is required on:
  - developing a transition plan for merging the Connexions service into the new all-age careers service;
  - issuing letters to Local Authorities about the current funding arrangement to ensure that the current cadre of professional careers advisers (in Connexions) is not lost;
  - providing schools with clear guidelines and appropriate levels of funding for 'securing' independent and impartial careers services;
  - developing a 'marketing campaign' for young people about opportunities for further and higher education, explaining the practicalities about the new funding arrangements for universities and the diversity of pathways to further and higher education.

## Action

- Simon Hughes was encouraged to meet with the Chair of Skills Development Scotland, Willy Roe, regarding the resources the SDS has developed for schools regarding career guidance. They also have an excellent array of materials and services that cover all ages.

## 7. Responses from Simon Hughes

- 7.1. Simon has been working on a replacement 'offer' for the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). He has recently (last week) submitted a proposal to the Prime Minister's Office. A public announcement is expected by the end of March, subject to the necessary budgetary approvals.
- 7.2. Simon has met a wide range of stakeholders concerned about access to educational opportunities. He has also established a blog to secure the contribution and involvement of young people across the country.
- 7.3. Simon is drafting a number of reports in line with his Terms of Reference from the PM, covering the following themes: (1) fair access to education, (2) the replacement for EMAs, (3) career education and IAG (due around Easter time). He welcomed inputs to his career IAG report from the Forum and indicated he would send a draft copy out for comment to the Forum.





- 7.4. Simon is working on a 'marketing campaign' to provide better information to young people, their parents/guardians and to schools. He anticipates a three-pronged approach:
- Guidelines to young people about future options post-16: about work, training, apprenticeships, 6th form, further and higher education (with a price guide as well). This would form part of a '*formal graduation process*' for Year 9 students.
  - Information for parents and guardians about the choices their children face and where to go for assistance and guidance. This would also allow people to 'exchange views' through an online information portal.
  - Guidelines to schools about the choices facing young people post-16. Along with this, Simon suggested schools develop an alumni network as advocates for access, i.e. a 'young elders' network that could serve as role models.

## 8. Suggested actions by the UK Careers Sector Strategic Forum

1. Actively follow the release of the 'new' EMA arrangements when they are launched.
2. Provide Simon's office with evidence of Connexions service closures and examples where local authorities are putting funding in place for careers services despite the cuts.
3. Support the draft transition plan being developed by Unison, the National Connexions Network, Careers England and ICG for presentation to DfE/BIS officials, John Hayes and Simon Hughes.
4. Write a letter to Simon Hughes with a short list of the existing reports about the types of information and guidance provided to young people already, especially using online and social media, as an input to his ideas about a 'marketing campaign'.

Convened under the auspices of the CIHE, the UK Careers Sector Strategic Forum is a strategic leadership network of careers sector stakeholders. It aims to formulate a national strategic framework for careers information, advice and guidance (IAG) to address the issues of access, transparency, quality, equality, and continuity, and to identify areas where UK-wide co-ordination would be helpful.

Chair: Sir Martin Harris

Convening Committee: Keith Herrmann (Convenor, CIHE) Ian Borkett (Unionlearn), Vivienne Brown (Skills Development Scotland), Margaret Dane (AGCAS), Dr Deirdre Hughes (Careers Profession Alliance), Prof. Tony Watts

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