

An Informed Choice: A Road Map for Improving Careers Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) Across the UK



This paper focuses on current policy and practice relating to careers Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) in schools and examines major inconsistencies in provision across the UK, paying particular attention to why this is important for progression into science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) courses and jobs.

The Engineering and Technology Board (ETB) is an independent organisation that promotes the vital role of engineers, engineering and technology in our society and inspires people at all levels to pursue careers in engineering and technology. The ETB partners business and industry, Government and the wider science and engineering community: producing evidence on the state of engineering; and inspiring young people to choose a career in engineering, matching employers' demand for skills.

For more information about the ETB please visit www.etechnology.co.uk



Overview

In order to build a prosperous and successful economy and ensure improved levels of achievement and aspiration across the UK, it is critical that all individuals are able to make informed career choices and that both they and those who advise them, formally or informally, have access to accurate and robust information to help them do so.

This briefing paper focuses on current policy and practice relating to careers Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) in schools, and examines major inconsistencies in provision across the UK, paying particular attention to why this is important for progression into science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) courses and jobs.

The paper examines the success of recent policy changes and calls for a number of improvements including: regular Ofsted monitoring of careers IAG provision; implementation of the recommended priorities for action that emerged from the LLUK & UKCES report Skills Needs and Training Supply for Career Guidance – a Gap Analysis¹; the mandatory provision of careers education as part of Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) lessons in England, as well as improved access to information in primary schools and upwards; and access to resources for teachers, careers advisers and parents to bring careers IAG up to desirable and consistent levels across the board. While this paper focuses on the formal framework for careers IAG we recognise that in this technological age young people also receive multiple messages and access information from a variety of sources and media that may influence career choices.

The current situation

Careers education in schools is a relatively recent development with no UK wide framework currently in place. Prior to the 1970s the role of careers work in schools was confined to interviews and information giving. From the early 1970s it began to be incorporated into the curriculum, although its place there has never been secure.

In 2001 changes to Government policy placed careers IAG in England for 11-19 year olds firmly under the umbrella of the Connexions service, while elements of a wider approach to careers education (but non-statutory) reside within the national curriculum under the subject area of PSHE. Adult careers services in England have been the responsibility of the online Careers Advice Service (formerly Learndirect) with face-to-face services provided by Next Step. Provision in Higher Education (HE) and Further Education (FE) is usually the responsibility of the individual institution; however while most FE colleges have their own careers services many will have received support from Connexions for a number of their students. Wales, Scotland and more recently Northern Ireland

have an all age service which caters both for young people and adults.

Connexions in England has significantly eroded what was previously seen as a universal careers service. Its focus on young people not in employment, education and training (NEETS) coupled with the holistic role of the Connexions Personal Advisor (who may or may not be a professional careers adviser) has arguably weakened the potential of careers services and has seriously reduced the percentage of young people who have access to its services.

A patchwork of provision

The most recent careers education policy shift published in 2006² was a result of the Government's response to the extensive consultation in 2005 'Youth Matters'³. The resulting implementation finally took place in 2008 when the responsibility for IAG was transferred from Connexions to local authorities. In essence this means that the commissioning of IAG, along with the associated funding, has now been devolved from Connexions to local authorities working through children's trusts, which in turn are encouraged to work with schools and FE colleges to agree new arrangements. Under these arrangements, the statutory responsibility of the school or college 'to provide a careers education programme' remains, and they have also been given more control over the delivery of IAG, to the extent that they may even opt out of existing local arrangements where existing provision is poor and where this can be properly evidenced.



1 Skills Needs and Training Supply for Career Guidance – a Gap Analysis Prepared for Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) & UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) by TBR, 21st July 2009.

2 DCSF 'Youth Matters: Next Steps' (March 2006) <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/Youth/youthmatters/youthmatters/>

3 DCSF 'Youth Matters' Green Paper (July 2005) looked into how services for young people could be reformed to produce a coherent and integrated system of support <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/Youth/youthmatters/youthmatters/>



The New Quality Standards from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) setting out the expectations for IAG services in England - that local authorities would commission and manage after they assumed responsibility in April 2008 - were published in October 2007⁴.

A recent study⁵ of the arrangements made by local authorities for the provision of IAG services for young people in England provides insight into the current picture in schools and colleges:

'In broad terms the organisation of the career guidance element of Connexions/IAG services can be divided into three categories. 30% of local authorities (are making provision 'in-house' - i.e. within the local authority); 35% have contracted provision to the preceding Connexions partnership; and 35% have contracted it to another contractor (usually a careers company).'

While it is too early to understand the full impact that the recent transfer of responsibility for IAG to Local Authorities in England has had on schools and on young people seeking advice, it should be noted that just prior to this only 40% of school leavers⁶ were receiving an interview from a Connexions Personal Advisor.

Finally it should also be noted that the funding levels in relation to the provision of career guidance for 13-19s between 2000/01 and 2008/09⁷ had been reduced by 15.5% (excluding inflation).

The challenge for engineering and technology

A perennial challenge faced by the Engineering and Technology Board (ETB) and the community when trying to improve the often negative perception of engineering is supplying and sign posting good quality unbiased careers information about the possible qualification routes and opportunities in engineering and technology to young people and those who influence and advise them.

Current work by the DCSF through the careers strand of the STEM Programme⁸ is beginning to address this issue and promote the high importance of post 14 subject choices via a range of communications methods and websites. These include the STEM Choices resource pack produced by the Centre for Science Education at Sheffield Hallam University with VT Enterprise and the Future Morph website - www.futuremorph.org.

Given the variety of STEM routes that are now available to pre-14 year olds, an early understanding of the subject combinations and alternative qualification routes is particularly

vital in order to avoid huge areas of STEM becoming unachievable (for some) later in life. Furthermore we already know from the recent Engineering and Engineers Brand Monitor (EEBM)⁹ (August 2009) that many advisers are not familiar with the routes and qualifications needed to pursue a career in engineering, with 40% of the advisers surveyed believing that A levels and university is the only route to an engineering career. However, for organisations like the ETB and other professional institutions the current delivery arrangements for providing teachers and advisers with accurate careers information is becoming increasingly complex.

In addition to needing access to high-quality and robust information a key challenge facing organisations and career educators alike is persuading young people and key stakeholders that there is a link between careers education and educational improvement for the individual, and economic improvement for the nation. The National Framework for Careers Education and Guidance in England 11-19¹⁰ affirms this link, stating that:

'Careers education and guidance programmes make a major contribution to preparing young people for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life. They help young people make decisions and manage transitions as learners and workers'.

It goes on to assert that effective careers programmes 'contribute to the economic prosperity of individuals and communities'.

Anthony Barnes and David Andrews¹¹ put forward practical suggestions for enhancing quality in careers education and guidance in the curriculum, outlining the personal benefits and possible outcomes of good careers education in the following terms:

'Choosing a career step can be seen as a creative act of self expression. At its best, careers work raises the aspirations of young people to realistically challenging levels, helps them to define success in their own terms and fosters their autonomy so that they can gain greater control over their own destinies.'

4 DCSF IAG Quality Standards October 2007 http://www.cegnet.co.uk/files/CEGNET0001/ManagingCEG/QualityStandardsforIAG/quality_standards_young_people.pdf

5 McGowan, A., Watts, A.G. & Andrews, D. (2009). Local Variations: a Follow-Up Study of New Arrangements for Connexions/Careers/IAG Services for Young People in England. Reading CfBT Education Trust.

6 Watts, A.G. (2008). The partnership model for careers education and guidance: rise, decline - and fall? Career Research and Development, 20, 4-8.

7 A response to a parliamentary question in June 2008; for more information see McGowan et al. (2009) p. 20

8 <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/stem/>

9 EEBM www.eteach.co.uk

10 DfES The National Framework for Careers Education and Guidance in England 11-19 (2003) <http://dev.cegnet.co.uk/resource/content/files/651.pdf>

11 Barnes, A & Andrews, D (1995). Developing Careers Education and Guidance in the Curriculum, p.6, London, David Fulton.



Box 1: Corroborating evidence for change

Despite clear statements about the need for continuous and progressive careers programmes in the National Framework for Careers Education and Guidance in England 11-19¹² there is a wide range of evidence that supports the view that careers IAG in England could still benefit from considerable strengthening:

The recent Panel on Fair Access to the Professions¹³ final report includes a number of recommendations proposing a radical re-think of careers IAG services in England including: schools and colleges being given the sole responsibility for managing their own services from primary age; access to ring fenced funding; clear support and information for parents about routes into HE; and inspections of the careers services provided in schools and colleges by Ofsted. The primary aim of the recommendations is to aid social mobility and improve equality of opportunity; some of these measures could also foster an environment where young people are exposed to a wider range of careers from an early age (including STEM).

Similarly the 2008 Rathbone/Nuffield Review Engaging Youth Enquiry¹⁴ outlined the importance of consistent and systematic support for young people - and their wider family and carers - both inside and outside the formal educational context to ensure they did not become disengaged and over a period of time drift into the NEET category.

Research undertaken by the Sutton Trust¹⁵ for the National Council of Education Excellence in 2008 looked at the issues around increasing access to Higher Education and once again highlighted the need for 'Good quality information, advice and guidance' in this case to better support the higher education aspirations of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Worryingly it concluded that at least half (and sometimes more) of the support currently given is inadequate, and can be poorly timed and partial, stating that: 'There is a need for particular support at certain key points, such as age 14 and 16, so that young people realise the implications of certain choices on their subsequent Higher Education prospects. There is also a lack of specialist guidance to help youngsters negotiate the very many - and increasingly complex - pathways open to them'.

The ETB's own research into 'Parents Perceptions of SET Based Careers'¹⁶ in 2006 brought to light that parents were unlikely to recommend or endorse a career in STEM because they felt uninformed about the career opportunities in STEM; most were not aware of shortages in this area and would generally advise keeping options open (choosing STEM was viewed by many as a difficult and narrowing option). They also did not know where to look for more information about STEM jobs, and were unaware of the facilities available in school including access to an adviser or whether there was support available for setting up placements for example.

Most recently the ETB's Engineering and Engineers Brand Monitor¹⁷ (August 2009) report drew attention to the significant role of parents and family in the process of career choice. Findings highlighted that parents of today's generation value more service orientated industries such as banking, law, etc and that there was little awareness of the different types of engineers. It was also felt that careers advice is offered too late with most young people only really getting any advice in college/sixth form. This gives credibility to the view - given the findings about parents' lack of understanding in relation to STEM jobs - that support with careers IAG should be targeted to the parents/carers of children at primary school and upwards as well as the young people themselves.

12 DfES The National Framework for Careers Education and Guidance in England 11-19 (2003) <http://dev.cegnet.co.uk/resource/content/files/651.pdf>

13 The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions (July 2009) http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/strategy/work_areas/accessprofessions.aspx

14 Rathbone/Nuffield Review Engaging Youth Enquiry (October 2008) <http://www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk/files/documents196-1.pdf>

15 Increasing higher education participation amongst disadvantaged young people and schools in poor communities. The Sutton Trust, October 2008. http://www.suttontrust.com/reports/NCEE_interim_report.pdf

16 Parents Perceptions of SET Based Careers (July 2005) <http://www.etechn.co.uk/research/reports/perceptions.cfm>

17 EEBM www.etechn.co.uk



How can STEM careers programmes be more effective?

All individuals (and their influencers) should be able to make an 'informed career choice'. Taking into account the new delivery mechanisms and funding arrangements, and recognising the host of curriculum reforms (including the new Diplomas) and vocational changes that will undoubtedly impact upon young people in England, it is concerning to see how the more detailed advice and guidance needed by those considering the wide range of 21st century careers (including careers in science, technology, engineering and maths) might be overlooked.

We believe that the culmination of recent policy changes to the delivery of IAG has fragmented any existing delivery framework and has cut off or made it very difficult to provide relevant information about qualification routes and key labour market information to those responsible for supporting young people at a time when it is most needed. Furthermore we remain concerned that the current fragmented and potentially underfunded delivery model of careers IAG in schools and colleges in England is impeding the ability of organisations like the ETB and others who try to reach out to young people in order to promote the wide range of exciting possibilities in STEM.

The situation in England in 2008 where the actual number of school leavers receiving careers interviews from an external service is only 40%¹⁸, is in stark contrast to the picture in other UK nations. In Wales the target is for 90% of school leavers to have an interview with a careers adviser, and in Scotland 100%; in Northern Ireland the actual figure is over 70%. In Scotland where there is an all-age service, a recent review to determine which elements or models of delivery best promote the overall aim of improving post school destinations found that advisers can have a significant positive impact on the pupils they work with. In Wales the actual number of interviews per person aged 14 to 19 is nearly 3.5¹⁹.

18 Watts, A.G. (2008). The partnership model for careers education and guidance: rise, decline – and fall? Career Research and Development, 20, 4-8.

19 Watts, A.G. (2009). Careers Wales; a Review in an International Perspective. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government.

20 DCSF IAG strategy is now due for release in the Autumn 2009 <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/1419/index.cfm?go=site.home&sid=57&pid=497&lid=633&ctype=None&pctype=Contents>

21 Skills Needs and Training Supply for Career Guidance – a Gap Analysis Prepared for Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) and UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) by TBR, 21st July 2009.

Tackling STEM awareness and better careers IAG in schools

The corroborating evidence (see Box 1) does suggest that currently the careers IAG provision in schools and beyond is not meeting expectations or having the desired impact. We believe that the ideal arrangement should be informed, impartial, continuous and targeted careers IAG in all schools as part of an all age careers framework. This framework would provide an informed choice for all, not only those interested in STEM, and arguably make a significant contribution to maximising the economic potential of the UK.

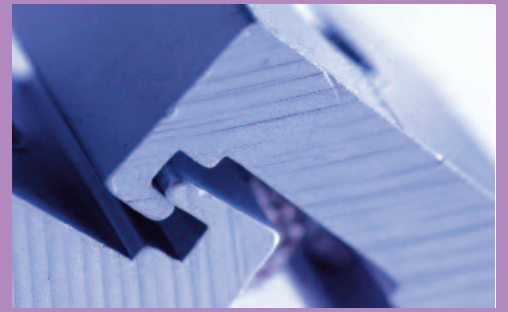
Alongside the issue of improved IAG, lies the challenge of how to raise awareness amongst parents/carers who are key influencers about the possibilities of careers in STEM. It is plain that the support of a range of institutions and organisations would be essential in order to effectively convey key messages about careers in STEM to parents/carers; but more importantly the actual careers IAG structure would need to be highly visible and accessible to teachers, parents/carers and young people so that organisations like the ETB could continue to input and update the accurate information about engineering and technology careers and pathways.

Ultimately any messages and interventions made by the ETB and other organisations, particularly UK wide employers working to tackle STEM shortages, would have a much higher impact and reach if careers education and guidance in schools and colleges was working more effectively.

Box 2: Critical Timescales

At the time of writing this paper the planned DCSF IAG strategy²⁰ has been delayed until Autumn 2009; while this is disappointing it does provide a crucial opportunity for any implications of the current DCSF consultation into the impartiality of careers IAG in schools to be carefully considered. This is in addition to the QCA consultation regarding the statutory position of careers education as part of PSHE and the existing government plans for an adult advancement and careers service in England to be launched in 2010.

The ETB believes that in addition to these consultations, there needs to be a fast implementation of the recommended priorities for action that emerged from the LLUK & UKCES report Skills Needs and Training Supply for Career Guidance – a Gap Analysis²¹.



Recommendations

Overall

All our recommendations are underpinned by the requirement that Ofsted should provide ongoing monitoring into the quality of information, advice and guidance provision to ensure that the information and advice (especially the Labour Market Information (LMI)) being provided is accurate.

For young people:

- + A universal all age careers service which includes services for young people from 9+ so that they are able to make informed choices.
- + A statutory entitlement for young people in England to receive careers education as part of existing personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme of study.
- + Access to regular and impartial (not a one off) careers IAG in schools and colleges which is informed, age appropriate and supported by links to the existing curriculum. Careers awareness should be fed into the curriculum at key decision points and be supported and coordinated by professionally trained careers advisers and teachers.



For careers advisers:

- + Access to relevant resources including a central and comprehensive database of career options and qualification routes, so that careers advisers are able to support impartial and informed subject choices and career decisions post 14.
- + Implementation of the recommended priorities for action that emerged from the LUK & UKCES report Skills Needs and Training Supply for Career Guidance – a Gap Analysis. (also see box 2).

For parents/carers:

- + Access to a universal all age careers service which provides parents/carers with specific information about subject and careers choices in order for them to provide informed careers advice.

For teachers:

- + Teachers must be familiar with the implications of subject choice on career choice; which is particularly relevant to science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM).
- + Demonstrable Government commitment is needed to STEM careers awareness being further integrated into relevant parts of the curriculum.

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If you have any comments related to this briefing please send them to: research@etechb.co.uk

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