

Careers England Policy Commentary 24

This is the twenty-fourth 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.¹

Government Inspiration Vision Statement and Other Recent Developments

A.G. Watts

1. **Introduction.** Alongside the Ofsted Thematic Review and Government Action Plan published in September 2013², the Government also published an *Inspiration Vision Statement*.³ This has clearly been the basis for Ministerial statements in two recent Parliamentary question sessions: in the House of Lords on 23 October 2013; and in the House of Commons on 11 November 2013. This Policy Commentary analyses these various statements. It demonstrates that the Government, despite its earlier promises to achieve a renaissance of the careers profession, appears now to be writing careers professionals out of the policy script.

2. In addition, an analysis of relevant sections in a recent report of the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission⁴ is provided as an annex to this Policy Commentary. The Commission is chaired by Alan Milburn, who in an earlier report⁵ to the Labour Government recommended that Connexions should be broken up, the duty for careers guidance be devolved to schools and the relevant funding be passed to schools. The first two of these recommendations have subsequently been implemented by the Coalition Government but, crucially, the third has not. The new report comments that, as a result, ‘the chickens are already coming home to roost’ (p.195). It accordingly recommends that ‘the UK Government should provide additional resources to schools to provide high quality careers services’ (p.203).

3. **Government Inspiration Vision Statement.** Alongside the Government Action Plan⁶, the Vision Statement represents Matthew Hancock’s first major policy statement

¹ Helpful comments from Paul Chubb and Dr Tristram Hooley on an earlier draft of this Policy Commentary are gratefully acknowledged. The author is however solely responsible for the views expressed.

² See Watts, A.G. (2013). *Ofsted Thematic Review and Government Action Plan*. Careers England Policy Commentary 23.

³ HM Government (2013). *Inspiration Vision Statement*.

⁴ Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (2013). *State of the Nation 2013: Social Mobility and Child Poverty in Great Britain*.

⁵ Panel on Fair Access to the Professions (2009). *Unleashing Aspiration: the Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions*. London: Panel on Fair Access to the Professions.

⁶ Department for Education and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2013). *Careers Guidance Action Plan: Government Response to Recommendations from Ofsted’s Thematic Review and National Careers Council’s Report*.

on careers guidance since he was appointed as Minister of State for Skills and Enterprise, succeeding John Hayes as the Minister with responsibility for careers guidance.

4. The key messages in the Vision Statement are six-fold:

- Careers education is about aspiration as much as advice.
- Information is widely available. As well as advice, we need inspiration.
- The best mentoring and motivation comes from people in jobs.
- Employers, schools and colleges must do more in partnership together.
- Government will help facilitate this using the improved National Careers Service.
- Careers last a lifetime so we will continue supporting young people and adults to develop the career management skills they need.

While in the first of these it is interesting to see the use of the term ‘careers education’, it is clear from the subsequent text that the focus is not on a curriculum but on a range of isolated activities.

5. The emphasis on ‘aspiration’, ‘inspiration’ and ‘motivation’ is explicitly linked to contributions from employers and people in jobs:

‘The best motivation and advice tend to come from people in jobs themselves.’

Accordingly, schools are encouraged to adopt such activities as:

- Inspiring speakers.
- Visits to real-world workplaces.
- High-quality work experience.
- Help with CVs and mock interviews.
- Mentoring and support for those at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training).

Implicitly, it seems that most if not all of these interventions are to be provided by employers and people in jobs.

6. There is, however, no reference at all to the role of careers professionals – either careers advisers or careers education co-ordinators – in supporting such activities and integrating them into a coherent developmental careers programme.⁷ It is noted that schools and colleges have been ‘given a powerful new accountability to secure independent and impartial careers guidance for their students’, but no indication is given of what this might comprise. On where it might be sought, the document refers to the ‘many social enterprises and charities’ that are providing opportunities ‘to help learners

⁷ Nor is there any reference to the role of careers professionals in ensuring that resources like Plotr (cited in the statement) are used effectively, or that advice on options is widened to include apprenticeships, entrepreneurship or other vocational routes (as recommended in the statement).

enter the world of work’, but again makes no reference to what these ‘opportunities’ might comprise or to the role of careers professionals within them.

7. The Vision Statement includes references to the proposed revision of the Statutory Guidance, to the proposed extension of the National Careers Service role in relation to schools, and to the proposed improved destinations data, as outlined in the accompanying Government Action Plan. It claims that

‘These policies represent a big culture change in how careers information, advice and guidance is delivered.’

In doing so, it implicitly refers to the National Careers Council’s recommendation that a ‘culture change’ is needed in careers provision for young people and adults.⁸

8. On adults, there is a brief section which reaffirms the role of the National Careers Service:

‘... the National Careers Service will continue to provide online, telephone and face-to-face support for adults of all ages. We will continue to improve the service provided, with professionally-qualified advisers, up-to-date Labour Market Information, local information, and a payment by results system that means money is targeted with best effect.’

The inclusion here of a specific reference to the role of ‘professionally-qualified advisers’ contrasts with the absence of any such reference in relation to provision for young people.

9. **Subsequent Ministerial statements.** More recently, there have been two sets of Ministerial statements in Parliament relating to careers guidance for young people.

10. The first was in the House of Lords⁹, in response to a Parliamentary Question asked by Baroness Jones of Whitchurch on ‘concerns about the schools careers service highlighted in the Barnardo’s report *Helping the Inbetweeners*’¹⁰. In responding on behalf of the Government, Lord Nash (Parliamentary Under-Secretary in the Department for Education) stated:

⁸ National Careers Council (2013). *An Aspirational Nation: Creating a Culture Change in Careers Provision*. For a critical analysis, see Hooley, T. (2013). *Careers England Policy Commentary* 21.

⁹ *Hansard*, 23 October 2013.

¹⁰ Barnardo’s (2013). *Helping the Inbetweeners: Ensuring Careers Advice Improves the Options for All Young People*. This report expressed concern ‘that the recent changes make it harder for the majority of young people to find and receive good quality careers advice rather than easier’ (p.11). It noted that when asked about websites, ‘young people continued to express a preference for face-to-face advice’. It also noted the importance of ‘trust and authenticity about the advice given to them... often engendered by a personal relationship’ (p.17) with ‘someone who knows about many suitable options and how to achieve them’ (p.11).

‘I disagree that the gold standard is a face-to-face interview with a careers adviser. The gold standard is what all good schools do, which is to seek to identify their pupils’ passions, interests, aptitudes, strengths and weaknesses at an early stage and to work with them throughout their time at school to provide a direct line of sight and contact with the workplace. That is what a good education is all about. A few interviews at the end of your time in school is a poor substitute for that.’

He later added:

‘There is clear guidance on pupils who will specifically benefit from face-to-face advice – disadvantaged pupils and those with learning difficulties or disabilities... What we regard as a really first-class education is what I outlined rather than last-minute careers advice.’

By establishing a false dichotomy between contacts with the workplace and a careers interview, and indicating his preference for the former, Lord Nash implicitly marginalised the latter, except for certain limited target-groups – and even there it was left open as to whether the intervention referred to here was a careers interview or mentoring. His reference to ‘last-minute careers advice’ also indicated the lack of understanding by Ministers that careers advice needs to be available at all key decision points and to build upon the foundations of a coherent programme of careers education, throughout the student's school life. To compound these distortions, Lord Nash subsequently indicated what he regarded as good ‘careers advice’:

‘I recently visited Stoke Newington school and sixth form college... where they follow excellent practice in offering careers advice. They have a speed dating careers day, which is very useful. There is a wide variety of good practice that schools can use and a wide range of organisations such as Business in the Community, Business Class and the Education and Employers Taskforce with which schools can engage.’

All the examples given here relate to encounters with employers and people in work, not to careers interviews with careers professionals. Lord Nash reinforced this by adding:

‘... we do not expect teachers to be careers experts. That is unrealistic, which is why we expect all schools to engage with their local business and professional communities.’

11. The second set of statements was in the House of Commons, as part of an Education Question Time.¹¹ Graham Stuart (Conservative MP for Beverley & Holderness, and Chair of the Education Select Committee¹²) asked:

¹¹ *Hansard*, 11 November 2013, cols.629-630.

¹² See Watts, A.G. (2013). *Education Select Committee Report on Careers Guidance for Young People*. Careers England Policy Commentary 18.

‘In the light of Ofsted’s damning report earlier this autumn, will the Minister assure the House that further steps will be taken to ensure that the transfer of the duty to schools leads to an improvement in careers advice and guidance?’

In response, Matthew Hancock stated that:

‘... high-quality careers advice... must be delivered by people who understand how to inspire and mentor young people to enter careers that will interest them.’

He later added:

‘The best way to solve careers advice is not to insist on a bureaucratic system of requirements, but to ensure that people in the workplace are closer to education and that schools communicate with employers, so that those who deliver careers advice understand the careers on which they will be advising.’

A Conservative MP (Damian Hinds) then asked:

‘Does the Minister share my experience that it is quite unusual to hear someone of my age spontaneously talking about the excellent careers advice they received, and even rarer to meet someone who was in the job that they were once advised was for them?’

In response, Matthew Hancock noted that:

‘Many people were mentored by those who inspired them and from whom they learned a lot. Ensuring that all children have such relationships with people in the sort of careers that they want to enter is an important part of strengthening social mobility.’

Again, the clear implication is that ‘careers advice’ should be provided by employers and people in jobs, not by careers professionals.

12. **Conclusion.** The emphasis placed by Ministers on aspiration and inspiration would be widely welcomed by Careers England members and the wider careers community, as would the notion that employers and people in jobs have important contributions to make in this respect. Members would also, however, emphasise that:

- (a) such contributions should be integrated into a coherent and developmental careers programme, including careers education within the curriculum, managed by a careers professional;
- (b) this programme should include face-to-face interviews with careers professionals, who have been trained in career guidance skills, practise under a code of ethics, and have knowledge of the full range of courses and occupations;¹³

¹³ In this respect, it is worth noting the evidence that it is not low aspirations, but misaligned aspirations, that lead young people to become NEET. See Yates, S., Harris, A., Sabates, R. & Staff, J. (2010). Early

- (c) the overall careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) in a school should be quality-assured through a CEIAG quality award which is nationally validated through the Quality in Careers Standard (as recommended by the Education Select Committee, and as already being done by many schools in the country) (see <http://www.careersengland.org.uk/quality.php>).

None of these points is evident in any of the Ministerial statements analysed above. Instead, the consistent impression given is that all effective interventions can be provided by employers and people in jobs. Implicitly, careers professionals and career education programmes have been written out of the script.

12. This gives a very different flavour to the ‘culture change’ recommended by the National Careers Council. The NCC stated that ‘the career development profession clearly has a key role to play and the profession is changing rapidly’ (p.4). In general, however, its proposed ‘culture change’ was described in broad and vague terms, with no clear criteria for measuring whether it had taken place, so permitting the concept to be interpreted by the Government in whatever way it wished. From the analysis in this paper, it would seem that its interpretation omits any role for the careers profession.¹⁴

13. If this is the case, it represents a major volte-face on the part of the Government. When John Hayes was the responsible Minister, he stated that:

‘I am clear that we need to restore a focus on specialist expertise in careers guidance for young people.’¹⁵

In support of this principle, John Hayes cited the Browne Report’s ‘very clear recommendations’ that careers advice should:

‘... be delivered by certified careers professionals who are well informed, benefit from continued training and professional development and whose status in schools is respected and valued.’¹⁶

More broadly, John Hayes stated:

occupational aspirations and fractured transitions: a study of entry into ‘NEET’ status in the UK. *Journal of Social Policy*, 40(3): 513-534.

¹⁴ Yet to date the NCC has issued no statement questioning the Government’s interpretation of the concept. Instead, the Chair of the NCC, Deirdre Hughes, has welcomed the Government’s Career Action Plan as ‘a major step forward in the right direction’ (*Careers Matters*, Issue 1.2, October 2013, p.6). For a critical analysis of other limitations of the Plan, see Watts, A.G. (2013). *Ofsted Thematic Review and Government Action Plan*. Careers England Policy Commentary 23.

¹⁵ John Hayes in speech to Institute of Career Guidance Annual Conference, Belfast, 4 November 2010.

¹⁶ Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance (2010). *Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education*, pp.29-30. Cited by John Hayes in speech to Institute of Career Guidance Annual Conference, Belfast, 4 November 2010.

‘I want the careers profession to return to a position of public recognition, prestige and value where guidance is seen as an essential part of life and experience. It is too important for us to do anything other.’¹⁷

He subsequently referred to ‘the renaissance of the guidance profession’.¹⁸ Accordingly, Ministers made a commitment to ‘implement the recommendations of the Careers Profession Task Force’.¹⁹ This included ‘looking to the Careers Profession Alliance to establish common professional standards and a code of ethics for careers professionals’.²⁰ John Hayes indicated that he favoured this work leading to a ‘licence to practise’.²¹ Careers professionals have since come together to form the Career Development Institute in order to pursue these tasks, on which it is making encouraging progress. It seems, however, that with the change of Minister, these efforts are now being ignored and at risk of being marginalised and undermined.

14. It may be that this omission represents an oversight rather than a deliberate policy change. The reference to ‘professionally-qualified advisers’ in relation to provision for adults (para.8 above) provides some possible grounds for hope in this respect. If so, it would be helpful if a strong statement to this effect could be made in the public domain as soon as possible, and clearly reflected in the revised Statutory Guidance and in subsequent Ministerial statements.

¹⁷ John Hayes in 13th Annual Lecture, International Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby, 16 June 2011.

¹⁸ John Hayes in speech to Institute of Career Guidance Annual Conference, Brighton, 4 November 2011.

¹⁹ Careers Profession Task Force (2010). *Towards a Strong Careers Profession: an Independent Report to the Department for Education*. The Task Force, chaired by Dame Ruth Silver, was set up in January 2010 by the previous Labour Government. Under the new Coalition Government, an explicit statement that ‘The Government ... have accepted the recommendations of the Careers Profession Task Force’ was made by Nick Gibb in response to Parliamentary Questions 36925-36926 from Jenny Chapman MP, 14 March 2011.

²⁰ John Hayes in speech to Institute of Career Guidance Annual Conference, Belfast, 4 November 2010. The Careers Profession Alliance had been formed by a number of careers professional associations in the UK. John Hayes noted that its work to date – to which ‘our public policy initiative’ had acted ‘as a catalyst’ – represented ‘an unprecedented degree of coherence on professional standards, training and accreditation’. In particular, he reported that: ‘The careers profession is committed to creating one professional body which will set standards, maintain a professional register leading to a licence to practise, and provide a range of professional services’. This gave him confidence that ‘the profession is up for it, in the popular parlance... We have yet to reach the destination, but we are making significant steps along the road’ (John Hayes in Education Bill Committee, 29 March 2011).

²¹ John Hayes in Education Bill Committee, 29 March 2011. Also mentioned in speech to Institute of Career Guidance Annual Conference, Belfast, 4 November 2010.

Annex: Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission Report

A.1 The report of the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission²², chaired by Alan Milburn, recognises the arguments that led the Coalition Government to abolish the Connexions service and devolve obligations to schools. But it notes that:

‘... the Government has devolved the responsibilities without devolving the resources to enable schools to provide good careers advice to pupils’.

It adds:

‘The chickens are already coming home to roost’ (p.195).

In particular, it cites evidence of:

- *Inadequate levels of provision.* It reports Ofsted’s finding that three-quarters of schools are failing to provide adequate careers advice.²³
- *Poor-quality advice.* It refers in particular to limited face-to-face provision and weak coverage of vocational training and apprenticeship options.

It notes that these gaps in careers provision have particularly acute implications for disadvantaged young people, leaving them:

‘... at risk of missing out on the information and networks they need to make the right career choices’ (p.196).

A.2 The report places particular emphasis on the importance of positive long-term relationships between schools and businesses. It also comments more specifically on whether schools are giving sufficient priority to work experience, and notes that:

‘... disadvantaged children are more likely to struggle to get access to high-quality opportunities’ (p.197).

On levels of work experience, it reports:

‘... anecdotal evidence of a reduction for under-16s following the removal of the duty on schools to provide it’ (p.197).²⁴

It states its belief

²² Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (2013). *State of the Nation 2013: Social Mobility and Child Poverty in Great Britain.*

²³ Ofsted (2013). *Going in the Right Direction? Careers Guidance in Schools from September 2012.*

²⁴ In fact, the duty was to provide work-related learning.

‘... that it is important for the Government and schools to rethink the nature and role of work experience (what, when, for whom)’ (p.197).

It also suggests that:

‘... Government could further incentivise schools to ensure that students have high quality, early engagement with school (as well as wider employability skills) by addressing a key weakness in its destinations data – by improving the quality of data on the destinations of students not continuing in education’ (p.197).

A.3 In summary, the report recommends that:

‘... the UK Government should provide additional resources to schools to provide high quality careers services, whilst schools should ensure that they build long-term relationships with businesses and improve work-experience opportunities and Ofsted should assess and report on their performance’ (p.203).

It is important to note that the proposal that the Government should provide unspecified ‘additional resources’ to schools differs from the Education Select Committee’s recommendation that the Department for Education should provide around £120 per annum to the National Careers Service to carry out a capacity-building and brokerage role in relation to schools²⁵. Recently, Graham Stuart (Chair of the Education Select Committee) has described careers guidance for young people as being ‘the elephant in Michael Gove’s red box’, and has noted that DfE funding for the NCS is currently confined to £4.7 million (for the helpline), representing 0.008% of the DfE’s total budget: ‘that figure should shame the DfE into action’.²⁶

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²⁵ House of Commons Education Committee (2013). *Careers Guidance for Young People: the Impact of the New Duty on Schools*. HC 632-1. London: Stationery Office.

²⁶ *Times Educational Supplement*, 7 October 2013.