

Careers England Policy Commentary 17

This is the seventeenth 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. It builds upon Policy Commentaries 15B and 16, issued earlier in 2012, on the Coalition Government's emerging policies on career guidance.

Practical Guide for Schools on Securing Independent Careers Guidance

A.G. Watts

1. The new Practical Guide for Schools¹ is directed at head teachers, school staff, governing bodies and local authorities. It relates to the duty, under the Education Act 2011, for schools to 'secure access to independent and impartial careers guidance for their pupils from September 2012'. It seeks to supplement the Statutory Guidance issued in March 2012 by 'offering additional practical information' on which schools might wish to draw 'when interpreting your new responsibilities and deciding on the most appropriate forms of independent careers guidance for your pupils'.

2. The Guide represents a concession to the Liberal Democrats. In the debates on the Education Act in the House of Lords, the Liberal Democrats had been persuaded not to move their series of tabled amendments by the promise of Statutory Guidance which would address their concerns about the availability of face-to-face careers guidance and the quality assurance and professional competence of those 'secured' to provide it. But the Statutory Guidance published in March conspicuously failed to meet these concerns.² Following disquiet expressed by Liberal Democrat peers led by Baroness Sharp of Guildford, Lord Hill (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools) announced that:

'The department's view, which I think is the right view, is that statutory guidance should always be as short, focused and clear as possible. But ... there could be benefits in having some practical information and additional support to schools to help them to understand what their duties are ... my honourable friend John Hayes, who is the responsible Minister, would be very happy to have that discussion with my noble friend Lady Sharp and to see how that practical information could best be provided.'³

¹ Department for Education (2012). *Securing Independent Careers Guidance: a Practical Guide for Schools*.

² For a detailed analysis, see Watts, A.G. (2012). *Careers England Policy Commentary 16: Statutory Guidance for Schools on Securing Access to Careers Guidance*.

³ Lord Hill of Oareford in House of Lords, 22 May 2012.

The Guide represents the results of these discussions.

3. The Guide effectively addresses many of the issues raised during the consultation on the Statutory Guidance, which were then omitted in its published version. In particular, it has strong sections on the two issues of chief concern to the Liberal Democrats: face-to-face guidance and quality assurance.

4. On **face-to-face guidance**, the Guide states:

‘Increased complexity and competition in education and labour markets means that most, if not all, young people would benefit from individual, face-to-face careers guidance to enable them to make informed decisions about future options based upon consideration of the wealth of information available from a range of sources and media. As highlighted in the statutory guidance, this is particularly crucial for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds or with special educational needs. Face-to-face guidance with a qualified careers adviser will enable your pupils to review their circumstances, abilities, interests and aspirations as they make decisions about future education, training and work options.’

This meets the concern that the statement in the Statutory Guidance that face-to-face guidance is ‘particularly’ relevant to children from disadvantaged backgrounds or with special educational needs could easily be read as implying that it is *only* relevant to such pupils.

5. On **quality assurance**, the Guide effectively adopts the model promoted by Careers England on the basis of the recommendations of the Careers Profession Task Force⁴, by distinguishing three aspects:

- The quality of the school careers programme – with references to ‘the various quality awards which exist for CEIAG provision in schools and colleges’, and to ‘the national validation, the Quality in Careers Standard’ as a means ‘to determine an appropriate quality award to pursue’.
- The quality of the independent careers provider – with a reference to the ‘online register of organisations accredited to the matrix Standard’.
- The quality of careers professionals working with the school – with references to the work of the Careers Profession Alliance, the Qualification in Careers Guidance, and the CPA’s new online register of careers professionals.

This meets the concerns expressed about the omission of the first and third of these in the Statutory Guidance.

6. On some other issues, progress is evident, but more limited.

⁴ Careers Profession Task Force (2010). *Towards a Stronger Careers Profession*. London: Department for Education.

7. In particular, the references to **careers education** remain weak (indeed, the term itself is conspicuous by its absence). The key relevant points here are:

- The first draft of the Statutory Guidance stated that the repeal of the requirement for schools to provide careers education did not imply that careers education was unimportant: schools should recognise that the range of activities encompassed within the term ‘careers education’ is significant in contextualising the careers guidance on offer to pupils, and supporting the development of their decision-making and career management skills; and should consider how these activities are best delivered. This did not appear in the published version of the Statutory Guidance, and is not reinstated in the Guide.
- On the other hand, the preamble to the Guide extends the definition of careers guidance to comprise ‘services and programmes intended to assist pupils to make and implement education, training and occupation choices and to learn how to manage their careers’: the reference to learning (‘to learn how’) has been added to the formulation used in the Statutory Guidance.
- There is also a helpful reference to the *Framework for Careers and Work-Related Education* produced by the Association for Careers Education and Guidance.
- But the relevant section in the Guide refers to planning a *programme of activities* rather than to a *curriculum*. This despite the fact that research, both in the UK and in North America, demonstrates that the most effective model of delivery for careers work in schools is a curriculum-led approach in which career is seen as an important focal point for learning, based on a body of knowledge, skills and pedagogic approaches, with the various careers components integrated with the mainstream curriculum in a coherent, developmental way.⁵

8. On the nature of **what needs to be commissioned from outside the school**, the Guide indicates that schools with an in-house careers adviser can ‘retain’ him or her (again, as previously⁶, blurring the issue of whether schools without one can now appoint one) but that this will need to be supplemented ‘with external sources of careers guidance to meet the new duty’. It extends the list of such sources to include not only ‘an external careers provider’ but also ‘employer visits, mentoring, website and telephone access’ and notes that ‘taken together, the external sources must provide information on the full range of post-16 options and access to face-to-face support where needed’. This would seem designed to *encourage* use of external face-to-face careers providers without *requiring* it.

9. On **impartiality**, the reference to covering ‘the full range of post-16 options’ is now reinforced by a reference to inviting ‘employers and other local education and training providers to input to your school’s careers programme’ but this is weakened by including it in a list of options (with ‘or’ rather than ‘and’ as the conjunction).

⁵ See Hooley, T., Marriott, J., Watts, A.G. & Coiffait, L. (in press). *Careers 2020: Options for Future Careers Work in English Schools*. Pearson Think Tank & International Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby.

⁶ See Watts, A.G. (2012). *Careers England Policy Commentary 15B (Final Version): The Coalition’s Emerging Policies on Career Guidance*, para.14.

10. On the role of **local authorities**, there is no reference in the main text, but the first of four case studies outlines an example of local authority support for commissioning (in Blackburn with Darwen). Two of the other case studies are of schools working together in a local partnership or consortium (the fourth relates to consulting with parents to shape provision). This reinforces a suggestion in the main text, in relation to the potentially time-consuming task of commissioning specialist careers provision, that a solution might be ‘forming a consortium with other local schools and education and training providers to commission a shared independent, expert resource’.

10. The two key issues remain funding and the minimum requirement to meet the statutory duty.

11. On **funding**, one of the ‘Myths’ in a section headed ‘Mythbuster’ is that: ‘It will be expensive to secure independent, face-to-face careers guidance for all my pupils in years 9-11’. The ‘Fact’ presented in response is:

‘The statutory guidance is clear that qualified careers professionals can play an important role in delivering face-to-face careers guidance, particularly at key transition points when your pupils are faced with post-14 and post-16 choices. At other times, schools may wish to supplement this with different types of face-to-face provision. Careers fairs, events offered by post-16 providers, employer talks and a visit to your local university are all examples of cost-effective activities that can inspire young people and get them thinking about the future.’

Read literally, this suggests extensive face-to-face careers guidance provision at the two key decision points. Despite the context, there is no explicit reference to its costs, but they would seem likely to be reasonably substantial. But the reality remains that schools have been given no extra funding to purchase such services, many of which were previously available to them free from the Connexions service: the funding provided for these services has been removed rather than transferred.⁷ So this particular ‘myth’ is not convincingly ‘busted’.

12. On the **minimum requirement**, the status and language of the document are purely advisory, providing information that schools ‘may wish to draw on’. It is emphasised that:

‘Apart from the elements identified in the statutory guidance, schools are free to decide what careers provision to make available in accordance with the needs of their pupils.’

It remains the case that, despite Ministerial statements that ‘Where there is clear evidence of a school failing to meet its statutory duties, we will take action’, there appears to be no indication of who will monitor the implementation of these duties (Ofsted has indicated

⁷ For details, see Watts, A.G. (2012). *Careers England Policy Commentary 15B (Final Version): The Coalition’s Emerging Policies on Career Guidance*, paras.42-47.

that it will not inspect against them⁸), and no clear basis on which a sustainable challenge to a school's provision could be mounted.⁹

13. The Guide represents a positive outcome for the work of the Liberal Democrats, and for the lobbying undertaken by Careers England and other members of the Careers Sector Strategic Alliance. It is most unfortunate that it is being published so late, after schools have set their budgets for the new school year, and just before the long summer break. It is also unfortunate that no draft was circulated for wider consultation, which might have ameliorated some of its limitations. But within the framework of the Coalition Government's policies, it constitutes a stronger statement of Government expectations from schools than has been available previously. It should help schools to meet their new responsibilities, vague as these still are, in a more positive and thoughtful way. It merits strong promotion to schools from the Government, from Careers England and its members, and from other careers organisations.

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⁸ Speech by Karen Adriaanse HMI to Advisers and Inspectors for Careers Education (AICE), London, 11 June 2012.

⁹ See Watts, A.G. (2012). *Careers England Policy Commentary 15B (Final Version): The Coalition's Emerging Policies on Career Guidance*, paras.16-17.