

A Short History of Careers Education Policy in England

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I have called this article a short history of careers education policy in England because careers education itself has not featured in school curricula in England for very long and has only been subject to policy attention in recent years. After a brief overview of the early years I will review the policy context for careers education over the past two decades and then discuss current issues and questions for the future.

Careers education: the early years

Careers education lessons did not appear on school timetables until the 1960s. This is not to say that schools had not previously taught some of the topics now covered in careers education, particularly transition skills such as making applications and preparing for interviews, but these were often covered in other lessons such as English. As schools began to develop programmes of careers education, sources of support to careers teachers started to emerge, for example the Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC) in 1964 and, in 1969, the National Association of Careers Teachers (NACT), later to become the National Association of Careers and Guidance Teachers (NACGT) and now the Association for Careers Education and Guidance (ACEG). Courses run by HM Inspectorate also played an important role.

The 1970s saw considerable growth of careers education, particularly following the publication in 1977 of Bill Law's and Tony Watts's book *Schools, Careers and Community* (Law and Watts, 1977), which identified four elements of careers education: self awareness; opportunity awareness; decision learning; and transition learning (to become known as 'DOTS'). This was one of the first publications to come out of the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling (NICEC) which was founded, as a partnership between CRAC and the then Hatfield Polytechnic, in 1975. Teachers were appointed to the position of head of careers and the new local authority careers services, set up in 1973, began to offer training courses for careers teachers. One of the earliest examples of support from Government was the development in 1973 of the Careers Library Classification Index, as a joint enterprise between CRAC and the Government-funded Careers and Occupational Information Centre (COIC). Later in the 1970s the government funded a major careers education and guidance development project through the Schools Council.



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The 1980s: vocationalising the curriculum

Developments in careers education continued into the 1980s and were given a significant boost through the Government's major curriculum initiative of that decade, the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI). Interestingly this curriculum development programme did not come from the Department of Education and Skills (DES) but from the Employment Department (ED). In its pilot phase (1983-88) the focus was initially on developing technical and vocational options for targeted groups of pupils within secondary schools but by the time the programme was extended across the country the focus shifted to making the 14-18 curriculum more vocationally relevant for all pupils. It was in this extension phase, which ran from 1987 to 1997 that careers education and related aspects of schools' work, notably work experience and recording achievement, received considerable support. The initiative was managed by local education authorities (LEAs) and was generously funded. Schools, working in consortia, had access to money and support for curriculum development and in-service training in return for developing their curricula in response to the priorities of TVEI and one of these priorities was careers education and guidance (CEG). From the mid-1980s there was a substantial growth in the number of LEAs appointing advisers and advisory teachers specifically to support CEG, and these staff worked in partnership with development managers in the careers services.

Starting in the mid-1980s Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) published a series of discussion documents on the 5-16 curriculum, under the general title *Curriculum Matters*. The second in the series (DES/HMI, 1985) stated that "careers education needs to be timetabled in the later years of secondary education" and a similar view was stated in the Government's White Paper *Better Schools* (DES, 1985). In 1988 HMI published a further discussion document specifically on careers education (DES/HMI, 1988), which re-stated the importance of careers education in the curriculum and drew heavily on the DOTS model when defining its aims.

Probably the clearest statement about careers education from Government in the 1980s appeared in *Working Together for a Better Future* (DES, ED, Welsh Office, 1987).

"Where then does careers education, information and guidance come into all of this? The answer is – or should be – right at the centre. Different schools organise careers education and guidance differently. No single model is best. But clear and effective arrangements are essential."

This document was published in April 1987. Three months later the DES published a consultation document on *The National Curriculum 5-16* (DES/Welsh Office, 1987) and this included no mention of careers education. A decade that had brought a lot of support ended with the position of careers education looking precarious.

The 1990s: securing a place in the national curriculum

The 1990s were dominated by firstly the introduction of the national curriculum in England and then the subsequent reviews of the requirements. In 1990 the National Curriculum Council (NCC) published curriculum guidance on careers education and guidance as one of five cross-curricular themes (NCC, 1990). While the guidelines offered support for careers education, careers teachers and curriculum managers struggled to see how the suggested activities could be accommodated within the schemes of work for the core and other foundation subjects, or within the limited time available beyond a heavily prescribed national curriculum. By the middle of the decade, however, the situation had begun to improve. Firstly, there was some relaxation of the statutory requirements, both in terms of the number of compulsory subjects at key stage 4 and in the level of detail of what had to be covered in each subject. Secondly, further guidance was published: in 1995 the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) published *Looking Forward* (SCAA, 1995) and then in 1999 the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) published *Learning Outcomes from Careers Education and Guidance* (QCA, 1999). Thirdly, the Government provided dedicated funding for the in-service training of careers teachers, through both the Grant for Education Support

and Training (GEST) which ran from 1995 to 1998 and the Careers Service INSET budget which started in 1995 and continued until the initial years of the Connexions service.

The decade ended on a high note when, through the Education Act 1997, the Government, influenced by the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and arguments focused on the economic benefits of CEG, introduced legislation to make careers education, for the first time in England, part of the compulsory curriculum. From September 1998 schools had a statutory duty to provide planned programmes of careers education in Years 9, 10 and 11, i.e. the final three years of compulsory schooling. In one sense this was a major achievement, as ten years previously there had been no reference to careers education in the proposed national curriculum but, in another sense, careers education was still in a relatively weak position. It was part of the statutory curriculum but only in three years and outside the national curriculum, without a prescribed programme of study. During various reviews of the national curriculum, the careers professional associations campaigned for a programme of study but only succeeded in having some references to careers education included in the non-statutory framework for personal, social and health education (PSHE).

The 21st century: mid-term review

The dawn of the new millennium ushered in further policy support for careers education. In 2001 the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) established the national Careers Education Support Programme, which continues to the present day, and took the decision to publish a national framework of recommended learning outcomes for CEG. The national framework (DfES, 2003) still uses the DOTS model as the structural basis for the framework of recommended learning outcomes, although the model has been updated to promote a more active and participative approach to career planning on the part of the learner, a change first introduced in *Looking Forward* and continued in the later guidelines from QCA. Thus self awareness becomes self development, opportunity awareness becomes career exploration, and decision learning and transition learning have been combined into career management.

The CEG framework broke new ground in that it was the first, and still the only, curriculum guidance to extend beyond the statutory years of schooling to age 19. The policy intention was that it should apply not only in school sixth forms but also to 16-19 year learners in colleges and in work-based training. At the same time the statutory requirements on schools to provide careers education in the curriculum were extended, with effect from September 2004, to include Years 7 and 8. It seems likely that these developments were made easier to introduce because policy responsibility for careers education was located in a division of the DfES that was separate from the division that had policy responsibility for all other aspects of the

school curriculum. This was a legacy from earlier times when responsibility for the whole curriculum, except careers education, was located in the DES while responsibility for careers education was located in the Employment Department (ED), within the division responsible for the Careers Service. In the middle of the 1990s, when the then Department for Education (DfE) was merged with the ED to form the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), policy responsibility for careers education remained in a separate division though links were established with the Curriculum Division. When the DfEE was later split into the DfES and the Department of Work and Pensions, responsibility for careers education remained within the DfES but still in a separate division.

Although the publication of the national framework and the extension to the statutory duty on schools strengthened the policy position of careers education in the curriculum, the position of careers education in practice was often still relatively weak, partly because it lacked the status of being a national curriculum subject and partly because it had to compete for curriculum time with new requirements such as the need to accommodate the new national curriculum subject, citizenship, and the requirement to provide work-related learning for all pupils in key stage 4. Further, having benefited from the policy lead being located separately from responsibility for the rest of curriculum policy, some of the disadvantages of this arrangement were beginning to become evident. For example, careers education was often omitted from lists of statutory requirements in government publication on the school curriculum.

By 2004 the Government itself had come to question the position of CEG and the DfES set up an 'end-to-end review' of CEG. The review, published in 2005 (DfES, 2005a), found that there was a problem over the priority given to careers education in schools, colleges and work-based training and included the conclusion that:

“the greatest potential for improving CEG delivery lies in driving up the quality and relevance of careers education in schools;”

The Green Paper that followed the review *Youth Matters* (DfES, 2005b) was mainly concerned about new arrangements for the provision of information, advice and guidance services for young people, but included the statement that:

“Our vision is... all young people should have access to personal development learning, delivered through the curriculum, covering careers education...”

Following several months' consultation the DfES published a policy document (DfES, 2006) which regrettably included no reference to careers education and nothing about how the vision proposed in the Green Paper was to be achieved in practice.

In the meantime, QCA began to review the position of all those elements of the curriculum focused on personal development learning, including careers education, with a view to supporting more integrated approaches to these inter-related areas of the curriculum. At the time of writing, one proposal that is being considered is to merge the careers education framework with the framework for work-related learning and enterprise, into a single strand of economic well-being.

Careers education: present and future

Having reviewed the past, where are we now? Careers education is part of the statutory curriculum from age 11 to age 16, outside the national curriculum, with a non-statutory framework 11-19. It is supported by a national support programme, linked to local support provided mainly through Connexions partnerships, careers companies and, to a lesser extent, LEAs. Its position in the school curriculum remains relatively weak however and there is no evidence of a national strategy to implement the vision put forward in *Youth Matters*.

One other policy development needs to be considered for its possible impact on careers education. The replacement of management allowances for teachers with Teaching and Learning Responsibilities is leading to an increase in the number of individuals from professional backgrounds other than teaching being appointed to the role of careers co-ordinator in schools. While this arrangement has several advantages, 'non-teachers' find the tasks associated with curriculum leadership for careers education challenging (Andrews, 2005). It remains open to question whether having a careers co-ordinator with more time to devote to planning and managing careers education will lead to an improvement in careers education or whether their lack of experience of curriculum planning will lead to a lowering of quality.

Questions for the future include:

- Should careers education be given the status of a national curriculum subject, with a statutory programme of study?
- Should careers education become part of something larger such as economic well-being or personal development learning, and, if so, should it be merged with work-related learning and/or personal, social and health education (PSHE)?
- Should policy responsibility for careers education be re-located to the Curriculum Division with the DfES?
- Should a national strategy for improving careers education be developed and implemented?

One thing is certain: we cannot allow the position to remain the same as it is now. Despite being part of the statutory curriculum, careers education is still in a relatively weak position in the school curriculum. It is often

forgotten: for example, we have national CPD certificates for teaching citizenship and PSHE, but no equivalent professional development opportunity for CEG. I suspect, however, that for change to be brought about, stakeholders other than educationalists will have to promote the need for improvement. Ten years ago the legislation to strengthen the position of careers education came about partly because of pressure from employers and the world of business. One policy initiative that has a high priority within the DfES at the moment is the introduction of specialised diplomas. These require employer engagement. Young people will also need high quality CEG when making choices about these new pathways. Perhaps now is the time to re-engage employers in the debate about the benefits of careers education.

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