

**The Economic and Social Health of the Nation:
The Leitch Report and the Distinctive Contribution of
Specialist Career Guidance Providers**

A personal paper for policy-makers in England
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1. Introduction

Alongside my role as Director General of City & Guilds, I have been pleased to serve as the elected Chairman of the Board of Directors for Careers England, the Trade Association of specialist career guidance providers across England. This paper offers my reflections as I leave this post in order to take up the chairmanship of the World Skills Partnership Board. It articulates my firm belief in the crucial contribution of specialist career advice and guidance for people of all ages to the future economic and social success of the nation - as now recognised and emphasised by the Leitch Report¹.

I believe that every part of the UK needs effective, well-informed and professional career information, advice and guidance services for all age groups.

Regrettably, within the UK the foundations are currently weakest in England. This paper accordingly adds my voice to the growing concerns that there is urgent and important work to be undertaken in England to redress the increasingly apparent deficiencies in career guidance provision.

2. The Leitch Report and the Context In England

From a career guidance perspective, the key features of the important report from Lord Leitch are:

- 'Career', linked to 'aspiration' and 'progression', is a prominent theme within the report.
- The report recommends a new universal careers service for adults in England.
- The new service would integrate 'learndirect' and 'nextstep', under the 'learndirect' brand.
- It would also have strong links with Jobcentre Plus, including co-location and an integrated information system.
- It would lead a sustained national campaign to promote skills development, backed by outreach activities within communities.
- The contract with the new service would be managed by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).
- The funding would include output-related elements, related to participation in learning and to progression.
- It would be available to all adults, who in particular would all be entitled to a free 'Skills Health Check'.
- The objective of sustained employment and progression would apply to the new careers service and also to all employment and skills services, including Jobcentre Plus.
- The importance of career guidance for young people is underlined, and it is suggested that the new service should learn from those elsewhere in the UK (*all of which are all-age, and about which I say more below*).
- The importance of other sources of careers advice, including private providers, is recognised.

If these impressive recommendations are to be implemented, the former structure in England of a careers service for young people and an IAG framework for adults (which existed prior to the implementation of elements of the Learning & Skills Act 2000) would, ironically, have been replaced by an IAG framework for young people and a careers service for adults. I believe there is no logical rationale for this reversal.

Lord Leitch's recommendations primarily concern adults, reflecting the brief of his review team. But the principles of the Leitch Report need to be followed through for young people too. Unless more robust foundations are set in place in the crucial teenage years of learning, we will not secure the world-class skills required for future prosperity; properly directed investment in the 11-19 youth market will pay great dividends in the adult years.

The recent debates, concerning the potential benefits of raising the age of leaving learning to 18, add weight to the need to ensure that crucial decisions on learning options (and providers) are supported with impartiality and knowledge of the

¹ Leitch Review of Skills (2006). *Prosperity for All in the Global Economy – World Class Skills*. London: The Stationery Office.

labour market. England's current provision of support for such choices varies too much from locality to locality. It is, at best, patchy.

My conviction, therefore, is that England urgently needs more and better resourced impartial career information, advice and guidance provision for all age groups across the nation:

- Estimates by researchers and futurists suggest that each of us will have to re-skill or up-skill ourselves between 5 and 10 times during our lengthening working life, if we are to maximise our future employability. Both young people and mobile adults will therefore require access to reliable labour market information that properly identifies future employment opportunities, based upon sound data and projections, if they are to make informed choices and if, as a nation, we are to minimise skills shortages.
- The core purpose of our tertiary education system, and particularly the further education and work-based learning systems, should be to provide learning and skills for employment. In fulfilling that core purpose, it is essential that the system is well informed on future employment needs and requirements. Any successful market depends on informed demand: the labour market is no different. Individuals need high-quality information on labour market opportunities, change and development, in order to make informed choices; learning providers and funders need high-quality labour market information in order to set priorities, allocate resources and shape provision.

High-quality labour market intelligence, supported by high-quality guidance and support, are both essential. Simply providing the one without the other will not suffice.

3. Two Proposals on Key Priorities To Address Future Skills Needs

From the perspective of the crucial contribution of specialist career advice and guidance providers, I wish to make two proposals on key priorities to help the nation address future skills needs:

3.1. Maximising youth success 11-25

Employers claim that young people coming (successfully) through the academic system are less and less well prepared for the world of work, that their generic skills in communication, number and collaborative working are poor, and they have too little capacity to apply their learning to real-world problems.

Investment in the 11-19 phases of learning will bring significant benefits in post-19 continued learning, including enhanced progression and achievement, with reduced 'drop out' and the subsequent waste of financial resources and human talent.

The ages of 18/19 are no longer the 'natural' point of transition. The early twenties are also years of increasing complexity for many young people; a unified career support strategy would reduce the likelihood of those years becoming 'lost' for too many.

The Social Exclusion Unit Final Report on 'Transitions'² conclusively makes the point:

"The transition to adulthood is becoming more complex, longer and more risky. It is a time when young people enter a new and exciting world with new rights – and responsibilities. It is also a time when they take decisions that will affect the rest of their lives....."

² Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (November 2005). *Transitions: Young Adults with Complex Needs* Social Exclusion Unit Final Report. London: The Stationery Office.

This report looks at the lives of 16- to 25- year-olds with complex needs...policies and programmes are often targeted at a specific age group or specific problem: there are relatively few examples of public services that address the needs of 16- to 25-year-olds in the round or ensure an effective transition from youth services to adult services.....

Many policies assume that youth ends at 18 or 19 but the reality is that for some disadvantaged young people – teenage parents for example – this may be when support is most needed. Many of the issues that are thought of as the problems of teenagers are in fact as bad (or worse) for those in their early twenties, on whom much less policy has been focused – the phenomenon of ‘the invisible early twenties’.”

3.2. Labour market information and guidance

Consumer and economic research confirms that one of the key factors in the successful operation of any market is informed demand. The labour market is no different; ensuring the availability of labour with the right skills at the right time is essential for its optimal operation.

This is fundamentally dependent upon choices made by young people and adults, and the availability of sufficient training places on the supply side. Yet, to impact on the forward planning inside a college, or to be able to help a 17- or a 42-year-old make an important learning or career choice, these data need to be translated into accessible information available in their language, through the media they access, at times when they need it.

The technology to create such an Internet-based system is now widely available and understood. That system could then provide the key background information service to support locally-tailored and locally-based information, advice and guidance services to offer additional interpersonal guidance and support where and when required.

4. A National Strategy for Career Advice and Guidance

The economic and social health of our nation demands that we make the best possible use of the distinctive contribution of specialist providers of career advice and guidance - both to the development of skills for career planning amongst the 11-19 age range, and in career decision-making by adults. England needs an effective national strategy to secure this, in every locality, to the highest standards.

A clearly defined all-age strategy is essential because individuals are at all times on a journey, a pathway through their lives. Their needs are diverse, not single-faceted, nor neatly ordered and sequential. As the Social Exclusion Unit report on ‘Transitions’³ has demonstrated, choices and transitional changes do not conveniently occur at discrete points which fit in with age-segmented public services. An all-age strategy would build upon existing successes, such as the effective tracking systems established universally across England under Connexions which should quickly be extended to cover at least the 16-24 age-group. Better and more personalised services are required to meet the public’s needs throughout their journey.

Promoting achievement and economic well-being for all (irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity and location) will be crucial to ensure that all citizens are enabled to maximise their talents and utilise these for their own, their families’ and the common good in 21st century Britain. The members of Careers England have extensive experience of making important contributions to these key outcomes for young people and adults.

We have strong links with other national organisations (such as the Institute of Career Guidance, the National Association of Connexions Partners, the Association for Careers Education and Guidance, the Association of Colleges, the Association of

³ Ibid.

Learning Providers and UCAS). Close contact and meaningful dialogue with government departments and agencies (including the LSC, DfES, DWP and 'learndirect') has been established.

The recent increase in the publicly-voiced concerns about both the quality and the accessibility of support for young adults in some parts of England (most notably from the House of Lords Science & Technology Select Committee⁴ and the CBI⁵) surely calls for us to learn the lessons from the Celtic nations. We urge policy makers in England to follow up the Leitch Report⁶ by questioning why the very different approaches adopted in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales (where all-age specialist career advice and guidance services have been successfully established) have not been openly assessed and considered in England. This question needs to be addressed with urgency.

England now needs to establish a single review of its separate strategies for career advice and guidance service provision for young people and for adults so that a clear all-age strategy is set which is fit for purpose: enabling all four home nations to meet the longer-term skills needs required for the economic and social health of the UK.

4.1. For Young People

The National Audit Office⁷ reported upon the Connexions Service in 2004 and found that:

"Connexions provides a good quality service to young people who meet Personal Advisers, but not all young people who would benefit from advice are receiving it".

Following this NAO report, the Public Accounts Committee⁸ of the House of Commons in 2004 considered evidence on the Connexions Service which was critical of overall standards of careers provision for young people. The Committee concluded:

"Connexions should work with schools to help them deliver a good standard of careers education. The quality of schools provision for careers education is very variable. For example, half of the schools surveyed by the National Audit Office claimed they had insufficient time to develop the curriculum to incorporate careers education. Connexions partnerships should identify local gaps or weaknesses in provision and appoint a Personal Adviser to work specifically with schools on developing the careers curriculum".

As indicated above⁹, the House of Lords Science & Technology Committee has even more recently been especially critical of elements of careers provision, arguing that its lack of universal coverage - due to withdrawal of support for the 'average ability and above' - has led to poor choices of courses of study and career pathways amongst young people whose talents are so important to the nation's future health and prosperity. Regrettably this leads me to conclude that current provision can only be assessed as variable or patchy. As a statutory public service, careers support for young people must meet the quality of the best, everywhere; it should not be a post-code lottery.

⁴ Concern about the erosion of careers services for young people in the recent past up to 2007 continues to mount. Recently, the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee (2006) stated: 'In general, the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) careers advice offered in schools appears not to be of sufficient quality, and the Connexions Service is not well adapted to the needs of high achieving students. The government has largely neglected careers advice in Next Steps, and this omission should be remedied at the earliest opportunity' [*Science Teaching in Schools*, pp.18-19. HL Paper 257. London: The Stationery Office].

⁵ The Confederation of British Industry argued in a press release on 20.11.06 that there is a compelling argument for 'a desperately-needed, new professional careers advisory service for all students and adults ... providing vital information, advice and guidance to young people and adults'.

⁶ Whilst the Leitch Report makes no direct comment on whether careers services should be all-age or not, it does suggest that the new adult careers service in England should learn 'from those elsewhere in the UK' (p.22), all of which it elsewhere recognises as being 'aimed at people of all ages' (p.108).

⁷ National Audit Office (2004). *Department for Education and Skills Connexions Service: Advice and Guidance for All Young People*. Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General. HC 484 Session 2003-2004: 31 March 2004 (p.31).

⁸ House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts. 48th Report of Session 2003-04 (p.5).

⁹ See footnote 5.

The recent and welcome expansion of enterprise education and work-related learning, together with the introduction of specialised Diplomas at 13+ (where the need for employer engagement and robust impartial career advice and guidance are integral to their success), further reinforces the case for urgent action to improve career support to be taken at strategic levels within Government. If young people are to be enabled to consider on merit the new specialised Diploma options at 14+, there must be universal access to information supported by impartial guidance (informed by the labour market) from the outset of the secondary school years for all young people.

Independent reviews of the all-age services in Scotland¹⁰ and Wales¹¹ have contrasted markedly with the largely negative findings of the Government's 'end-to-end review' of careers education and guidance for young people in England¹². Yet no open assessment has taken place of the case for an all-age service in England; the terms of reference of the 'end-to-end review' excluded it from consideration.

It is of concern that today there is no published national specification for the future provision from 1.4.2008 in England of how the current statutory duty of the Secretary of State (SoS) for Education & Skills will be delivered in respect of a 'careers service'¹³ for young people. The lack of such a national specification also raises doubts about the effective discharge of the inter-linked duty by all publicly-funded schools in England¹⁴ to provide access for 'careers advisers' delivering the SoS's statutory duty, so that all young people are assured of access to impartial and comprehensive information on all post-16 learning and work options, routes and providers.

Public accountability of how these crucial statutory duties are being discharged is open to question, as apparently no records of 'careers advice' provided for young people are now maintained (according to a recent Parliamentary Question¹⁵).

Now is also surely the time for the statutory duty placed upon all publicly-funded schools to have in place a policy and programme of 11-16 careers education¹⁶ for all of their students to be extended to cover all 16-19 learning providers and their learners.

In the immediate future, the absence of both a national specification for the discharge of the statutory 'careers service' duty and of a continuing duty to provide careers education to all in post-16 learning, coupled with the existing separation of support services in England for adults (aged 19+) from the currently horizontally structured young people's Connexions service, could bring increased problems of patchy coverage and post-code lottery of provision for young people. This is at a time when enhanced learning and skills support provision is widely accepted as essential for the health of our economy, and when moves are growing apace to involve all 16-19 year-olds in appropriate continued learning.

The 47 Connexions Services (established on boundaries coterminous with the LSC areas) are at present going through a transition by 2008 to form part of Children's Services in 150 local authority areas in England, as determined by *Youth Matters: Next Steps* (DfES, 2006).

¹⁰ Watts, A.G. (2005). *Careers Scotland: Progress and Potential*. Glasgow: Careers Scotland.

¹¹ Moulson, R. & Prail, S. (2004). *Careers Wales Review – Final Report*. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government.

¹² Department for Education and Skills (2005). *End to End Review of Careers Education and Guidance*. London: DfES.

¹³ The 1973 Employment and Training Act, as amended by the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1994, requires the SoS to provide a 'careers service' for young people including advice on all options post-16.

¹⁴ The 1997 Education Act placed duties upon all publicly-funded schools to provide programmes of careers education, which include the right of access for 'careers advisers' delivering the SoS's statutory duty to make information available to all students on all learning and work options. This statutory duty of the SoS has been performed under the Connexions service arrangements since the implementation of the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

¹⁵ House of Commons (Hansard), PQ, 25 January 2007: *Mr Boris Johnson*: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what percentage of children aged (a) 13, (b) 14, (c) 15, (d) 16 and (e) 17 years received careers advice at school in the last period for which figures are available. *Beverley Hughes*: Careers advice falls under the wider information advice and guidance (IAG) remit of the Connexions Service. Information on Connexions' interventions with young people is collected centrally, but we do not collect information specifically relating to careers advice given in schools.

¹⁶ The 1997 Education Act (sections 43-45) includes the power for the Secretary of State to extend this duty in respect of careers education to all publicly-funded 16-19 learning providers (schools, colleges and work-based learning providers).

At national level, I believe that steps must not only be taken urgently to put appropriate national specifications in place but also to ensure that open and transparent procurement of the best providers (in terms of value for money, and of offering high-quality and innovative provision) of such support services for young people is implemented in every locality. Providers should be drawn from the public sector, the voluntary & community sector and the private sector; there is also a wealth of evidence that short-term contracting must be avoided as it inherently inhibits the successful outcomes the nation requires.

Unless these issues are addressed, there is a real danger that the creeping 'remunicipalisation' (often by default rather than objective assessment of options and proper procurement) of the career guidance provision for young people will undermine the potential to build the best possible services for all ages in each of England's 150 LA areas and in each of the 9 Regional LSC areas.

4.2. For Adults

The DfES established a national Review of IAG (information, advice and guidance) support in England in 2005. It is now due to report in the spring of this year. Looking to the future, 10 'emerging design principles' have been outlined by the IAG Review Group in a DfES paper (July 2006) and reinforced by the recent "Summary of Progress with the IAG Review" (DfES, 2006). These principles have clearly influenced the Leitch Report. The 10 principles are:

- *1. That a national, coherent and integrated career management/coaching service for adults should be available which promotes a positive, proactive approach to career management and coaching rather than a remedial one*
- *2. The opportunity to make a choice about the nature, level, and type of services taken up should be central to the offer*
- *3. There should be access to a standardised menu of specific activities, clearly stated and supported by a set of service standards and 'publicly-facing' quality assurance arrangements*
- *4. Individuals should be encouraged to dip in and out of the menu of services at different times along a career pathway (with an outreach engagement strategy for harder-to-reach groups)*
- *5. Some services will be available through self-managed activities and some supported/mediated interventions*
- *6. There will be a cost for some services, with a clear indication as to when this cost may not apply (for specific groups)*
- *7. A universal entitlement to an initial 'career health check' should be considered, with more specific supported entitlements for priority target groups, including those for whom guidance may be linked to benefits*
- *8. There should be one public-facing brand and logo (with possible additional strap lines/service descriptors as appropriate)*
- *9. A clear statement of service entitlement to users (stating where services are costed, and who is eligible for free services) should underpin the offer*
- *10. It should be provided by an IAG workforce of competent professional, paraprofessional staff with trained volunteers, with a national, coherent career and CPD structure*

My Board and I warmly support much of the thrust of these emerging principles, and would offer the following comments:

- Principle 1 requires acquisition of 'career management skills' by individuals; this must begin at the statutory school stage.
- Principles 2-6 and 8 require assessment to be available to national quality standards (which principle 3 proposes).
- Principle 5 permits choice of service, or allocation of service, to be 'managed' by the public purse. I suggest that lessons should be learnt from the experience in Scotland of deploying the three-level model of assessment of need: 'self-help', 'assisted' and 'in-depth'.
- Principle 7 is supported by Leitch: I echo that welcome.
- Principle 8 is an essential component if the public is to be fully engaged: evidence from Scotland and Wales supports this conclusively.
- Principle 9 is crucial as it defines what the public has the right to expect.

- Principle 10 will be the key to successful implementation and delivery of the service; capacity and competence are the two sides of this crucial coin.
- Principle 10 in the IAG Review for adults has highly important implications for those supporting 11-19-year-olds too; all workers providing key elements of career advice and guidance must have knowledge of wider personal issues which materially impinge upon the choices people make, and they must as a pre-requisite not simply be competent but excellent in career advice and guidance skills to meet the labour market needs of the nation.

Of over-riding concern, however, is that the absence in England of a clear all-age strategy is resulting today in the separation of strategic direction in England's career advice and guidance services for young people and for adults. Too often there is wasteful duplication, lack of continuity of provision, and patchy rather than effective transition from youth services to adult services. A prime example of disconnection is that the national quality standards for both services are running in different directions.

5. Conclusion: Strategy Is All-Important

My conclusion is that the Government should urgently follow up the Leitch Report (and the forthcoming report of the review of IAG for adults) with the final piece of this crucial jig-saw: that is, how to establish and implement an effective all-age career advice and guidance strategy.

On 8 December 2006, at the first Annual Conference of Lifelong Learning UK, Alan Johnson (Secretary of State for Education and Skills) was asked what vision he had for an all-age career guidance service to support seamless lifelong learning. He replied that Leitch had not decided whether England needs an all-age careers service, but that this was a debate that we needed to have. I agree.

I have no doubt whatsoever that an all-age strategy is an essential prerequisite for economic and social success. An obvious option would be an all-age service for England. The time has now come for this to be rigorously evaluated – alongside alternatives – without partiality; we know that it has proven to be effective elsewhere in the UK. This impartial assessment is now urgent.

England must put in place an effective all-age strategy; if an all-age service is not to be established, then the chosen strategy must be driven by better labour market intelligence, with greater employer engagement, and critically it must secure solid foundations at 11-19 with far more effective transitions from youth to adult services (as the Social Exclusion Unit report rightly advocates in respect of the 16-24 year-old age range).

Evidence from within the UK already cited above, and from across Europe and world-wide, should urgently be assessed. Further key sources to assist such a review include:

- *Career Guidance and Public Policy: Bridging the Gap* (OECD, 2004)
- *Career Guidance: a Handbook for Policy Makers* (OECD, 2004)
- *Careers Education and Guidance in England* (Association of School and College Leaders, Paper 29, October 2006)
- *The Case for Career Guidance* (ICG, January 2007)

Whichever future option is determined for implementation in England, the nation rightly demands best value for the public purse in all publicly-funded services. The economic and social benefits which would accrue are critical for the overall success of the UK's future skills strategy.

The Leitch Report provides a major opportunity and challenge for the Department for Education and Skills. My Board and I believe that it merits an enthusiastic welcome within its own terms of reference, along with urging the Department to apply

its key principles to young people too. The economic role which individuals play is distinctively different from their personal or social role; their economic role is part of their public contribution to the nation's economic health.

We are ready to provide any further information or evidence which may assist policy-makers in this critical work in developing a meaningful all-age strategy in England.

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(February, 2007)