

# High-quality Career Guidance for Enhancing Social Mobility: a submission to the Milburn Review of Social Mobility and Child Poverty

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Coalition Government's strategy on social mobility<sup>1</sup> recognises the value and contribution of careers education and guidance. Aside from a role for government, it states that *"we can all make a difference to raising aspirations and helping people to make informed choices about jobs and careers"*.
- 1.2. It also adopts a 'life cycle' approach to the issues, covering factors that have a bearing on social mobility from early foundation years into adulthood. The UK Careers Sector Strategic Forum welcomes the ambition outlined in the social mobility strategy and recognises that a partnership approach between schools, colleges, employers and the careers sector is crucial to fulfilling the aspirations that young people have about future jobs and careers.
- 1.3. But the ambitious commitments in the social mobility strategy are at risk of being undermined by some of the targeted budget cuts currently being imposed. A case in point is the substantial cut in funding for the careers sector: the funding provided for the career guidance component of Connexions (estimated at £203 million) has been totally removed. The cuts have led to the loss of access to face-to-face careers interviews for young people, a loss of approximately 4,000 careers advisers<sup>2</sup> and about 2 million young people receiving little or no career guidance this year<sup>3</sup>. This is particularly troubling at a time when there are almost one million young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs).<sup>4</sup> For the further education sector, there is particular concern about the increase in the number of learners who will enrol at college/training without having had access to career guidance, and the impact that this will have on retention and achievement. Colleges are already feeling the impact of the withdrawal both of the Connexions service and of the EMA<sup>5</sup>.
- 1.4. These cuts have been concealed by the transfer to schools of the statutory duty to secure access to career guidance for all pupils. This transfer was recommended by the earlier Milburn Report<sup>6</sup>, despite all the international evidence indicating that it was misconceived. In two countries that have made a similar transfer (Netherlands and New Zealand), it resulted in a significant diminution in the extent and quality of career guidance provision<sup>7</sup>. But in both cases the funding was transferred, which is not to be the case in England. There are accordingly grounds for grave concern about the likely impact of these policies.

<sup>1</sup> Cabinet Office (2011). *Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers: A Strategy for Social Mobility*.

<sup>2</sup> Hooley, T. & Watts, A.G. (2011). *Careers Work with Young People: Collapse or Transition? an analysis of current developments in careers education and guidance for young people in England*.

<sup>3</sup> Data from ASCL, on the number of young people in years 9, 10, and 11 who will be affected by the gap in career services from April 2011 to April 2012, between the scaling-down of Connexions and the introduction of the new arrangements.

<sup>4</sup> ONS (2011). *Labour Market Statistics October 2011*.

<sup>5</sup> Association of Colleges (2011). *September 2011 Survey of Colleges: Headline Findings on 16-19 Enrolment*.

<sup>6</sup> Panel on Fair Access to the Professions (2009). *Unleashing Aspiration: the Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions*.

<sup>7</sup> Watts, A.G. (2011). *The Proposed Model for Career Guidance in England: Some Lessons from International Examples*. Paper prepared for the Department for Education and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.



“A wide curriculum offer is only valuable if learners are aware of which part of it is appropriate for them, which means that there is a need for impartial, personalised information, advice and guidance.”

(Source: NFER<sup>1</sup>)

<sup>1</sup> Marson-Smith, H., Golden, S. & McCrone, T. (2009). Widening 14–19 Choices: Support for Young People Making Informed Decisions.



1.5. This submission sets out our concerns about the role of careers education, information, advice and guidance in improving social mobility. It summarises the key issues facing the careers sector in England, the role of careers professionals in helping people make informed choices, and the impact this has on the pathways and routes that are open to them. Social mobility needs to translate into opportunities for young people and adults, and resonates with the need to invest in technical and higher-level skills and to ensure pathways for lifelong learning and enhanced career adaptability<sup>8</sup>. For the purposes of brevity, however, the note focuses mainly on interventions for young people.

## 2. Informed choices for young people

- 2.1. Young people’s subject choices are not just educational choices: they are also career choices. It is important to ensure that young people have the support they need from the age of 13 or 14 to think through the qualification options and pathways they will have post-16. The landscape of choice is complicated, in terms both of the number of qualifications available and the different routes young people can take. There are also the views of employers to take into account – how do they value this array of educational outcomes in terms of making young people employable? Too often young people, their parents and carers are not aware of the entry requirements, preferred subjects or pathways that are needed to enter higher education or to follow a pathway into the professions<sup>9</sup>.
- 2.2. Independent and impartial advice and guidance from qualified professionals is crucial to helping young people make informed choices. The current provisions in the Education Bill must accordingly be strengthened to assure the provision of professional face-to-face career guidance at key transition points for all students; the Department for Education must allocate funding for such provision, and make clear in its guidance to schools that it is incumbent on headteachers and school governors to set aside allocated resources to meet their statutory obligations; and the quality of career guidance must be closely monitored by Ofsted.

## 3. Tracking destinations to enable diverse pathways

- 3.1. The social mobility strategy suggests that “*the planned Key Stage 4 destinations measure will act as a strong incentive for schools to make sure that they are preparing young people for success post-16 and are helping them to make choices that are right for them*”. However, the destinations data for schools will simply indicate the destinations reached, not whether they accord with young people’s aspirations, interests and abilities. They accordingly do not provide an appropriate or adequate measure of the quality of career guidance. Nor do they indicate whether pupils are receiving advice about the full range of options and career routes, including apprenticeships<sup>10</sup>.
- 3.2. Concerns about tracking destinations and data collection extend particularly to young people not in employment, education and training (NEETs): the loss of Connexions will mean that schools, colleges and work-based learning providers will not have access to data to respond to their needs. This will be compounded by the loss of data from schools, since they will not be recording interventions with young people except where required for the destinations measure.

## 4. Supporting young people through transition

- 4.1. The social mobility strategy notes the importance of transition points across the life cycle, with support at early stages the best time at which to narrow the gaps and provide second chances. The Pupil Premium will provide an extra £2.5 billion a year for the most disadvantaged pupils to radically improve their educational outcomes. Some of this resource needs to be devoted to career interventions to help young people connect the subjects they study with options for further and higher education and pathways into work.

<sup>8</sup> Bimrose, J., Brown, A., Barnes, S.A. & Hughes, D. (2011). The Role of Career Adaptability and Skills Supply. London: UK Commission for Employment and Skills.

<sup>9</sup> See the Russell Group guide to making decisions about post-16 education 2011. Also Panel on Fair Access to the Professions (2009). Unleashing Aspiration: the Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions.

<sup>10</sup> The Association of Colleges, Ofsted and the Institute of Career Guidance (ICG) have already identified that it will be essential to ensure that the full range of options and careers routes, including apprenticeships, are reported on rather than a narrowly selected approach.



4.2. In a typical school setting this could mean exposure to understanding the world of work in career-related learning programmes in Key Stage 2, including discussions of ‘what I want to be when I grow up’ and ‘what I might need to do in order to get there’<sup>11</sup>. In Year 7 teachers can explore how their subjects open up pathways into different careers and offer different options for transition. More active interventions based on careers education and formal career guidance from Year 8 onwards can follow alongside ‘taster’ sessions from local colleges and universities, inspirational talks from alumni and employers, work experience, and career mentoring. Responsibilities for the co-ordination and delivery of such programmes need to be clearly allocated to appropriately qualified school staff alongside independent career guidance practitioners.

## 5. Access to higher education and the professions

5.1. Our universities can be significant engines for social mobility. A recent report by the Office for Fair Access<sup>12</sup> noted what universities are doing to enhance access to those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Trend analysis shows that access to university by people from less privileged socio-economic groups has grown substantially since the mid-2000s<sup>13</sup> but more remains to be done. Universities must be far more proactive in working with schools and colleges to raise aspirations and ensure this translates into more successful applications from these target-groups.

5.2. Bursaries and fee waivers at age 18 come too late in the decision-making process for young people thinking about going to university. The influence of OFFA will hopefully see a growth in the resources allocated by universities to active outreach. Here too there are opportunities for careers services and careers programmes in schools and colleges to work with universities to support access to higher education and into the professions. This needs to include vocational pathways and routes into higher-level training and work.

5.3. The Forum is concerned that widening access to HE may be negatively affected as the selection processes in universities become more restrictive. Careers professionals have a role to support individuals to keep abreast of the criteria for entry to HE and to ensure that opportunities for all are kept open.

5.4. As for access to the professions, much has been written about the need for significantly enhanced outreach by the professions to schools and better career guidance for young people<sup>14</sup>. There is a clear imperative for stronger links between the careers sector, employers and professional bodies.

## 6. Access to work experience

6.1. Many employers emphasise the value of work experience for students to explore the world of work and develop the employability skills they need in the workplace. The Milburn Report questioned the quality of work experience in schools although it recognised that there is some good practice. The removal of the duty on schools to provide work-related learning will further weaken the links that schools have with employers and is likely to reduce access to work-experience opportunities as well.

6.2. The Forum accordingly recommends that the DfE should reassess the importance of work-related learning in its national curriculum review. In addition, it is crucial that employer bodies are more vocal about the importance of work experience for schools<sup>15</sup> and address this matter with the Secretary of State for Education. Employer commitment to offer more high-quality work experience to schools is a key requirement in this respect.



11 For recent evidence on the impact of such programmes, see Wade, P., Bergeron, C., White, K., Teeman, D., Sims, D. & Mehta, P. (2011). Key Stage 2 Career-Related Learning Pathfinder Evaluation. RR116. London: Department for Education.

12 OFFA and HEFCE (2011). Access Agreement and Widening Participation Strategic Assessment Monitoring: Outcomes for 2009-10.

13 Higher Education Funding Council for England (2010). Trends in Young Participation in Higher Education: Core Results for England.

14 Panel on Fair Access to the Professions (2009). op cit.

15 Hughes, D. (2010). Social Mobility of Young People and Adults in England: the Contribution and Impact of High-quality Careers Services. London: Careers England.



“The best schools – including independent schools – know how important it is to help young people develop the self-awareness, self-esteem and confidence to take decisions and seize control of their future learning and careers.”

(Source: Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers: A Strategy for Social Mobility, p.40)



6.3. The best opportunities are often arranged for those whose parents or carers have the necessary social capital and contacts<sup>16</sup>. Young people from poor socio-economic backgrounds frequently do not have these contacts and are hence substantially disadvantaged. Strong links between employers, schools and the careers sector can assist in making these opportunities more fair and transparent. The box below highlights some of the initiatives that are helping to ensure that more young people get access to the world of work as part of their studies to enhance their employability and improve their career-oriented decisions. The impact and effectiveness of all such programmes is heavily dependent on the quality of careers programmes within schools.

### A bridge to work

- The Education and Employers Task Force plans to recruit 100,000 people from all sectors and professions into schools and colleges to talk about their jobs and career routes.
- The Bridge Group plans to work with universities to mobilise support from university alumni in order to help students from non-traditional backgrounds better understand the world of work, provide student placement opportunities and gain access to graduate employment opportunities.
- The STEM Ambassadors programme run by STEMNET has a network of 27,000 volunteers who go into schools to provide insights to the work of STEM-related jobs.
- The Science Council has launched the Hidden Science Map to help teachers to link careers work to STEM employers in their communities.

## 7. The actions

7.1. The UK Careers Sector Strategic Forum urges the Milburn Review on Social Mobility and Child Poverty to ensure the following steps are taken:

- Encourage the government to support the Forum’s call for face-to-face career guidance to be enshrined in the Education Bill and in guidance to schools.
- Seek ways of using the Pupil Premium to link improved educational outcomes to supporting careers education and guidance that helps young people with their choices and transitions within the school and into further/higher education, into apprenticeships or into work.
- Emphasise the need for employers and professional bodies to be better connected with the careers sector and thereby achieve greater outreach to schools in order to improve access to the professions.
- Support strong links between employers, schools and the careers sector to ensure that work-experience opportunities are fair and transparent.
- Support the Careers Profession Alliance and its work to establish a ‘Register of Careers Professionals’ and a new ‘Careers Progression Framework’ designed to ensure individuals’ access to careers expertise and to improve social mobility by attracting new entrants from differing backgrounds into the profession.

Inputs to this submission provided by: Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS); Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL); Careers England; City & Guilds; Institute of Career Guidance (ICG); Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS); National Association for Educational Guidance for Adults (NAEGA); National Connexions Network (NCN); The Science Council; TUC; UNISON; Warwick Institute for Employment Research (Warwick IER)

Convened under the auspices of the CIHE, the UK Careers Sector Strategic Forum is a strategic leadership network of careers sector stakeholders. It aims to formulate a national strategic framework for careers information, advice and guidance (IAG) to address the issues of access, transparency, quality, equality, and continuity, and to identify areas where UK-wide co-ordination would be helpful.

Chair: Sir Martin Harris

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.