

Careers England Policy Commentary 28

This is the twenty-eighth 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

Revised Guidance for Colleges

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1. **Context.** The Government has published new Guidance on *Careers Guidance and Inspiration* for general further education colleges and sixth-form colleges.² This is designed to sit alongside the Statutory Guidance³ and Non-Statutory Departmental Advice⁴ for schools issued in April 2014.⁵ It replaces the Guidance for colleges published in June 2013.⁶

2. As with the earlier Guidance for colleges, the new document is not statutory. In extending the duty to secure access to independent careers guidance to cover students up to the age of 18, the Government decided to do so not by law, but by making it a requirement of their funding agreements. Accordingly, the document merely ‘offers guidance on which colleges may wish to draw’ (para.2).

3. **Analysis.** There is some confusion about the overlap of coverage between the documents for schools and for colleges in relation to 14-16-year-olds:

- Para.2 states that the SG and NSDA for schools ‘can be used by colleges to review support for 14-16 year old students’.
- Para.4 states that the new guidance applies to ‘all students in colleges up to and including the age of 18’.

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

² Department for Business, Innovation and Skills & Department for Education (2014). *Careers Guidance and Inspiration: Guidance for General Further Education Colleges and Sixth-Form Colleges*.

³ Department for Education (2014). *Careers Guidance and Inspiration in Schools: Statutory Guidance for Governing Bodies, School Leaders and School Staff*.

⁴ Department for Education (2014). *Careers Guidance and Inspiration in Schools: Non-Statutory Departmental Advice for Governing Bodies, School Leaders and School Staff*.

⁵ For an analysis of these two documents, see Watts, A.G. (2014). *Revised Statutory Guidance and Non-Statutory Departmental Advice on Careers Guidance and Inspiration in Schools*. Careers England Policy Commentary 27.

⁶ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills & Department for Education (2013). *Securing Independent Careers Guidance: Guidance for General Further Education Colleges and Sixth-Form Colleges*. For an analysis of this document, see Watts, A.G. (2013). *Statutory Guidance for Further Education and Sixth-Form Colleges*. Careers England Policy Commentary 22.

4. The new revised Guidance reaffirms the recognition in the earlier Guidance of colleges' own careers provision:

‘The government recognises that many FE institutions already have successful student support services – often holding the matrix standard for their careers information, advice and guidance provision’ (para.13).

Accordingly, it gives a stronger profile to internal specialist careers services than the revised Statutory Guidance for schools does. But whereas the previous Guidance for colleges simply commented that ‘this support should continue’⁷, the new version states that:

‘Colleges should review existing support and take steps to ensure this meets their students’ needs. Feedback from students and parents can help to inform future provision. Feedback from employers can also be useful to evaluate the different activities they provide’ (para.13).

5. Apart from this reference to internal specialist careers services, the revised Guidance for colleges adopts a very similar position to the revised Statutory Guidance for schools. In particular:

- The main emphasis throughout is on links with employers. All the case-studies are related exclusively to this (which was not the case in the earlier Guidance for colleges).
- There is a brief and marginal reference to ‘independent careers advisers’ who ‘can help students to locate ambitious careers options by assessing their abilities, interests and achievements’. But, as with the schools document, this is at the end of a long list of ‘external sources’ who are largely employer-based (mentors and coaches, ‘role models and inspiring individuals from the careers to which young people aspire’, and college alumni; they also include HE advisers and the National Careers Service website) (para.27). The use of the term ‘external’ in relation to the ‘independent careers advisers’ is problematic: it is unclear where this leaves college-based careers advisers, or their relationship with truly external careers advisers.
- There is no reference at all to CEIAG quality awards and their validation through the Quality in Careers Standard, which in the previous Guidance to colleges was at least mentioned in a footnote.⁸ This despite the fact that the development of the QiCS was part-funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

⁷ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills & Department for Education (2013). *Securing Independent Careers Guidance: Guidance for General Further Education Colleges and Sixth-Form Colleges*, para.6.

⁸ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills & Department for Education (2013). *Securing Independent Careers Guidance: Guidance for General Further Education Colleges and Sixth-Form Colleges*, footnote 3.

6. Moreover, whereas the Non-Statutory Departmental Advice for schools mentioned the CDI register of careers professionals⁹, there is no reference to this in the new document for colleges. Alongside the failure to refer to the QiCS (see para.5 above), this omission means that the Government's abandonment of its earlier promise to implement the recommendations of the Careers Profession Task Force¹⁰ appears complete. Far from making the professional and organisational standards compulsory, as recommended by the House of Commons Education Select Committee¹¹, it has now decided to ignore them altogether.

7. The roles the document proposes for colleges are largely confined to 'helping students access information... about the routes into different careers' (paras.22-23), to 'training in preparing CVs, job hunting and interview techniques' and help 'in completing UCAS applications' (para.28), but most of all to establishing links with employers (paras.17-20). There are no references to more broadly-based careers education programmes.

8. The section on the National Careers Service focuses sharply the inconsistency between the government policies relating to young people and adults respectively, which is particularly evident in relation to colleges that span both groups. It mentions that the NCS is currently co-located in over 125 colleges (para.30), and states that 'the government is keen to see more extensive partnership working between colleges and the NCS' (para.31). But it also reiterates that only those aged 19 or over can book a face-to-face appointment with an NCS adviser (para.29).

9. The same section refers intriguingly to the government being keen to extending the 'more extensive partnership working' to 'working with schools, Jobcentres and employers to provide a more integrated careers guidance infrastructure underpinned by informed labour market intelligence' (para.31). There is no indication of who is to take the lead here (National Careers Service? Local Enterprise Partnerships? Local Authorities?).

10. Other features of the revised document include:

- A welcome new section (paras.24-25) on support for young people with special education needs or disabilities (some of whom are covered up to the age of 25). These received only a single sentence in the previous version.
- A new sub-section (paras.14-16) on destination measures, mentioning the importance of collaborating with Local Authorities on this, and how such measures can be used by colleges 'to assess their success in supporting students to

⁹ Department for Education (2014). *Careers Guidance and Inspiration in Schools: Non-Statutory Departmental Advice for Governing Bodies, School Leaders and School Staff*, p.21.

¹⁰ See Watts, A.G. (2012). *The Coalition's Emerging Policies on Career Guidance*, para.7. Careers England Policy Commentary 15B.

¹¹ House of Commons Education Committee (2013). *Careers Guidance for Young People: the Impact of the New Duty on Schools*, para.105. HC 632-1. London: Stationery Office.

take up education, employment or training which offers good long term prospects’ (para.15).

11. **Conclusion.** In general, the new Guidance for colleges is open to the same criticisms as the Statutory Guidance for schools. While there are a few welcome features, it reinforces the Government’s betrayal of the promises it made in its early days to establish a genuinely all-age careers service and to revitalise the professional status of careers guidance.

12. The ‘inspiration’ agenda, involving employers much more actively, would have been widely welcomed by the careers sector had it been added to the implementation of these original promises and embedded in professionally-managed careers programmes. But it appears now to be viewed largely as a substitute for the role of careers professionals. The recent endorsement by many employers of a Careers Sector Stakeholders Alliance Briefing Note affirming the complementary roles of employers and of careers professionals in providing career support to young people¹² demonstrates that there is little employer support for such a position.

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¹² Careers Sector Stakeholders Alliance (2014). *Securing Our Future Talent: the Roles of Employers and Career Professionals in Providing Career Support to Young People in Schools and Colleges.*