



Careers information, advice and guidance (IAG) roundtable

Minutes: 26 January 2015

Attendees:

Paul Blomfield MP, Chair of the APPG on Students.

Graham Stuart MP, Chair of the Education Select Committee.

Alex Cunningham MP, member of the Education Select Committee

Alison Seabeck MP

Professor Tristram Hooley – Professor of Career Education at the University of Derby.

Sue Spence, Director of Development and Careers Advisor at Huddersfield University.

Denise Bertuchi – Education and Children’s Services, UNISON.

Ian Ashman – Principal of Hackney Community College and Co-Chair of AoC London region.

Grace Breen— senior policy advisor, CBI.

Joe Vinson – NUS Vice President for Further Education

Amy Smith—Sheffield College Students’ Union and NEC and FE Zone Committee member

Ryan Briggs— President, New College Durham Students’ Union and FE Zone Committee member

Rajay Naik—Director of Government and External Affairs, Open University

Nigel Szymczyk—Chair of UNISON National Careers Forum and a careers adviser for Nottingham Futures

Chair’s opening:

Paul Blomfield MP, Chair of the APPG on Students, opened the roundtable by explaining that the issue of careers information advice and guidance is a topic which the newly established APPG on Students is very keen to examine. It is an area which is currently concerning politicians across all parties, and whilst there is some consensus across parties that there is a problem with the quality of current provision, there are still considerable differences on what the solutions are.

The recent Public Accounts Committee report on 16-18 year old participation in education and training also highlighted that careers advice is a big challenge for the government.

The key areas for discussion for the roundtable are:

- What should be the role of the employer, education providers (schools, colleges and universities), local authorities, and the central government be in careers guidance?
- What does careers guidance look like at different stages of people’s lives, and what are the key points in people’s lives where they may be in need of careers guidance?
- How should careers advice be delivered? What is the value of different type of careers guidance: for example, face-to-face, group work, online resources.

Incentivising schools to deliver good careers advice:

There was consensus from participants that the right incentives are not in place for schools to provide quality careers advice.

Graham Stuart MP, Chair of the Education Select Committee, said that this was a key finding of his Committee, adding that currently the vast majority of careers advice is being delivered by teachers alongside other priorities. He said that whilst schools are driven by delivering results from exams, there are not similar pressures for them to deliver on careers advice. He argued that schools need to take careers advice more seriously; there is a need for a visible careers plan in schools, as well as a national quality standard.

Alex Cunningham MP agreed that current provision of careers advice in schools is poor, and said that whilst schools have been given the responsibility for providing careers advice and guidance, they have not been given the budget.

Tristram Hooley, Professor of Career Education at the University of Derby, said that there is a key role for government to stimulate schools to deliver quality careers advice through appropriate incentives, and the existing statutory guidance is not good enough. This should include requirements to publish a careers plan which is accessible to parents, and to capture destinations data. However, he also expressed caution about the role which data could play in assessing outcomes as this does not capture careers quality. Graham Stuart MP also made the point that, although destinations data would be useful, it would not be a panacea given that it would likely work on a five year basis.

Tristram Hooley made the comparison between the incentives which schools and universities both have to deliver careers advice to their students, saying that the latter had far more incentives. These incentives include the student satisfaction survey, the work of the Quality Assurance Agency, and graduate employability data. Whilst there are certainly areas where these incentives could definitely work better, there is a real need to look for similar incentives in the schools system.

Bias towards higher education and away from further education and apprenticeships

Alison Seabeck MP argued that there is an inherent bias in schools to guide students towards higher education and away from further education. She said that there are examples of students being told that they cannot transfer from their sixth form to a further education college, or on to an apprenticeship, as institutions are reluctant to let their students leave. This is why independent advice is so important, as young people's choices and futures should not be constrained by what the school or college needs. She also said that the views of young people about the provision of the careers advice they receive are very rarely captured.

Paul Blomfield agreed that very often young people are only going on to apprenticeships when they find out about them themselves – it would appear they become apprentices in spite of careers advice, not because of it.

Joe Vinson, NUS Vice President (further education), agreed that impartiality is a huge problem and there is a massive bias towards higher education. He said that 60 per cent of A-level students found careers advice impossible to navigate, and this is likely to be magnified for students in the vocational sector.

Amy Smith, NUS FE Zone and NEC member and Disabled Students' Officer at Sheffield College, described the careers advice she received at school. She said that she felt pushed towards taking A-levels which were not right for her. When she said she wanted to explore other options of further education, they attempted to persuade her to stay on at school, and she had to research alternative options herself.

Ian Ashman, Principal of Hackney Community College and Co-Chair of AoC London region, said that many colleges report that they struggle to get in to schools to talk about the options of

further education. He also observed that often teachers and parents are poorly informed on the availability of options, yet many young people rely on them for advice. Alison Seabeck MP agreed that there is a bias from parents against certain careers, and a lack of awareness about the range of options.

Fragmentation of provision

Tristram Hooley argued that the current system of careers advice is not coherent; there are a number of different concurrent projects and a number of actors involved including Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), the National Careers Service, local government, employers, and now a newly announced 'employer-led' company. He argued that there is a need for the government to provide a systemic framework, rather than launching individual projects as it has been doing.

Denise Bertuchi, Education and Children's Services UNISON, agreed that there are a number of different projects being run which do not connect up, for example, the current investment from the National Youth Agency to support NEETs; whilst the aims of the project are important, it is a satellite rather than part of a wider strategy.

Alex Cunningham MP also raised the point that, whilst a lot of good work has been and is being done to provide specialist support for disadvantaged groups, for example those with learning difficulties, there is more which needs to be done to provide systemic support across the board.

The role of professional careers advisors

Alex Cunningham MP noted a severe lack of professional careers advisers in the education system, highlighting the fact that very often it is teaching assistants and schools clerks who are providing the careers advice in schools.

Denise Bertuchi said that the role of the careers professional has been significantly undermined and wrongly demonised despite the fact that should be a highly qualified and skilled job. Young people deserve to get advice from fully qualified professionals, yet careers advisor posts are now being advertised as level 4 jobs with low pay. She warned that, because a large number of experts are now operating as sole traders with no network of peer support, there has been a significant driving down of standards and professional development.

Nigel Szymczyk, Chair of UNISON National Careers Forum and a careers adviser for Nottingham Futures, agreed and argued that there is danger of de-skilling across the sector, saying that the provision of careers advice is now being tailored to what the schools are asking for, as opposed to what is best for the young person.

Sue Spence, Director of Development at Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) and Careers Advisor at Huddersfield University, made the point that AGCAS has largely avoided the demonisation taking place elsewhere in the careers sector. Their practitioners are qualified to masters level, and they have a professional code of practice which includes impartiality. The fact that they are able to operate as a coordinated team, working across different universities and regions, means that they have retained a network for information sharing, including for sharing information on local labour markets. This information is essential to good careers advice, but has largely been lost at school and college level.

Ian Ashman called for regional careers 'hubs' located across the country, which would each have professional careers advisers based there. He suggested that these could be managed by LEPs. Alison Seabeck MP, said that this model is interesting and could enable young people to return to the hub for advice, once they have made their initial decisions about further study and work,

to ask follow up questions. Currently, young people are too often are left unsupported once they have made these decisions.

Employer involvement in careers advice

Graham Stuart MP outlined the need for employers to be more engaged in careers advice provision in schools, and the need for a broker to link up employers and schools and to motivate employers to do more. He welcomed the government's recent announcement that they will be funding a new 'employer-led company' to specifically broker these relationships.

Alex Cunningham MP expressed his doubts about the new initiative, however. He said there is still a lack of understanding about what the responsibilities will be within this body. He said it was disappointing that the Secretary of State had not recognised that what is needed is actually professional careers advisers.

Grace Breen, senior policy advisor CBI, said that she anticipates that the new company would help to broker relationships between employers and schools. However, she also made the point that the employer's role is not to deliver advice, rather it is about inspiring young people and providing an awareness about the range of jobs which are available within specific companies and across sectors. This awareness is important, not only for students but for teachers as well.

Grace Breen also added that a particular value in involving employers is that they are able to provide knowledge about what employers are looking for; hearing this from employers is very important to students and can encourage a shift for young people in how they think about work.

Alex Cunningham MP said that this is a really important point – that there is a distinction between the responsibility to inform—which is where employer involvement is really important – and the responsibility to provide advice and guidance. Rajay from Open University made the point that there has been a proliferation of information and advice – from the internet, from friends and family, and from employers—and this is why guidance is so essential, because young people require the tools for navigating all this information.

Adult and workplace careers advice

Keith Harmann raised the importance of all age, all stage careers advice. People in the work place, as well as university and college, need quality careers advice because as the economy changes, this will affect everyone, and more needs to be done to develop future talent in the workplace.

He argued that there are already a number of existing funds which can be levered to provide a careers hub model for careers advice, including European structural funds and resources held by LEPs. He argued that there are a number of stakeholders who all have an interest in this area, and there is a need for these funds to be pooled. He also pointed to the existing fragmentation of a number of different projects, and said that what is needed is more coherent, system wide, strategic interventions.

How can quality careers advice be achieved?

There was a closing discussion about what is required for quality careers advice to be achieved.

Tristram Hooley argued that professional careers advice is essential, as is careers advice which is embedded in to the curriculum. He also argued that a quality standard is essential, and Sue Spence said that inspection would be important for this. Alex Cunningham MP said there is a need for a really clear set of criteria which schools should have a statutory duty to follow.

Graham Stuart MP said that access to face-to-face is important, and that this should be recorded by schools. He argued that very often schools do have the resources to provide careers advice properly, but they need to be incentivised to take it seriously; the use of quality standard is important to making this happen.

Paul Blomfield MP questioned whether the use of a quality standard is too static to measure and ensure that quality is delivered, and Graham Stuart MP agreed that relying on a data set which is released every five years certainly would not be sufficient.

Alison Seabeck MP said that work experience is a crucial part of careers advice provision, and Graham Stuart MP agreed that that, along with face-to-face provision, is essential.

Amy Smith said that it is really important to listen to student experiences of careers advice, including what their expectations are from careers advice and whether these are being met. Ryan Briggs, President New College Durham Students' Union and FE Zone Committee member, made the point that the quality of careers advice received by a young person can significantly impact on their available options for the future. He said that it is important that students are not only provided with information about what careers options are available, but also what will be required of them to achieve this.

There was discussion about how to properly embed careers advice across the curriculum. Sue Spence raised the example of how this works at universities; she said that at Huddersfield all degree courses need an employability element in order to be validated. They invite speakers from industry, and many integrate work experience placements into the course. She stressed the need for accurate labour market information for this to happen.

Closing remarks:

In summary, Paul Blomfield thanked attendees and said that it had been really useful to have such an important discussion and to have this dialogue with parliamentarians.