

## Careers England Policy Commentary 7

*This is the seventh in a 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 Leitch Implementation Plan

1. *Summary.* From a career guidance perspective, the key points in the Leitch implementation plan<sup>1</sup> are:

- The main proposals made in the Leitch Report<sup>2</sup> regarding the establishment of a new careers service for adults are to be implemented.
- However, the prominence given both to the word ‘career’ and to the role of the new service seem to have been weakened somewhat.
- The implementation plan adds little detail to the proposals, but emphasises the links with Jobcentre Plus and with the new Skills Accounts.
- It also sets a broad timetable for implementation: that aspects of the new service are to be trialled during 2008-09, and that the service is to be fully operational in 2010-11.

The next steps are likely to be consultations on the preparation of a detailed specification for the new service, to be published by the end of 2007, and trials of elements of the proposed ‘menu’ of service provision – including the ‘skills health check’.

2. *Prominence of ‘career’.* The concept of ‘career’ appears rather less prominently in the implementation plan than in the Leitch Report. Whereas the word was used 150 times in the report, it is used 58 times in the plan. Many of the latter references relate directly to the new careers service; there are also references to the importance of skills as a route to career progression. But the use of the term ‘career’ as a core theme to encompass aspiration, progression, and linking learning to work, is less evident. Certainly the plan argues for a culture change to achieve the required ‘skills revolution’:

‘Changing the culture in this country in relation to skills is at the heart of that revolution. We need to embed the value of skills in our culture in a way it has never been before. We need individuals to feel that it is their responsibility to improve their skills throughout their lives, because of the benefits that will bring for them and their families’ (p.7).

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<sup>1</sup> Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (2007). *World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England*. Cm 7181. London: The Stationery Office.

<sup>2</sup> Leitch Review of Skills (2006). *Prosperity for All in the Global Economy – World Class Skills*. London: The Stationery Office.

The argument is later elaborated further:

‘We want to create a nation where all adults, whether employees, employers, self-employed or non-employed, understand that training is the only reliable route to sustained employability, progression and success over a lifetime. For those both in and out of the labour market, we want to create a culture where everyone knows and understands that what people can do is not set for life, it is “in our hands” and all of us can, through up-skilling, take control and change our lives for the better’ (p.35).

It could be contended that the need for a ‘career culture’ would be the clearest and most succinct way of describing this sought change. The plan promotes the concept, but not the term.

3. *The new careers service for adults.* The plan indicates that the main proposals made in the Leitch Report regarding the establishment of a new careers service for adults are to be implemented. More specifically, it announces that:

‘We will merge the information and advice services of learndirect and nextstep providers into a new universal adult careers service in England, working in partnership with Jobcentre Plus. It will promote individuals’ management of their own learning, skills and career progression and support learners to get the most out of their learning and encourage progression’ (p.28).

4. The goal of the new service is stated in these terms:

‘Our long term ambition behind creating a universal adult careers service, working with Jobcentre Plus, is to ensure that everyone is able to access the help they need to take stock of where they are in achieving their goals and ambitions, and to get the support they need to advance themselves and achieve their full potential’ (p.28).

This is to include ‘ongoing support and follow-up for individuals’ (p.29).

5. The plan recognises that ‘many people face multiple barriers to gaining new skills and better jobs’ (p.28). However (in contrast to Connexions), this is to be addressed not by establishing a ‘holistic’ service, but through effective signposting:

‘The service will ... signpost individuals to other services, where they have other needs than those related to skills alone, for example child care or advice on employment rights’ (p.29).

6. Particularly in relation to ‘those who are low skilled, in financial need and who do not see learning as relevant to them’, the new adult careers service will operate in close partnership with others:

‘We will work through libraries, voluntary and community organisations and learning centres. We will utilise Union Learning Representatives and continue to foster networks of learning champions or learning ambassadors, particularly in deprived areas, to promote the service and to help it reach hard to reach groups’ (p.29).

7. The principles underpinning the new service are to apply also to embedded services within learning providers:

‘We will ensure that the information and advice services of all FE colleges and training providers are aligned with the objectives and quality standards of the adult careers service’ (p.28).

The underlying concern is that not only the new careers service but related information and advice services should be as seamless as possible from the perspective of the user. Thus one of the key features of the new service is to be:

‘A “no wrong door” approach – the quality and appropriateness of the support should be the same, irrespective of whether the initial contact is with a jobcentre, a learning provider or the careers service itself’ (p.29).

In other words, the information and advice provision of learning providers and of Jobcentre Plus is not to be *part* of the new service, but is to be closely co-ordinated with it.

8. The links with Jobcentre Plus are emphasised strongly in the plan. The new careers service is rarely mentioned without a qualifying reference to these links. In particular, the new careers service is seen as having a role in relation to JCP’s work with ‘workless people’:

‘We envisage that jobseekers identified by their Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser as requiring further skills support will be referred to a careers adviser for a skills health check’ (p.31; see also p.34).

But in terms of the more general delivery of customer service in support of the skills strategy, JCP appears to be given greater prominence than the new careers service:

‘... Skills Accounts, Jobcentre Plus and the new adult careers service will all play vital roles, working together in a mutually supportive way to deliver seamless customer service. In the longer-term the most important building blocks will be the national network of Jobcentre Plus offices, working in close partnership with the LSC to secure high quality, employment-focused training in each local area, plus the new adult careers service’ (p.32).

The sequencing here could be read as suggesting that the new careers service will be as often as possible be co-located in JCP offices, partly on cost-saving grounds<sup>3</sup>; certainly it does not suggest significant investment in stand-alone premises. In addition, while the new careers service and JCP are to be co-ordinated, and possibly co-located, rather than integrated, the possibility of fuller integration appears not to be ruled out in the longer term: it is proposed that the new UK Commission for Employment and Skills will:

‘... advise in 2010 on whether there should be further institutional change to secure better integrated employment and skills services’ (p.26).

9. The other linkage strongly emphasised in the plan is with Skills Accounts (what Leitch termed ‘Learner Accounts’). These accounts are viewed as being ‘the way into learning and up-skilling for those aged 19 and over, other than in relation to HE’ (the other exception is those ‘being supported to train in the workplace’, where in principle no money changes hands) (p.27). The accounts are seen as ‘our most important mechanism for engaging customers’ (p.32). As part of this:

‘When they open a Skills Account, individuals will be able to access the full range of adult information, advice and guidance services in the new universal adult careers service’ (p.11).

The implication that access to the new careers service will be limited to those who have opened a Skills Account seems seriously misconceived. The question needs to be asked: will those considering entry to higher education, or career-path changes that do not require enrolment on fee-paying courses, be debarred from using the service unless they open an account that is of no immediate use to them? The sequencing appears back to front: it would be much more plausible and logical to suggest that adults might be encouraged to contact the service in the first instance to explore their needs and plans, and that the service might then, where appropriate, encourage them to open a Skills Account (including information about any financial entitlements they may have).

10. The plan for the new careers service is thus more strongly linked to, and to some extent subordinated to, Jobcentre Plus on the one hand and Skills Accounts on the other, than in the Leitch Report. There appear also to be potential tensions between the two sets of linkages. Investment into the Skills Accounts may come from Government, from employers, or from individuals, but the expectation is that:

‘At intermediate and higher levels of qualification, where the private returns are greater, we expect employers and learners to contribute more to the costs of learning’ (p.17).

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<sup>3</sup> An impression reinforced by a statement made by John Denham (Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills) in the House of Commons: ‘... there will be the closest possible co-operation between Jobcentre Plus and the new careers service. Indeed, in many cases they will be co-located’ (*Hansard*, 26 July 2007, col.1044).

Many such customers are unlikely to view Jobcentre Plus as a service with which they are accustomed to engage, or would find attractive. An over-identification of the new careers service with Jobcentre Plus as currently constructed could deter some of these customers from using its services.

11. The Leitch Report's notion of a universal entitlement to a free 'Skills Health Check', to 'identify an individual's skill needs and strengths' (Leitch, p.110), is reflected in the plan but given less prominence. It is now to be part of:

'A menu of services comprising personalised assessment through a skills health check, advice on skills and employment, Skills Accounts and continuing support for progression' (p.29).

This is in line with one of the design principles that emerged from the information, advice and guidance (IAG) policy review<sup>4</sup> (which is not explicitly referred to in the plan).

12. The place of the new service in relation to the proposed national campaign for promoting skills and learning is somewhat weaker than in the Leitch Report. The report saw the service as 'leading' the campaign (Leitch, p.110); whereas the plan views the service as supporting the campaign already launched in July 2007, which is being led by the Learning and Skills Council ([www.inourhands.lsc.gov.uk](http://www.inourhands.lsc.gov.uk)) and which is 'planned to run for many years' (p.35). The summary of the Government's responses to the Leitch recommendations on the DIUS website (<http://www.dius.gov.uk/leitch-summary.pdf>) attempts to reconcile these statements by commenting that: 'The new adult careers service will lead the task of taking the skills campaign messages out to hard to reach groups'.

13. The plan makes no comment on the Leitch Report's proposal that the new careers service 'should operate under the already successful and well-known learndirect brand' (Leitch, p.109). The issue of the respective roles of Learndirect and of the LSC in relation to the operation of the new service is also deferred. The fact that the LSC is mentioned in the plan as one of the 'owners' of the trials for the new service (along with DIUS, DWP and JCP) but not as one of the 'owners' of the operational service (DIUS and DWP) (p.69) could be interpreted as leaving the options open. These include the issue of whether the new careers service will be run as a single government service or will be managed through sub-contractual arrangements, as with the current Nextstep provision. This is an issue of particular concern to Careers England members, as are (if sub-contracting is adopted) the number of geographical contracts that are to be tendered and the areas these will cover – all of which are still to be determined..

14. There is no indication of the level of funding to be provided for the new careers service. In line with the Leitch Report, however, it will include an outcome-related element. This is not discussed in the plan, but the summary on the DIUS website (see para.12 above) specifies it in detail:

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.iagreview.org.uk/>

‘Funding arrangements for the new unified adult careers service will involve incentives to increase the take up of services by low, no-skilled and harder-to-reach groups, users entering jobs or training, and users progressing in employment’.

15. *Train to Gain*. Alongside Learner (now Skills) Accounts, the other main mechanism envisaged by Leitch for moving from a supply-led to a demand-led learning system was Train to Gain. Leitch recommended that, with a few exceptions, all adult skills funding should be routed through these two mechanisms by 2010 (Leitch, p.111). The plan states that:

‘We endorse this direction of travel. However, given budget constraints, we believe that doing so by 2010 would create unacceptable risks to the performance and stability of colleges and training providers, which in turn would damage the quality of education and training offered to learners’ (p.18).

Nonetheless, it announces that Train to Gain employer training funds are expected to rise from around £440m in 2007/08 to over £900m in 2010/11 (p.18). The section on Train to Gain (pp.56-58), however, focuses solely on brokerage between employers and learning providers. There is no reference to the importance of information and guidance to involve the learner in the process, and link the learning to the learner’s career progression. The new careers service could help skills brokers in the design and delivery of such information and guidance, alongside union learning representatives and others.

16. *Services for young people*. There is also no reference to the relationship of the new adult careers service to services for young people. The plan includes an extensive 7-page section on ‘equipping young people with the skills they need for work and life’ (Section 5). This covers a wide range of topics, including 14-19 diplomas, apprenticeships, work-related education, enterprise education, and raising the participation age. The only reference to career guidance here is a very general statement that reforms are being introduced focusing ‘on supporting young learners in choosing among a range of options and in finding appropriate provision’ (p.66). The word ‘career’ is conspicuous by its absence throughout the section.

17. Although not mentioned in the plan, the latest draft of the new Quality Standards for Young People’s Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) requires that ‘young people reaching the upper age limit for young people’s information, advice and guidance services know about careers services for adults and how to access them and support is provided to facilitate a smooth transition’.<sup>5</sup>

18. *Timetable*. The plan sets out a broad action plan for implementation. This indicates that aspects of the new adult careers service are to be trialled during 2008-09, and that the service is to be fully operational in 2010-11 (p.69).

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<sup>5</sup> As presented to the Steering Group for the production of the Standards, July 2007. The final version is expected to be presented to Ministers for approval shortly.

19. The next steps are likely to be consultations on the preparation of a detailed specification for the new service, to be published by the end of 2007, and trials of elements of the proposed 'menu' of service provision – including the 'skills health check'.

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